Factors That May Have Contributed to a Comparably Safer School Climate for LGBT Students

by

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Factors That May Have Contributed to a Comparably

Safer School Climate for LGBT Students

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT youth at three California public high schools. Furthermore, the intent of the research was to identify common themes and proven strategies that could potentially be replicated and initiated in other schools. This study includes data collected from interviews with each school’s principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor to gather their perspectives of what may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students at their schools, respectively. In addition, full-time teaching staff were invited to participate in a confidential online survey to gain their perspectives, as well as to validate data collected from interviews. Specifically, the following research question directed this study:

What do various stakeholders believe may be contributing to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students?

The findings that emerged provide a potential roadmap for schools that wish to create a safer and more inclusive school climate for LGBT students. More specifically, the areas of focus include (a) anti-bullying policies, procedures, and school culture; (b) staff training; (c) gay and straight alliances and visible safe spaces; (d) LGBT-inclusive curricula; and (e) inclusive school-wide activities.
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I would like to dedicate this dissertation to those youth who have ever felt alone or unloved because of who they are. Please know there are many of us fighting each day to make the world safer and more inclusive for you to fulfill your dreams. There will likely be moments of challenge, but life will get better as you surround yourself with those who support and love you just the way you are. Always remember that you are of value in this world, so never give up. I promise . . . it will be worth it!
CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

Schools should be a safe and nurturing environment for all students, yet studies indicate that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth experience a disproportionate amount of bullying, harassment, and violence (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010). The inequalities associated with LGBT individuals are not new phenomena in the United States.

To the Western world, the political, medical, and judicial discourse of sexuality accelerated in the 18th and 19th centuries (Drazenovich, 2012). By the 20th century, the sexual minority experience was significantly defined by homosexuality’s official designation as a mental illness (Herek, 2010). This classification was used to justify federal and state laws and regulations that barred homosexuals from employment or prohibited them from obtaining professional licensure in numerous occupations, including teaching in public schools (D’Emilio, 1983).

Subsequently, many psychiatrists and physicians attempted to change homosexuals into heterosexuals (Herek, 2010). When psychotherapy did not work, many were coerced into other methods, including hormone treatments, aversive conditioning with nausea-inducing drugs, lobotomy, electroshock, and castration (American Psychological Association [APA], 2009). These failed attempts led many LGBT individuals to suicide (Herek, 2010).

By 1973, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III (DMSIII) removed homosexuality as a mental illness (Drescher, 2010). Further, the APA urged mental health professionals to help remove the stigma of mental illness that has long been associated with LGBT individuals (Herek, 2010). “During the past century, Psychology
has transformed itself from a profession that once provided an institutional foundation for sexual stigma to one that is now dedicated to actively challenging that stigma through research, practice, teaching, and other professional work” (Herek, 2010, p. 697).

Unfortunately, years later, LGBT youth are still experiencing risks to their physical, emotional, and social health, primarily because of the societal stigma that still exists (Perrin, 2002).

By the mid-1970s, the lesbian and gay movement had made some modest achievements, including several cities and counties adding sexual orientation to their lists of nondiscrimination statuses (Fetner, 2001). In 1977, celebrity spokesperson Anita Bryant formed the first anti-gay counter movement organization in the United States in an attempt to reverse the new discrimination protections for lesbians and gays (Fetner, 2001). Bryant was able to help inspire California State Senator John Briggs (R-Fullerton) to author a 1978 California ballot initiative, Proposition 6. The initiative would have made homosexuals ineligible for employment in California’s public schools (Fetner, 2001). Proposition 6 was ultimately rejected by the voters, in part due to gay activists who mobilized to form a “No on 6” campaign to defeat the measure (Witt & McCorkle, 1997).

Soon after, in 1983, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued its first statement on lesbian and gay youth, reflecting a growing understanding that these adolescents may recognize their sexual orientation earlier than in the past (Frankowski, 2004). The AAP reaffirmed that a physician’s responsibility to provide comprehensive health care and guidance in a safe and supportive environment is for all adolescents, including those who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) and who are struggling
with issues of sexual orientation (Frankowski, 2004). Despite AAP statements issued in 1983, these youth still experience many risks to their physical and mental health and safety that occur outside the scope of usual office practice (Frankowski, 2004).

Before the 1990s, school districts experienced virtually no litigation concerning LGBT students (DeMitchell & Fossey, 2008). On July 31, 1996, in a historic case in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, openly gay student Jamie Nabozny won a settlement of nearly $1 million for his pain and suffering after 4 years of brutal anti-gay abuse by his peers (Russo, 2006). In fact, the jury unanimously held the school administrators accountable after turning a blind eye to the torment, laughing at Jamie’s reports, and even telling him he deserved the treatment because he was gay (Russo, 2006). In recent years, school districts continue to be drawn into a growing number of lawsuits in which sexual orientation is the central issue of the litigation (DeMitchell & Fossey, 2008).

In the year 2000, California became the fifth state to enact legislation to protect LGBT students, AB 537, also known as the Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000, which protects students in schools from harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity (Knotts, 2009). Although the law offered several recommendations, there were no funds available from the California Department of Education to enforce these laws (Knotts, 2009). Although the law offered several recommendations, there were no funds available from the California Department of Education to enforce these laws (Knotts, 2009). Despite the new measure, schools have an unconscious acceptance of heteronormativity and gendered norms, which creates a burden for change (Knotts, 2009). Schools are often places where these stereotypical gender roles are introduced (Deutsch, 2007). They also tend to reinforce these roles and
norms and are not well prepared to address homophobic bias and bullying (Macgillivray, 2004).

Attitudes about LGBT acceptance are rapidly changing. For example, in 2012, for the first time, national polls showed a majority of Americans supporting marriage equality, including the endorsement of this right from U.S. Vice President Joe Biden and President Barack Obama (Halkitis, 2012). These changes seem to be moving at a much slower pace within the school system, however.

Given both the frequency reported in recent studies and the serious nature of reported anti-gay bullying, there is an urgent need to better understand sexual prejudice among adolescents (Collier, Bos, & Sandfort, 2012). Parents and school administrators are often hesitant to ask questions about sexual orientation, and youth are often reluctant about identifying themselves as LGBT (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008). Although all youth will experience negative consequences when parents and schools are unsupportive, research confirms that LGBT students are particularly vulnerable to negative outcomes (Espelage et al., 2008). It is thought that the conservative nature of American schools has led to much of the ground-breaking scholarship in this area being conducted outside of the United States (Hillier & Rosenthal, 2001).

**Statement of the Problem**

Studies continue to indicate that a majority of LGBT youth experience bullying and harassment at school (Kosciw et al., 2010). Many of these studies use observation and national or local school climate survey data in their analysis, offering several recommendations that may create safer and more inclusive climates. Beyond these recommendations, there seems to be a lack of literature analyzing schools where LGBT
youth feel safe and welcomed by school staff. In addition, there appears to be no research focusing on these safe schools, particularly on what may be increasing feelings of safety among LGBT students from the perspective of school staff.

The research has suggested that schools have responded with insufficient efforts to intervene effectively and address the concerns of LGBT youth (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network [GLSEN], 2008). It may be helpful to provide school leaders with effective policies and proven strategies that have been used in schools where LGBT youth feel comparably safer. These missing data may provide a solution for school leaders that have been hesitant to respond to school safety or inclusion issues related to LGBT student populations.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT youth in three California public high schools. This study includes data collected from interviews with each school’s principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor along with survey data from teaching staff to determine possible common themes and proven strategies that could potentially be replicated and/or initiated in other schools.

**Research Question**

California high schools that have successfully created comparably safer school climates for LGBT students may have used proven strategies that can be replicated and shared. Close investigation of these schools, in particular, close study of school staff, may reveal what is contributing to these comparably safer climates for LGBT students. Specifically, the following research question directed this study: What do various
stakeholders believe may be contributing to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students?

**Summary of Relevant Research**

A significant number of LGBT students experience an unwelcoming school environment (Dessel, 2010). Kosciw and colleagues (2010) found that nearly 9 out of 10 LGBT students were harassed at school. Findings indicate more than one-third of LGBT students who reported an incident of bullying said that school staff did nothing in response (Kosciw et al., 2010).

Less than 5% of principals said that their professional development experiences included LGBT issues specifically (GLSEN, 2008). Yet, research suggests that experiencing harassment for being LGBT leads to decreased school engagement and academic achievement (Horn et al., 2010). Schools with supportive staff result in fewer reports of missing school, fewer reports of feeling unsafe, greater academic achievement, higher educational aspirations and a greater sense of belonging (Kosciw et al., 2010).

One recent study using a school climate survey found that 8% of high school students identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or unsure (Children’s Memorial Research Center [CMRC], 2011). Another survey that included over 7,000 middle school students in Wisconsin revealed that 10.5% identified as LGB (Henry, 2009). The literature also shows that LGBT students typically come out to their friends at school before they tell their family members (Grov, Bimbi, Nanin, & Parsons, 2006).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have emphasized that school violence is a top public health concern (Peguero, 2011). Likewise, school crimes based on sexual orientation are more likely than those based on race (Stacey, 2011).
Studies indicate that violence is not only directed at students who openly identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual but also toward those who are gender nonconforming. In February of 2008, an eighth grader named Larry King was murdered by another eighth grader at a California middle school because of his gender expression and his openness about being gay (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell, 2010).

Anti-LGBT bullying is an issue even in the elementary grades. One study determined that 45% of elementary students hear comments like “that’s so gay,” and 26% hear comments like “fag” or “lesbo” from other students (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network [GLSEN] & Harris Interactive, 2012).

For most students, middle school seems to be when bullying behavior increases in severity (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009). A national school climate survey revealed that 82% of middle school students reported hearing homophobic epithets from other students, and 63% heard homophobic comments from school staff (GLSEN, 2009).

The awareness of one’s sexual minority status may be more stressful than typical challenges because it involves changes in relationships with peers and other caring adults (Russell & Marks, 2006). Research supports the theory that negative experiences resulting from LGBT stigma may lead to chronic stress and emotional distress (Bontempo & D’Augelli, 2002).

One study revealed that 11.7% of heterosexual students and 29.9% of lesbian and gay (LG) students indicated that they seriously considered attempting suicide (CDC, 2011). In addition to higher suicide risks, the CDC (2011) found other disparities included higher rates of alcohol and drug use among sexual minority students. Jordan
(2000) found that substance abuse among LGBT youth may be linked to increased depression or chronic stress.

Parents’ reactions to their child’s sexual orientation significantly affect the child’s mental health, especially when both parents are unsupportive (D’Augelli, 2002). For LGB youth, connections to family provide a level of protection against health risk behaviors (Ryan, 2010). Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, and Sanchez (2010) found a connection between parental rejecting and the use of illegal drugs, depression, attempted suicide, and sexual health risks.

Researchers have implied that the higher rate of homelessness in the LGBT youth population may be because they are often kicked out of their homes or feel so uncomfortable that they run away (McBride, 2012). Ray (2006) reports that 20% to 40% of all homeless youth in America identify as LGBT.

A significant amount of literature shows that school connectedness predicts a variety of health outcomes, including emotional well-being, substance abuse, suicide ideation, depression, and violent or deviant behavior (Thompson, Iachan, Overpeck, Ross, & Gross, 2006). Students who have a greater sense of school belonging are found to have greater academic motivation and higher academic achievement (Kosciw et al., 2011). Kosciw and colleagues (2011) found that LGBT students who are out to other students or school staff have higher levels of school belonging compared to those who are not out.

Pearson, Muller, and Wilkinson (2007) found LGB students leave high school with lower grades, are more likely to have failed a course, and have lower expectations of attending college compared to their straight counterparts. One study reports that having
supportive school staff improves LGBT students’ grades and increases the likelihood they will attend college (Kosciw et al., 2011).

In the 2011 National School Climate Survey, 29.8% of LGBT students skipped a class at least once in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (Kosciw et al., 2011). Similarly, Kosciw and colleagues (2011) found 31.8% missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable. In the case of students who were able to identify six or more supportive staff at their school, they were only half as likely to miss a day of school in the past month (Kosciw et al., 2011).

In light of these extensive studies of LGBT’s struggles in school, researchers are now focusing on factors that may create safe and supportive environments for these students (Russell, 2010). These strategies include enumerated anti-bullying and harassment policies, staff development, the presence of inclusive clubs (such as Gay and Straight Alliances), and inclusive curricula (Diaz, Kosciw, & Greytak, 2010; Kosciw et al., 2011; Russell, 2010; Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012).

School administrators play an important role in the experience of LGBT youth by setting the tone and implementing specific policies that may affect the school’s climate (Kosciw et al., 2011). Few issues in our schools are more evident and simultaneously treated as invisible (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). For example, discussions around LGBT issues often make school leaders feel uncomfortable, causing these discussions to be completely avoided (DeWitt, 2012). In a 2011 study, approximately one-third of LGBT youth said their school administrators were unsupportive (Kosciw et al., 2011).
Inclusive district policies may be able to change this behavior, as school boards often use these to support decisions made within the school systems (DeWitt, 2012). Support begins from the top down, and it may help if school administrators feel supported and have a shared vision with district officials and the school board (DeWitt, 2012). Ignoring issues related to bullying of LGBT youth will not rest until school leaders stand up and address the underlying moral issue of basic human rights (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009).

The literature clearly demonstrates that when LGBT students feel safe, they are more likely to learn. By learning about the unique needs of LGBT students, self-reflecting, engaging in professional development, and taking practical steps to advocate for LGBT youth, school administrators can create an environment that is safe and welcoming for all students (Capper & Owusu-Yeboa [Reed], 2006).

**Methodology**

To answer the research question, I employed a collective case study approach of three public high schools in California where LGBT youth are feeling comparably safer. Schools were selected by Carolyn Laub, the Founder and Executive Director of the GSA Network, a nationally known expert whose organization works closely with both students and advisors of Gay and Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs in California schools. The Executive Director of the GSA Network, collectively with her regional staff, were able to identity three stand-out high schools in which LGBT students feel comparably safer and more included. The principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor at each school were interviewed to determine factors that may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. In addition, all full-time teaching staff at each school were
invited to participate in a confidential survey of 15 questions using Qualtrics to gain their perspective, as well as to validate data collected from interviews. Within-case analysis was conducted one school at a time, followed by a cross-case analysis to identify common themes, assertions, or interpretations of the research findings. Investigating these schools has led to common themes that could be shared with other high schools wishing to create safer and more inclusive schools in California.

A survey with 15 questions was given to all full-time teaching staff using Qualtrics, an online and confidential survey tool. Some questions required simple yes or no responses, while others used a 5-point Likert-type scale. Staff participation was motivated by the participating school counselor, as he or she was asked to forward an email with a survey link to all full-time teachers.

Within-case analysis was conducted one school at a time. Observation notes were categorized, interviews transcribed, and survey results tallied to prepare for final analysis. Next, a cross-case analysis was used to identify common themes, assertions, or interpretations of the research findings.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study had a number of limitations. First, although an outside expert from the GSA Network, an LGBT advocacy organization, and her regional coordinators throughout California recommended the three high schools that were included in this study, this organization only works with high schools that have or are attempting to start a GSA club. Secondly, interview data were collected from only the school principal, one school counselor, and one GSA advisor, precluding opportunities to gather in-depth information from various teachers. Instead, all full-time teachers added their perspectives
using a confidential online survey. Lastly, students’ perspectives were not included in this study due to challenges obtaining parental permission for their child’s participation. Not all students are open about their sexual orientation or gender identity at home.

**Significance of the Study**

Any study in education that may lead to saving and improving the lives of at-risk student populations is worthwhile. As yet, only limited research has focused on schools that have taken effective steps at improving school climate for LGBT students. This missing piece in the literature may provide a solution to increasing the number of school leaders that address these grave safety concerns. The present study has added to the literature by analyzing schools that have effectively addressed school safety for LGBT students. In particular, the study has provided new findings from the perspective of school staff, which is exactly who must drive needed change in schools.

In addition, the present study design might be beneficial to other researchers who desire to investigate the concerns of other student populations or other equity issues found common in public schools. In addition, other researchers may want to use a similar design to review comparably safer school climates for LGBT youth at the middle school level. Investigating model schools and the staff who work there is not a new concept. It might, however, be an effective design at influencing improvements where hesitation for change is strong.
CHAPTER 2—LITERATURE REVIEW

Schools should be a safe place for all students to learn. Unfortunately, a significant number of students experience an unwelcoming and even violent school climate (Dessel, 2010). Kosciw and colleagues (2010) found that nearly 9 out of 10 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students were harassed at school. Education leaders are clearly concerned with student safety. Yet, when it comes to harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity, principals tend to respond with an insufficient level of urgency (GLSEN, 2008). Findings indicate more than one-third of LGBT students who reported an incident of bullying said that school staff did nothing in response (Kosciw et al., 2010). This may be attributed to the lack of staff development addressing the topic. When surveyed, fewer than 5% of principals said that their professional development experiences included LGBT issues specifically (GLSEN, 2008).

Several lawsuits have been filed against school districts claiming the system did not effectively protect LGBT students. In 2003, a district in San Jose, California paid over one million dollars to six students who alleged continuous harassment because of their sexual orientation and failure of school officials to respond adequately (Pogash, 2004). Additionally, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ, 2011) recently investigated a district in Tehachapi, California resulting in a settlement. An openly gay 13-year-old student in the Tehachapi district committed suicide after continuous harassment based on gender stereotypes (DOJ, 2011). Although school officials were aware of the harassment, the investigation determined that the administration did not take appropriate action (DOJ, 2011). Similarly, an investigation by the DOJ (2012a) was conducted at the
Anoka-Hennipin Unified School District in Minnesota. The federal investigation examined the way the district addressed issues involving bullying of LGBT students (DOJ, 2012a). The U.S. Assistant Attorney General responded to the settlement in a live conference call, stating, “Students cannot learn if they feel that school administrators can’t and don’t protect them” (DOJ, 2012b, para. 2).

This literature review includes research on disparities experienced by LGBT students in public high schools in the United States (Kosciw et al., 2010). Research suggests that experiencing harassment and violence for being LGBT leads to decreased school engagement and academic achievement and increased depression, anxiety, and suicide (Horn et al., 2010). The review also includes research regarding schools that have promoted a safe school climate for students who identify as LGBT (Russell, 2010). Initial findings suggest that schools with supportive staff result in fewer reports of missing school, fewer reports of feeling unsafe, greater academic achievement, higher educational aspirations, and a greater sense of belonging (Kosciw et al., 2010).

School leaders can be more effective at ensuring all students have an equitable and safe place to learn. Close investigation of schools that have created comparably safer school climates for LGBT students may result in findings that can be replicated. For those schools that have found success, observations and interviews may identify common strategies from the perspective of the principal, counselor, teachers, and parents of those who identify as LGBT. Continued research could potentially provide a model for how educators can effectively create safer schools for LGBT students.
**Background**

In order to create safer school climates for LGBT students, education leaders benefit from knowledge regarding the percent of students identifying as LGBT, as well as an understanding of when these students first become aware of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

The Illinois Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) and the Chicago YRBS conducted by the CDC randomly selected public high schools in 2009 (CMRC, 2011). The survey focused on priority health-risk behaviors that result in the most significant mortality, disability, and social problems during both youth and adulthood (CMRC, 2011). The survey results indicated about 8% of high school students identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or unsure (CMRC, 2011). Other surveys have revealed even higher percentages. For example, over 7,000 middle school students were surveyed in Dane County, Wisconsin, revealing that 10.5% identified as LGB (Henry, 2009).

It may be difficult to determine the exact percentage of LGBT students on school campuses, as many students fear disclosing their sexual identity, or coming out. These students spend a great deal of time and energy trying to manage the fears and repercussions of coming out (Davis, Saltzburg, & Locke, 2009). Research also shows that LGBT students typically come out to their friends at school before they tell their family members (Grov et al., 2006).

According to a 2-year longitudinal study of 528 LGB youth aged 15-19, D’Augelli, Grossman, and Starks (2006) found that male students became aware of same-sex attraction at the average age of 12 years and females at 13. “As more information has become available about homosexuality, it has been easier for many
children and adolescents to realize that they are gay at younger ages” (Ryan, 2009, p. 1).

In a study of transgender youth, those who transition from male-to-female (MTF) identify at the average age of 13 and those transitioning from female-to-male identify at the average age of 15 (Grossman, D’Augelli, Salter, & Hubbard, 2005). Understanding the prevalence and self-awareness of a minority student population that is not always identifiable may be helpful as educators work to create safer school climates for these youth.

Five themes comprise the literature regarding LGBT students, including anti-LGBT violence, bullying and harassment, mental health disparities and other negative effects, and actions schools are currently taking to address the issue. As Russell (2011) noted,

In recent years there has been a shift from consideration of the plight of individual students to the acknowledgement that the school context or climate must be better understood in order to prevent bias-motivated bullying and promote school safety and student well-being. (p. 15)

**Anti-LGBT Violence in Schools**

The Southern Poverty Law Center’s analysis of 14 years of hate crime data suggested that gays and lesbians, or those perceived to be gay, are more than twice as likely to be attacked in a violent hate crime as Jews or blacks, more than 4 times as likely as Muslims, and 14 times as likely as Latinos (Potok, 2010). Schools are not exempt from hate violence, as teens account for a significant proportion of offenders and victims of hate crimes in the United States (U.S. Department of Education [DOE], 2009). In fact,
Messner, McHugh, and Felson (2004) found victims as well as offenders of biased hate crimes tend to be young and male.

The CDC has emphasized that school campus violence is a top public health concern affecting the physical and emotional well-being of students (Peguero, 2011). Likewise, crimes that occur in schools are more likely to be based on sexual orientation than on race (Stacey, 2011). In a qualitative study including focus group interviews, with data analyzed through a constant comparison method, 31 LGBT student participants in New York City public schools reported that they were vulnerable to taunting, physical attacks, as well as hate crimes and violence (Grossman et al., 2009). Many researchers have used large-scale surveys to identify the rate of violence experienced by LGBT students.

According to the Massachusetts 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (MYRBS; Massachusetts Department of Education, 2004), which questioned 3,624 students in grades 9 to 12 from 50 randomly selected public high schools, students who identified as LGB were significantly more likely than their heterosexual peers to have been bullied (42% vs. 21%), threatened, or injured with a weapon (22% vs. 5%), skipped school because they felt unsafe (15% vs. 4%), and experienced dating violence (30% vs. 9%) or sexual contact against their will (41% vs. 8%).

(Grossman et al., 2009, pp. 25-26)

Similarly, a survey from a large high school found sexual minority youths were more likely than their straight peers to report being physically threatened, injured with a weapon, and fearful of attending school (Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & DuRant, 1998).
The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) conducted several national surveys to highlight the school climate experience of LGBT students. The 2007 National School Climate Survey of 626 middle school students revealed that 59% experienced physical harassment and 39% experienced physical assault because of their sexual orientation (GLSEN, 2009). In 2009, a National School Climate Survey consisting of 7,261 students between the ages of 13 and 21 found that 40.1% of students were physically harassed and 18.8% were physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation (Kosciw et al., 2010).

Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students

Studies indicate that violence is directed not only at students who openly identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual but also toward those who are gender nonconforming. Gender-nonconforming students can be described as boys who are more feminine than other boys or girls who are more masculine than other girls (Toomey et al., 2010). Researchers find that violence at school occurs as a result of youth efforts to demonstrate gender dominance and masculinity (Henry, 2009). Subsequently, violence experienced by gender-nonconforming adolescents frequently occurs at school (D’Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2006). The 2007 National School Climate Survey found that 41% of middle school students were physically harassed, and 24% were physically assaulted based on their gender expression (GLSEN, 2009). In a 2009 National School Climate Survey, researchers found that 27% of students from age 13 to 21 were physically harassed and 12.5% were physically assaulted at school because of their gender expression (Kosciw et al., 2010). Evidence suggests that LGB middle school students experience far more physical harassment and assault than do LGB high school students (GLSEN, 2009).
A qualitative study in the Philadelphia area that recruited 24 transgender youth ages 14-21, using 90-minute, open-ended, semi-structured interviews, indicated that 83% experienced physical harassment, and 75% felt unsafe at school (Sausa, 2005). These students related daily torment, including being shoved, punched, and beaten, having objects thrown at them, and in some cases, being assaulted with weapons (Sausa, 2005). A similar 2007 national survey of 295 transgender students revealed higher levels of harassment and violence compared to LGB students in the same study (Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009). Nearly 56% of students who identify as transgender had been physically harassed and 28% physically assaulted in school in the past year because of their sexual orientation (Greytak et al., 2009). In addition, 53% of transgender students were physically harassed, and 26% were physically assaulted for the way they expressed their gender (Greytak et al., 2009).

**The Repercussions of Harassment and Violence: Case Examples**

Violence among youth is widespread, making it the second leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 10 and 24 in the United States (Hall et al., 2012). In February of 2008, an eighth grader named Larry King was murdered by another eighth grader at a California middle school because of his gender expression and his openness about being gay (Toomey et al., 2010). A few days before the murder, King asked his killer to be his Valentine (Setoodeh, 2008). During class, his killer pulled a gun from his backpack and shot Larry in the head at the witness of the entire class and teacher (Setoodeh, 2008). After being rushed to the hospital, King died 2 days later from brain injuries (Setoodeh, 2008). The murder of Larry King is an extreme example of school victimization motivated by the gender nonconformity of a student (Toomey et al., 2010).
Another student, Jamie Nabozny, made headlines after winning nearly one million dollars in a settlement with a Wisconsin school district (Russo, 2006). In seventh grade, Nabozny “came out” at school and, subsequently, was routinely harasssed and physically abused by his peers (Russo, 2006). The harassment and violence included a mock rape by other students and several physical assaults, resulting in two suicide attempts by Nabozny (Stader & Graca, 2007). Even though Nabozny and his parents reported the abuse several times to school officials, little or no action was taken to discipline the offending students (Stader & Graca, 2007). Court records back up Nabozny’s attempts to report the incidents to a school administrator (Russo, 2006). “The administrator advised, ‘Boys will be boys’ and urged Nabozny to understand that ‘if you are going to be so openly gay,’ such behavior from his fellow students should be expected” (Russo, 2006, p. 121). Nabozny withdrew from his high school during the 11th grade (Russo, 2006)

These findings of violence targeted at LGBT students underscore the necessity of school-based programs to combat homophobia in schools (Stacey, 2011).

**Anti-LGBT Harassment and Bullying in School**

As indicated in the previous examples, bullying and harassment in schools have been identified as a problematic behavior among students, affecting achievement, social skills, and psychological well-being for both victims and perpetrators (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth face higher rates of bullying and harassment compared to their straight counterparts (Kosciw et al., 2010).

**Elementary Students**

The number of students who experience bullying in elementary grades has been estimated at twice that of secondary students (Ross, 1996). In a national survey of 1,065
elementary students, 75% report that students at their school are called names, made fun of, or bullied (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2012). The study goes further to determine that 45% of elementary students and 49% of their teachers hear comments like “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay” from other students (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2012). In addition, 26% of elementary students hear their peers make comments like “fag” or “lesbo” at school. Students who do not fit gender stereotypes have also become targets at the elementary level (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2012). The national study found that 26% of elementary students witnessed boys being targeted for acting or looking “too much like a girl,” and 23% witnessed girls targeted for acting or looking “too much like a boy” (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2012).

Middle School Students

For most students, middle school seems to be when bullying behavior increases in severity (Birkett et al., 2009). The transition to middle school is often challenging for typical students, but for those who identify as LGBT, the experience is an exceptionally difficult adjustment (Espelage et al., 2008). In a 2005 quantitative study from a Chicago public middle school, a significant association was found between bullying and homophobic behavior, specifically the use of homophobic verbal content (Espelage et al., 2008). The study included surveys that were administered to 169 students once during their seventh-grade year and to 143 students once during their eighth-grade year (Poteat & Espelage, 2005). The findings suggest that homophobic victimization resulted in significant psychological and social consequences for students. For example, male students who were targets of homophobic harassment experienced higher levels of
anxiety and depression, personal distress, and a lower sense of school belonging (Poteat & Espelage, 2005).

A national school climate survey revealed that 82% of middle school students reported hearing homophobic epithets from other students, and 63% heard homophobic comments from school staff (GLSEN, 2009). Gender expression was also a target as nearly two-thirds of LGBT middle school students heard negative remarks about gender expression (GLSEN, 2009). Lastly, the study found that 91% of LGBT middle school students were verbally harassed at school because of their sexual orientation and 72% based on their gender expression (GLSEN, 2009).

High School Students

“Schools nationwide are hostile environments for a distressing number of LGBT students—almost all of whom commonly hear homophobic remarks and face verbal and physical harassment and even physical assault because of their sexual orientation or gender expression” (Kosciw et al., 2010, p. xvi). In a qualitative study of students attending public high schools in New York, LGBT youth said that their straight peers primarily used name-calling, hate speech, harassment, and sometimes physical violence (Grossman et al., 2009).

A longitudinal study of 523 high school students in New York revealed that 78% of LGB youth experienced verbal victimization at school (D’Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2006). Data were drawn from youth aged 15 to 19, who were interviewed three times during a 2-year period (D’Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2006). In this study, male students experienced a higher rate of victimization, 87% compared to female students at 69% (D’Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2006). In a 2009 national school climate survey of
13- to 21-year-olds, 72.4% heard homophobic remarks, and 62.6% heard negative remarks about gender expression (Kosciw et al., 2010). In addition, 84.6% of students were verbally harassed at school because of their sexual orientation and 63.7% because of their gender expression (Kosciw et al., 2010). Schools need to dedicate more time to addressing school climate, especially for those most at risk for facing bullying, harassment, and violence.

**Mental Health Disparities and Suicide**

Working through awareness of sexual minority status may be more stressful than typical challenges because it involves changes in relationships with family, friends and peers, teachers, and other caring adults (Russell & Marks, 2006). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students face torment, alienation, and even complete rejection at home, which may be associated with mental health disparities, homelessness, and even suicide (Kim, Sheridan, & Holcomb, 2009).

**Emotional and Social Well-Being**

Growing up in a culture with prejudice and hostility toward homosexuality may create anxiety, stress, and other negative effects on mental health for LGBT youth (Russell & Marks, 2006). Research supports the theory that negative experiences resulting from LGBT stigma may lead to chronic stress and emotional distress among LGBT youth and young adults (Bontempo & D’Augelli, 2002).

The CDC (2011) analyzed the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (YRBS) from 2001 to 2009 across nine sites: Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, Boston, Chicago, New York City, and San Francisco. Depending on the survey question analyzed, sample sizes used for this report ranged from 3,733 to 36,774. The results
indicated significant disparities in emotional and psychological well being for lesbian and gay (LG) students compared to heterosexual students (CDC, 2011).

When students were asked if they felt sad or hopeless during the 12 months before the survey, the median percentage for heterosexual students was 24.8%, as compared with 41.3% for LG students (CDC, 2011). These higher rates of feelings of despair may be related to the higher rates of suicide risk. In the 12 months prior to the survey, a median of 11.7% of heterosexual students and 29.9% of LG students indicated that they seriously considered attempting suicide (CDC, 2011). Even more troubling was the median percentage of students who actually attempted suicide. In the 12 months before the survey, 6.4% of heterosexual students attempted suicide compared to 25.8% of LG students (CDC, 2011).

The CDC (2011) found other disparities included higher rates of alcohol and drug use among sexual minority students. The median percentage of students having at least one drink of alcohol one or more times in the past 30 days was 37.6% for straight students compared to 47.5% for LG students. Survey responses related to marijuana use, one or more times in the 30 days prior to the survey, indicated that 21.8% of straight students compared to 34.5% of LG students had used the drug. Lastly, 1.8% heterosexual students, as compared with 16.6% LG students, used cocaine one or more times during the 30 days prior to the survey (CDC, 2011). Jordan (2000) found that substance use and abuse among LGBT youth may be linked with feeling marginalized by society, seeking relief for feelings of depression and isolation, or desiring alleviation of the chronic stress associated with being stigmatized.
All students surveyed in the nine states attended public schools, leaving out the participants from private schools or students that have dropped out of school (CDC, 2011). Sexual minority students represent a disproportionate percentage of high school dropouts, which may have limited the accuracy of the findings related to emotional and psychological well being (CDC, 2011). In fact, some have estimated that almost a third of LGBT students drop out of high school, more than triple the national rate (Bart, 1998).

Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, and Gwadz (2002) found that increased stress on the part of LGB youth could be attributed to the social stigmatization associated with homosexuality. Stress can be external in nature, as students experience violence, verbal abuse, and rejection. However, stress can also be chronic and internal in nature, involving internalization of society’s stigmatization of homosexuality (Rosario et al., 2002). Not surprisingly, some LGB youth also struggle with negative attitudes regarding homosexuality due to the way they were raised or family and societal expectations (Rosario et al., 2002). Chronic LGBT-related stress could also involve the fear of others finding out about one’s sexual orientation or gender identity (Rosario et al., 2002).

Rosario and colleagues (2002) studied 156 youth ages 14 to 21 in New York City, using baseline, structured interviews, with follow-up interviews at 6 and 12 months. Rosario and colleagues found that LGB male youth hold more negative attitudes toward homosexuality than did the female youths at the baseline, 6-month, and 12-month assessments. These results were significant with correlations of -.35, -.21, and -.24, for each time period, respectively. Younger LGB youth reported more negative attitudes toward homosexuality on all three assessment periods. Again, these results were statistically significant with correlations of -.23, -.18, and -.18, respectively (Rosario
et al., 2002). This may indicate that, with time, LGB youth become more comfortable and accepting of their sexual orientation.

In another study, the mental health challenges of LGB students were analyzed using a sample of 542 youths from community settings (D’Augelli, 2002). Fears about negative reactions and victimization based on sexual orientation were related to mental health symptoms and suicidality. D’Augelli (2002) found that disclosing sexual orientation to family members was seen as extremely, very, or somewhat troubling by 70% of the participants. The study also found that 66% of participants described telling friends about one’s sexual orientation was extremely, very, or somewhat troubling. Having fears related to verbal and physical abuse at school and at home was significantly associated with higher mental health symptoms. The participants indicated that 24% of mothers and 37% of fathers were intolerant or rejecting, and more than one third reported losing friends because of their sexual orientation. In fact, D’Augelli found that those participants who lost friends reported more mental health symptoms and more past suicide attempts than those who did not lose friends. In addition, parents’ reactions to their child’s sexual orientation were significantly related to their child’s mental health, especially when both parents were rejecting (D’Augelli, 2002).

Limitations for this study include earlier gathered datasets from the late 1980s and late 1990s, as attitudes may have shifted. These findings, however, may be useful to school counselors or other staff when helping students through the coming out process and ensuring adequate support and acceptance.

The 2006 Boston Youth Survey (BYS), a biennial survey of 9th-12th grade students in 18 different Boston public schools, analyzed data from 1,032 students
(Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009). Participants were chosen through a two-stage, stratified random sampling strategy. Nearly 10% of the respondents identified themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgendered. Both male and female LGBT students displayed more emotional distress as compared to heterosexual and nontransgendered youth, as evidenced by significantly higher prevalence rates for suicidal ideation and self-harm. Almeida and colleagues (2009) found those who reported having been discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation were more likely to report self-harm (25.0% vs. 6.3%) and suicidal ideation (23.9% vs. 7.4%). This study shows that perceived discrimination is a likely contributor to emotional distress among LGBT youth (Almeida et al., 2009).

Limitations to this study include necessary exclusion of nearly one third of the respondents, due to their lack of response to questions regarding sexuality (Almeida et al., 2009). Still, this study underscores the importance of educators attending to students who they perceive are experiencing discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

In a longitudinal study at a public middle school in Central Illinois, Poteat and Espelage (2007) surveyed 143 students in both their seventh and eighth grade years. Findings suggest that homophobic victimization has significant psychological and social consequences for students. For males, being the target of homophobic epithets significantly predicted higher levels of anxiety and depression, personal distress, and a lower sense of school belonging after controlling for previously reported levels of these variables. Female students experienced higher levels of withdrawal after controlling for previously reported levels of each variable. It is particularly important that middle school
staff not underestimate the possible traumatizing effects of students who are targets of homophobia.

In the past few years, suicide among LGBT youth has received heightened media attention. Research suggests that continuous bullying may lead to or worsen feelings of isolation, rejection, exclusion, and despair, as well as depression and anxiety, which can contribute to suicidal behavior (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation [GLAAD] and Movement Advancement Project [MAP], 2011).

In a longitudinal study in New York City and surrounding suburbs, D’Augelli, Grossman, Salter, and colleagues (2006) interviewed 361 youth, aged 15 to 19, about LGB victimization. D’Augelli, Grossman, Salter, and colleagues examined predictors of serious suicide attempts among LGB youth using three groups: youth who reported no attempts, youth who reported attempts unrelated to their sexual orientation, and youth whose attempts were considered related to their sexual orientation. Half of the male students and one third of the female students considered their suicide attempts to be related to their sexual orientation. Findings suggest that gay-related suicide attempts were associated with others identifying them as LGB, especially the parents of these youth (D’Augelli, Grossman, Salter, et al., 2006). In addition, D’Augelli, Grossman, Salter, and colleagues found that early openness about sexual orientation, being considered gender nonconforming by parents, and parental efforts to discourage gender nonconforming behavior, were associated with gay-related suicide attempts. The sample population was recruited from community-based settings serving LGB youth and did not include LGB youth who may not want or need LGB-related community services. This,
along with the small sample size, may have limited the wider application of these findings.

Research shows that the relationships of LGB youth with their parents are often strained, particularly around the time of disclosure of sexual orientation (D’Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2005). For LGB youth, connections to family provide a level of protection against health risk behaviors (Ryan, 2010). Studies have found a relationship between family rejection in adolescence and the health of LGB youth (Ryan et al., 2010).

In a mixed methods research study, Ryan and colleagues (2010) surveyed and individually interviewed 245 LGBT Latino and white young adults within a 100-mile radius of San Francisco. The study used a participatory research approach that was advised by individuals who will use the findings, including LGBT adolescents, young adults, families, health and mental health providers, teachers, social workers, and advocates. Ryan and colleagues found a clear connection between parental rejecting during adolescence and the use of illegal drugs, depression, attempted suicide, and sexual health risks. The LGBT youth who were highly rejected by their parents were eight times as likely to have attempted suicide, six times as likely to report high levels of depression, three times as likely to use illegal drugs, and three times as likely to be at high risk for HIV and sexually transmitted diseases compared to those who were accepted by their parents (Ryan, 2009).

The lack of including other ethnic minorities, such as Black or Asian American LGBT youth, creates a limitation in this study (Ryan et al., 2010). Nevertheless, educators may find sharing this research with rejecting families helpful in encouraging them to be more supportive of their LGBT child. These findings also suggest that
educators need to monitor students closely and provide extra support for LGBT students who are experiencing rejection from their parents or caregivers.

Research surveys have also revealed alarming rates of high-risk sexual behavior and HIV infection among gay male youths (LaSala, 2007). To better understand the role that family relationships play in young gay men’s decisions to avoid unsafe sexual practices, researchers interviewed parents and sons (ages 16 to 25) in 30 families about issues and concerns related to HIV risk (LaSala, 2007). All research participants were from metropolitan New York City, Philadelphia, and New Jersey. Youth and parents were interviewed separately from June 2003 through November 2004, and grounded theory was the primary method used to collect and analyze the data. Nearly all of the parents experienced negative feelings, including shock, disappointment, and guilt, when they initially learned that their son was gay. However, as time passed and as they learned more, LaSala (2007) found that many of their adverse feelings dissipated. Nevertheless, parents of 24 of the youth had a persistent fear that their sons would contract HIV (LaSala, 2007).

Of the 30 youths, LaSala (2007) found that nearly 57% reported that their relationships with parents influenced their decisions to engage in safer sex, and 43% reported no influence. The most common explanation of parental influence centered on the youth’s sense of obligation to their parents (LaSala, 2007). The youth who reported no parental influence came from families in which parents had historically been preoccupied with personal or marital problems or rejecting (LaSala, 2007).

These findings suggest that relationships with parents play a role in young gay men’s decisions to practice safer sex (LaSala, 2007). The small sample size of this study
is a limitation. For parents who have sons that are open about being gay, it may be beneficial for educators to share with families the possible influences they have in encouraging safer sex practices.

**Homelessness**

A significant problem many LGBT students face is torment, alienation, or complete rejection at home (Kim et al., 2009). Parents and caregivers may react with anger or disgust and even get into physical fights with their children when they learn of their sexual orientation or gender identity (Ryan, 2009). Researchers from the Children’s Hospital Boston and the Harvard Medical School imply the higher rate of homelessness in the LGBT youth population may be because they are often kicked out of their homes or feel so uncomfortable that they run away (McBride, 2012). For these youth, education sinks into irrelevancy as they struggle to survive with no place to go (Kim et al., 2009). Ray (2006) reports that 20% to 40% of all homeless youth in America identify as LGBT. In addition to ensuring LGBT students feel supported at school, it may be equally important that educators provide guidance and consultation for the parents and caregivers of LGBT youth.

In a 2011-2012 survey of 381 homeless youth and service providers from 354 agencies throughout the United States, Durso and Gates (2012) found LGBT youth comprise approximately 40% of the clientele. The participants of the web-based survey were recruited by the National Runaway Switchboard and CenterLink, where over 97% of the participating agencies track demographic information about the individuals they serve. The findings revealed that 53% of their clients were female, 46% were male, and 1% were described as an “other gender” (Durso & Gates, 2012).
Durso and Gates (2012) suggest that family rejection on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity (46%) was the most frequently cited factor contributing to LGBT homelessness. Similarly, in another study that included a survey of nearly 10,000 LGBT youth, nonaccepting families was cited as the most important problem facing their lives right now (Human Rights Campaign, 2012). Durso and Gates also found that 43% of these youth were homeless after being kicked out, and 32% selected reasons of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse at home. In fact, Durso and Gates revealed that half of respondents thought that the overall health of their LGB homeless youth clients was worse than other homeless youth. Lastly, the study found 4 in 10 LGBT homeless youth have been subjected to sexual exploitation or sexual assault, and a third have had contact with the juvenile justice system (Durso & Gates, 2012).

Professionals working with youth should be aware of the link between LGBT youth and a greater vulnerability of being homeless (McBride, 2012). Family relationships and the risk of rejection and homelessness should be assessed when working with LGBT youth (McBride, 2012). Providing both students and parents support and appropriate resources may help decrease the various mental health disparities, suicide risks, and homelessness among the LGBT youth population.

**Other Negative Effects of Anti-LGBT Victimization**

In addition to mental health disparities, suicide risks, and the emotional and social well-being of LGBT youth, there are other negative effects from anti-LGBT bullying. If students do not feel safe and connected at school, they are less likely to learn.
Connectedness and Engagement

A significant amount of literature shows that school connectedness predicts a variety of health outcomes, including emotional well-being, substance abuse, suicide ideation, depression, and violent or deviant behavior (Thompson et al., 2006). Students being victimized at school may feel a negative impact on their school connectedness (Poteat & Espelage, 2007). Likewise, having a greater sense of belonging to one’s school is related to greater academic motivation, as well as higher academic achievement (Kosciw et al., 2011).

School connectedness in research commonly includes liking school, a sense of belonging, positive relations with school staff and peers, and an active engagement during class (Thompson et al., 2006). Furthermore, feeling valued and accepted in the school community is an important contributor to adolescent development and is related to positive educational and psychological outcomes (Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth often face unique challenges that make it difficult to develop a sense of connectedness to school (Diaz et al., 2010). Studies reveal that when LGBT students attend schools that are unwelcoming and even hostile, this creates challenges that prevent them from developing a sense of connectedness (Diaz et al., 2010). In fact, homophobic victimization is related to lower levels of school connectedness for LGB students compared to their straight peers (Poteat & Espelage, 2007). Lastly, transgender students experience even higher rates of victimization and lower levels of school connectedness compared to lesbian, gay, and transgender students (Greytak et al., 2009).
Overall, youth who are stigmatized by the school environment may become disengaged and detached from school. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students who do not feel a sense of belonging at school, or who expect they will be rejected if others learn about their sexual orientation or gender identity, may lose motivation to please their teachers (Pearson et al., 2007). As a result, these youth may become disengaged, fail to complete assignments, and even miss days of school (Pearson et al., 2007).

According to GLSEN’s 2011 National School Climate Survey, findings add to the evidence that students who experience harassment and assault at school may feel excluded and disconnected from the school community (Kosciw et al., 2011). The study included a representative national sample of 8,584 LGBT students between the ages of 13 and 20 from all 50 states and the District of Columbia from 3,224 unique school districts (Kosciw et al., 2011). Kosciw and colleagues (2011) reveal that LGB students who experienced a higher severity of victimization based on sexual orientation had lower levels of school belonging than LGB students who experienced less severe victimization in school. According to the study, 60.7% of LGB youth who experienced low levels of victimization had a positive school belonging, while that number dropped to 25.1% among those who experienced higher victimization at school. Research suggests having a greater sense of belonging to one’s school is related to greater academic motivation, increased effort, and higher academic achievement (Goodenow & Grady, 1993).

Kosciw and colleagues (2011) found that LGBT students who are out to other students or school staff have higher levels of school belonging compared to those who are not out. Survey findings indicate that only 40.1% of LGBT students who were not out to
their peers had a positive school belonging compared to 50.6% of LGBT students who were out to their peers (Kosciw et al., 2011). Similarly, only 42.1% of LGBT youth who were not out to their teachers had a positive school belonging compared to 54.1% of LGBT youth who were out to school staff (Kosciw et al., 2011).

There may be limitations to these findings as the 8,584 LGBT students who participated in the survey are only those who felt safe enough to identify their sexual orientation or gender identity. It is difficult to gather an accurate representation of what school life may be like for those who still do not feel safe or comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity, even on a confidential survey. Research shows that students open about their LGBT status at school have higher self-esteem, lower depression, and higher levels of attachment to school, thus possibly skewing the results of the National School Climate Survey (Russell & Van Campen, 2011). Clearly, feeling valued and accepted at school is an important contributor to adolescent development and is related to positive educational and psychological outcomes (Roeser et al., 1996).

Given the variety of positive outcomes associated with school connectedness, it is suggested that educators gain a better understanding of what leads to higher levels of school connectedness (Thompson et al., 2006). These findings indicate that safe and supportive school climates for LGBT students may increase feelings of connectedness and engagement at school.

**Educational Aspirations and Academic Achievement**

A positive and safe school climate is imperative for productive teaching and learning (Tirozzi & Uro, 1997). Experiencing victimization in school hinders LGBT students’ academic achievement and future aspirations (Kosciw et al., 2011). These
victimized students may become depressed and experience decreased self-esteem, causing
them to detach from school, skip school, or disengage in schoolwork (Needham, Crosnoe,
& Muller, 2004). As a result, future educational opportunities of these students are likely
to suffer (Pearson et al., 2007). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are more likely to have
lower grade point averages (GPAs), more likely to fail a class, and less likely to take
courses needed to apply for university (Pearson et al., 2007). In addition, research finds
when LGBT students do not feel safe at school, their aspirations to attend college
decrease (Clarke & Russell, 2009). As schools strive to increase academic achievement
and increase the number of students who are college bound, it may be wise to spend time
addressing school climate and feelings of safety.

In order to examine the academic success of LGB students, a study used data from
the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (NLSAH) and the Adolescent
Health and Academic Achievement (AHAA) data sets (Pearson et al., 2007). The
NLSAH is a nationally representative, school-based study of 20,745 students in 7th
through 12th grade that contains survey data on their romantic attractions, well-being, and
attitudes toward school (Pearson et al., 2007). The AHAA data set was drawn from a
random sample of high schools in the United States that were stratified by region,
urbanicity, size, type, racial composition, and grade span (Pearson et al., 2007). The
total number of respondents in this study included 5,947 females and 5,341 males.
Researchers examined whether same-sex attracted youth have compromised academic
outcomes as they complete high school (Pearson et al., 2007).

Findings suggest LGB students fare worse on most measures of academic
achievement compared to their straight peers (Pearson et al., 2007). In addition, Pearson
and colleagues (2007) found LGB students leave high school with lower grades, are more likely to have failed a course, and have lower expectations of attending college compared to their straight counterparts. In a separate study in California, students report better academic outcomes when they feel safe at school, particularly for those who identify as LGBT (Russell, Talmage, Laub, & Manke, 2009).

More specifically, the study’s finding revealed LGB students differed based on gender. Gay and bisexual boys display lower academic performance than lesbian and bisexual girls, approximately one quarter of a letter grade, substantial when given the number of courses a student has to take to complete high school (Pearson et al., 2007). Gay and bisexual boys are also approximately 51% more likely than their straight male peers to fail a course and 47% less likely to complete Algebra II, a course important for university entrance exams and applications (Pearson et al., 2007). The study implies gay and bisexual boys may have lower GPAs, partly a result of higher emotional distress, substance use, and disengagement, as well as lower teacher attachment (Pearson et al., 2007).

Interestingly, lesbian and bisexual girls seem not to suffer the same consequences as gay or bisexual boys when it comes to grade point average, even though findings revealed they experience increased levels of emotional distress and difficulty with social integration (Pearson et al., 2007). This may be due to other research findings that girls tend to internalize distress, while boys are more likely to externalize distress (Leadbeater, Kuperminc, Blatt, & Hertzog, 1999). The study, however, did reveal that lesbian and bisexual girls possess more negative attitudes toward school and are less engaged compared to their straight female counterparts (Pearson et al., 2007). Likewise, lesbian
and bisexual girls are 36% less likely than their straight female peers to complete Algebra II, negatively affecting potential university acceptance post-high school (Pearson et al., 2007).

Limitations to this study include the age of data used from the mid-1990s and early 2000s. Although the current literature continues to show a challenging school climate for LGBT students today, culture, attitudes, and perceptions on LGBT issues may have changed in the 10- to 17-year lapse of the data used.

Similarly, in a research brief using data from the Preventing School Harassment (PSH) Survey in California, increased feelings of safety was linked to both higher GPAs, as well as intentions to attend college (Clarke & Russell, 2009). The survey, created by the California Safe School’s Coalition and administered by the Gay and Straight Alliance Network to over 2,400 students, sought to discover students’ experiences of safety at school (Clarke & Russell, 2009). Students were also asked about their grades and plans for the future (Clarke & Russell, 2009).

The findings indicated that a majority of students who earned mostly A’s or mostly A’s and B’s strongly agree to feeling safe at school (Clarke & Russell, 2009). Conversely, a majority of students who earn mostly B’s and C’s or lower indicated that they do not strongly agree to feeling safe at school (Clarke & Russell, 2009).

Similar to improved academic achievement, Clarke and Russell (2009) propose that when students feel safer at school, they are more likely to be college bound. The data revealed that 83% of LGBT students who strongly agree to feeling safe plan to attend college compared to 67% of those who do not strongly agree to feeling safe (Russell et al., 2009).
Limitations to this study include using data from students who selected strongly agreed or strongly disagreed to questions about feeling safe at school and academic achievement. The study seemed to lack critical analysis for those students who responded with other options, such as agree or disagree. These findings are, however, consistent with other studies that claim LGB youth have higher achievement and are more likely to be college ready when they feel safe (Pearson et al., 2007).

Similar findings were found in the 2011 National School Climate Survey where LGBT students that were frequently harassed had an average GPA of 2.9 compared to a 3.2 average for LGBT students who were less often harassed (Kosciw et al., 2011). Likewise, Kosciw and colleagues (2011) found students who experienced higher levels of victimization based on sexual orientation or gender expression were more than twice as likely to report that they had no plans to attend college compared to those who experienced lower levels. The study also reports having supportive school staff improves LGBT students’ grades and increases the likelihood they will attend college. It is important that educators be visible allies to LGBT students, showing that they will stand up for their safety and right to learn in a respectful environment (Diaz et al., 2010). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students that could identify no supportive staff had a mean GPA of 2.9 compared to 3.2 for those with six or more supportive staff (Kosciw et al., 2011). In addition, 14.9% of students who could identify no supportive staff say that they do not plan to attend college compared to only 5.1% who could identify six or more supportive staff (Kosciw et al., 2011). Although some studies have reported that school personnel are aware of LGBT issues, other studies have reported that many are lacking in knowledge, are undertrained, are incompetent, or are potentially unwilling
to address LGBT issues (Graybill, Varjas, Meyers, & Watson, 2009). In addition to lack of knowledge, Mudrey and Medina-Adams (2006) reported that 74% of preservice teachers surveyed on a measure of homophobia scored in the homophobic range, suggesting that they hold negative views about LGBT individuals. Furthermore, LGBT students have identified school staff as providing an integral role in creating a school climate that can either perpetuate or decrease victimization (Chesir-Teran, 2003).

**Absenteeism/Drop Out**

Research suggests that many LGBT students miss or drop out of school at least in part because of difficulties related to their identity (Kim et al., 2009). An unsafe school climate prevents these students their right to a safe education (Kosciw et al., 2011). Data from the 2001-2002 California Healthy Kids Survey found that more than 200,000 students, or 7.5%, reported being bullied based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. Of those 200,000 students, 26.6% reported that they missed one or more days of school during the past 30 days before the survey because they felt unsafe (Russell et al., 2009). Researchers used the California Department of Education’s Average Daily Attendance (ADA) statistics to estimate the economic costs of these targeted California students to be 39.9 million dollars for the entire academic year (Russell et al., 2009). These findings may be limited due to being administered by the Gay and Straight Alliance Network as not all schools have Gay and Straight Alliances (GSAs), and, even if they did, not all LGBT students join. This missing population in the survey may have skewed the results.

In the 2011 National School Climate Survey, 29.8% of students skipped a class at least once in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (Kosciw et al.,
Similarly, Kosciw and colleagues (2011) found 31.8% missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable. When victimization increased, so did the number of school days missed (Kosciw et al., 2011). Students who experienced higher levels of victimization because of their sexual orientation were three times as likely to have missed school in the past month compared to those who experienced lower levels. Likewise, Kosciw and colleagues discovered that students who experienced higher levels of victimization because of their gender identity were more than twice as likely to have missed school in the past month compared to those who experienced lower levels.

Additionally, the findings suggested that when these students were able to identify six or more supportive staff at their school, they were only half as likely to miss a day of school in the past month (Kosciw et al., 2011). Also, those who attend schools with inclusive curriculum reported higher levels of school belonging and were half as likely to report missing school due to feeling unsafe (Kosciw et al., 2011). The improved findings may be attributed to these youth feeling safer, more supported, and more connected to their schools. This study suggests that having more visible supportive staff and LGBT-inclusive curriculum may encourage students to speak up when they encounter harassment and bullying rather than skipping school for safety concerns.

School districts are, for the most part, in the dark about which students are at risk of dropping out or have dropped out due to issues related to being LGBT (Kim et al., 2009). Furthermore, Kim and colleagues (2009) argue that legal and practical issues make it nearly impossible for schools to seek and maintain data on students’ sexual orientations. A total of 63.6% of LGBT students out of 8,584 surveyed on the National
School Climate Survey reported they were either not out to all school staff or only out to a few (Kosciw et al., 2011). This is just one reason why it is a challenge to get precise dropout rates among LGBT students, although some have estimated that almost a third of these youth drop out of high school, more than triple the national rate (Bart, 1998).

In general, dropout rates are particularly linked with high poverty rates, poor school attendance, poor academic performance, grade retention, and disengagement from school (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007). The main cause of dropout among LGBT high school students appears to be the hostile school climate created by continual bullying and harassment from peers due to their sexual orientation (APA, 2010). Increased school involvement and higher achievement scores is a protective factor against dropping out (Peguero, 2011). It may be wise for schools to spend more time focused on student safety among LGBT students, which may decrease absenteeism, increase academic achievement, and minimize the dropout risk.

**Recommendations for Safer Schools for LGBT Students**

With years of research on the struggles of LGBT youth in schools, researchers are now focusing on factors that create safe and supportive environments for these students (Russell, 2010). “The role of public education should ensure the right of all students to an environment free from harassment, discrimination, and violence, regardless of sexual orientation and gender expression” (Horn, Szalacha, & Drill, 2008, p. 810). Results from nationwide youth surveys continue to show dire for many who identify as LGBT, but they also help researchers highlight the role institutional supports can play in making schools inclusive and safe (Kosciw et al., 2011).
There have been important advances in recent years in knowledge of strategies that promote safer schools for LGBT students (Russell, 2010). Kosciw and colleagues (2011) claim the steps that schools take to improve climate are also an investment in better educational outcomes and a healthier student population. These strategies include enumerated anti-bullying and harassment policies, staff development, the presence of inclusive clubs (such as Gay and Straight Alliances), and inclusive curricula (Diaz et al., 2010; Kosciw et al., 2011; Russell, 2010; Toomey et al., 2012).

**Enumerated Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policies**

Nearly all studies examining school safety for LGBT youth have found that comprehensive and enumerated anti-bullying and harassment policies that specifically include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression prove effective (Kim et al., 2009). Enumerated anti-bullying policies provide the basis for school safety policies, as well as the institutional backing for school staff to create and enforce the anti-bullying measures (Russell & McGuire, 2008). These policies are especially strong when they also include procedures for reporting incidents to school authorities, possibly providing guidance or empowering staff to intervene when hearing biased language (Kosciw et al., 2011).

Findings from the 2011 National School Climate Survey indicate LGBT students who attend schools with these policies reported lower incidence of hearing homophobic language and verbal harassment (Kosciw et al., 2011). Kosciw and colleagues (2011) also found that staff at these schools were more likely to intervene when hearing homophobic remarks, and students were more likely to report incidents of harassment and assault to school authorities. Additionally, students in schools with enumerated policies
report fewer suicide attempts (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006). Anti-bullying and harassment policies that do not specifically include enumeration of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression do not provide the grounding needed for consistent policy implementation and change (Russell, 2010). Although Kosciw and colleagues found that a majority of students reported that their school had a policy, less than a tenth (7.4%) of students in the survey reported that the policy included sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Enumerated policies provide students with greater protection against victimization because they make clear the various forms of bullying, harassment, and assault that will not be tolerated at their school (Kosciw et al., 2011).

As these findings indicate, for anti-bullying policies to have the strongest possible impact on climate and feelings of safety, they should specifically mention and include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (Kosciw et al., 2011). Schools may find it worth the effort to update or create enumerated anti-bullying policies and provide a clear and safe way for targets of bullying and harassment to report victimization.

**Staff Development and Safe Spaces**

When students perceive school staff as supportive, they are less likely to experience problems in school (Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001). According to research, the perceived presence of school staff who are supportive of LGBT students is one of the most effective predictors of decreased feelings of threat, truancy, and suicide attempts (Kim et al., 2009). Unfortunately, staff development designed to increase the knowledge and ability of staff to respond effectively to anti-LGBT bullying and harassment or to
create supportive school climates is rare (Goodenow et al., 2006). According to Kosciw and colleagues (2011), principals, as the leaders of the school, may play a particularly important role in the school experiences of LGBT youth, as they set the tone of the school and are key to determining policies and programs that may affect school climate. However, Kosciw and colleagues reveal that less than a third of youth reported that their school principal was supportive of LGBT students.

In cross-sectional studies, researchers have found that school staff intervention in situations that involve bias-related harassment helps students feel safer at school (Blackburn, 2007). One of the only existing evaluation studies documented that a single training focused on LGBT youth had increased teacher self-awareness about LGBT issues and their access to resources and information (Greytak & Kosciw, 2010). Similarly, a state-wide study in Massachusetts showed that students reported a safer school climate in schools that provided staff development on LGBT youth violence and suicide prevention (Szalacha, 2003). However, in general, students say that staff intervene more when slurs are made based on race and gender than when slurs are made about sexual orientation or gender identity (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008). School trainings are an effective way to raise awareness and encourage positive and effective staff supports regarding LGBT issues (Kim et al., 2009). These trainings should include all necessary staff, including school counselors, sports coaches, education support professionals, and other part-time, volunteer, or classified staff that have supervisory duties over students (Kim et al., 2009).

Being able to speak with a caring adult in school may have a significant positive impact on LGBT students, particularly for those who are bullied, harassed, or feel marginalized (Kosciw et al., 2011). In the 2011 National School Climate Survey, Kosciw
and colleagues (2011) found almost all students (95.0%) could identify at least one school staff member that was supportive of LGBT students at their school, and more than half (54.6%) could identify six or more supportive school staff. In fact, students who could identify six or more supportive school staff felt safer and were less likely to miss a day of school. For example, 53% of students who had six or more supportive staff felt unsafe compared to 76.9% who could identify no supportive staff. Likewise, 21.9% of students who had six or more supportive staff missed school in the past month compared to 51.7% who could identify no supportive staff. Lastly, GPAs were 0.4 higher for students with six or more school staff and were about a third as likely to say they had plans to attend college compared to those that could identify no supportive staff (Kosciw et al., 2011).

Supportive staff can become visible to students by displaying a safe space sticker or poster in their classrooms and offices, serving as GSA advisors, intervening when hearing anti-LGBT language, or by incorporating LGBT-related issues and inclusive curricula into their classes (Diaz et al., 2010). Additionally, Kosciw and colleagues (2011) found the presence of openly LGBT school personnel may imply to students that the school is supportive and accepting. In the survey, 41.2% of students said they could identity an LGBT staff person at their school (Kosciw et al., 2011).

School staff should be visible allies to LGBT students, showing them that they are available and will stand up for their right to learn in a safe and respectful environment (Diaz et al., 2010). Having supportive school personnel can have a positive effect on the educational experiences of all students by increasing student motivation and positive engagement in school (Kosciw et al., 2011). It may be sensible for principals to provide staff development on LGBT youth as a way to improve schools’ effectiveness in
addressing anti-LGBT harassment as well as increase the number of visible supportive staff on school campuses.

Involvement in extracurricular activities for all students is positively linked to academic achievement and psychological well-being (Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005). Gay and Straight Alliances emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s and have created social supports for LGBT students and their straight allies (Fetner, Elafros, Bortolin, & Drechsler, 2012). These generally student-led, school-based clubs have grown dramatically in numbers in recent years (Russell, 2010). Students who attend schools that have GSAs are more likely to report safety for LGBT youth (Toomey et al., 2012). Schools that have GSAs report fewer incidents of victimization and better academic and health outcomes for LGBT students (Goodenow et al., 2006). In fact, Szalacha (2003) reveals GSAs have the most significant influence on school climates for LGBT youth and simply the presence of the club, not necessarily the participation in it, is associated with increased feelings of safety.

In a 2005-2008 study using qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 57 LGBT young adults, ages 18-25 in the United States and Canada who have participated in high school GSAs, many reported efforts of opponents to the formation of the clubs (Fetner et al., 2012). While some GSAs were officially recognized, some were forced to change the name while others had to form groups informally or outside school due to opposition from principals, other staff, or parent groups (Fetner et al., 2012). The Equal Access Act of 1984 protects the right of U.S. public school students to create GSAs or similar clubs at school (Kosciw et al., 2011). In fact, in recent years, schools in Florida, Texas, and Wisconsin have attempted to bar GSAs resulting in federal lawsuits where judges either
ruled in favor of allowing the GSA or the parties settled out of court (Rudolph, 2011). In June of 2011, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan wrote a “Dear Colleague” letter to educators, in which he reminded them that schools receiving federal funds must provide equal access to school resources for all student groups, including GSAs (Rudolph, 2011).

Fetner and colleagues (2012) also found that these students were instrumental in planning and carrying out a variety of activities, bringing a great sense of accomplishment, resulting in feeling empowered to engage in education, activism, and social activities. For many, according to Fetner and colleagues, the mere existence of the club and access to a comfortable social space was what made high school a bearable experience for the students involved. Through GSAs, students create a context for positive attitudes about themselves and others (Herdt, Russell, Sweat, & Marzullo, 2007).

Findings in the 2011 National School Climate Survey reveal that GSAs provide a safe space for LGBT students to meet and socialize and contribute to safer and more inclusive schools (Kosciw et al., 2011). In fact, Kosciw and colleagues (2011) found LGBT students who attended schools with a GSA heard less frequent homophobic and negative remarks about gender expression compared to students who attended schools with no GSA. In addition, 54.9% of those with a GSA felt unsafe compared to 70.6% in schools with no GSA. This increased feeling of safety may be attributed to less severe victimization in those schools. For example, Kosciw and colleagues discovered that 38% of students who attend school with no GSA experienced higher severities of victimization compared to 23% in school with a GSA. Lastly, students who attend schools with a GSA were less likely to miss a day of school in the past month for feeling unsafe and reported
higher levels of school belonging (Kosciw et al., 2011). Studies have clearly shown that having a GSA is linked to safer schools for LGBT youth (Russell, 2010).

**Inclusive Curriculum**

The availability of curriculum that challenges gender and sexuality norms has been identified as a key strategy to promote inclusive school climates (Toomey et al., 2012). “Many experts in multicultural education believe that a curriculum that is inclusive of diverse groups—including culture, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation—instills a belief in the intrinsic worth of all individuals and in the value of a diverse society” (Kosciw et al., 2011, p. 60). For example, Towles-Schwen and Fazio (2001) found that white students who had prejudiced parents were able to overcome their discomfort interacting with black students through positive experiences in the school setting. This allowed them to learn about those who are different in a nonjudgmental way and may be a first step toward preventing later prejudice among students. Including LGBT-related issues in the curriculum may help students feel more valued and promote more positive feelings about LGBT issues for both straight and LGBT students, resulting in safer school climates (Kosciw et al., 2011).

There have been several empirical studies documenting the importance of LGBT inclusive curriculum as a way to promote safer schools (Russell, 2010). In a research brief analyzing 2003-2005 data from California’s Preventing School Harassment (PSH) survey and the Safe Schools Policy Survey, over 2,400 student respondents helped researchers determine if there was a relationship between LGBT inclusive curriculum and safer schools (Russell, Kostroski, McGuire, Laub, & Manke, 2006). Previous research had documented that LGBT students feel safer and report less harassment in schools that
have inclusive curriculum (O’Shaughnessy, Russell, Heck, Calhoun, & Laub, 2004). The PSH research brief revealed that 50.3% of students surveyed attended schools where LGBT inclusive curriculum was taught (Russell et al., 2006). Of those students who identified as LGBT, 73% reported feeling safe at school compared to 58% who attended schools without inclusive curriculum (Russell et al., 2006). Interestingly, 83% of students who identified as straight in the survey also felt safe in schools with inclusive curriculum compared to 77% without. These findings may be attributed to students reporting fewer mean rumors, fewer reports of being made fun of, and less anti-LGBT bullying (Russell et al., 2006). For example, Russell and colleagues (2006) discovered 53% of students with inclusive curriculum reported being bullied because they were or someone thought they were LGBT compared to 66% where no inclusive curriculum was taught.

In fact, findings from the 2011 National School Climate Survey revealed LGBT students attending schools with LGBT inclusive curriculum were much less likely to miss school, had a greater sense of belonging, and reported less harassment (Kosciw et al., 2011). For example, students attending schools with inclusive curriculum were half as likely as those without to miss school for feeling unsafe. In addition, Kosciw and colleagues (2011) found that students who attended schools with inclusive curriculum were more comfortable discussing LGBT related issues with school staff than those without (72% vs. 47%). Furthermore, twice as many students experienced higher levels of victimization at schools with no inclusive curriculum compared to those with such curriculum (Kosciw et al., 2011). Less severe victimization in schools with inclusive curriculum may be attributed to increased feelings of safety. Kosciw and colleagues
found that 43.4% of students in schools with inclusive curriculum had felt unsafe in the past month, but that number grew to 67.5% for those without.

Unfortunately, the only time LGBT issues seem to be discussed are in health classes, where LGBT individuals are invariably linked to sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV/AIDS (Cianciotto & Cahill, 2003). Kosciw and colleagues (2011) reported less than 20% of students were taught positive representations of LGBT people, history, or events in their classes. California may soon help increase these numbers. In July of 2011, California became the first state in the country to pass a bill requiring public schools to include lessons about the historical contributions of LGBT Americans (Adinolfi, 2011). Senate Bill 48, also known as the Fair, Accurate, Inclusive and Respectful (FAIR) Education Act, also added sexual orientation and gender identity to the state’s existing anti-discrimination protections, which prohibits bias-related school activities, instruction, and curriculum (Adinolfi, 2011). Future studies might want to investigate changes in school climate in California public schools, as this new law begins to adjust and add to instruction and school activities.

Among the safe schools strategies, having LGBT inclusive curriculum has had perhaps the strongest documented influence on multiple outcomes for students who identify as LGBT (Szalacha, 2003). These findings indicate the importance of inclusive curriculum in schools to ensure positive learning environments in which all students can receive a high quality education, graduate, and continue on to further education (Kosciw et al., 2011).
School Leadership and Change

Establishing an inclusive learning environment means implementing interventions that seek to change school culture and climate (Erickson, Mattaini, & McGuire, 2004). The tone that is set by school administration has a great effect on the culture and attitude of the school population (DeWitt, 2012). School culture holds the key to the effective management of change and school improvement (Dimmock & Walker, 2005). School leaders play an important role in the experiences of LGBT youth, set the tone of the school, as well as determine specific policies and programs that may affect the school’s climate (Kosciw et al., 2011). There is a wide variety of information available to address bullying and harassment in schools; therefore, it may be important to consider why action is not always taken (Dessel, 2010).

Few issues in our schools are more present and at the same time treated as invisible as issues related to sexual orientation (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). For example, discussions around LGBT issues often make school leaders feel uncomfortable, causing these topics of discussion to be completely avoided (DeWitt, 2012). Being supportive of programs and discussions of LGBT issues can create distress for school administrators due to outside influences like parents, community, or job security (DeWitt, 2012). Other leaders may not see discrimination against LGBT youth as similar to racial or other forms of discrimination (Capper & Owusu-Yeboa [Reed], 2006). According to the 2011 National School Climate Survey, approximately one in three students reported that their school administrator was supportive of LGBT students, and about a third said their administration was unsupportive (Kosciw et al., 2011). District officials must make a
A strong statement that they will stand behind school staff with regard to advocating and ensuring the safety of LGBT students (Macgillivray, 2004).

A prominent way that principals shape school culture and practices is through their beliefs, which is also said to be the core of effective leadership (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). It may be easier to change individuals’ behaviors rather than their beliefs, even though for change to have lasting effect, beliefs much change, too (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). Regrettably, school leaders do not seem to prioritize the safety concerns of LGBT students with the same level of urgency as other safety concerns (GLSEN, 2008).

In reality, schools rarely treat students in an equitable manner (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). It is not uncommon for schools to continue and not challenge practices for years and even decades simply because of their historical status (Marzano et al., 2005). However, addressing bullying and harassment in schools is critically important in improving school culture and climate for all students (Dessel, 2010). Reed (2008) suggests that school leaders be reflective of their personal views by continually reevaluating their actions to ensure that the needs of all students are met. If administrators truly wish to be change agents for safer schools, they may have to step outside of their comfort zone and challenge the beliefs that make up their core outlook on equity (Reed & Johnson, 2010).

Administrators that embrace the ideal of a democratic life are likely to place social justice front and center to all actions within the school (Tillman, Brown, Jones, & Gonzalez, 2006). Dantley and Tillman (2006) noted that social justice scholarship includes students’ sexual orientation, along with other protected classes. According to
the DOE (2014), states are revising discipline laws to enhance local discretion, curtail zero-tolerance requirements, and encourage the development of alternative disciplinary approaches, such as restorative justice. The mission, vision, and policies of such leaders are typically informed by social justice that seeks to eliminate inequalities that have historically perpetuated institutionalized dominance and oppression (Tillman et al., 2006).

Dominant groups tend to set the standards and expectations for school culture, which are often white, Christian, middle class, and hetero-normative, thus creating a sense of invisibility for those who are different (Dessel, 2010). Creating an inclusive culture requires an inclusive leader and a vision of shared values (Banks, 2005). It is suggested that a democratic and collaborative discussion between supporters and opponents may lead to a smoother implementation for desired change (Macgillivray, 2004).

Inclusive district policies may be able to change anti-LGBT bullying, as school boards often use these policies to support decisions made within the school systems (DeWitt, 2012). Support begins from the top down, and school administrators must feel supported and have a shared vision with district officials and the school board (DeWitt, 2012). Top down support—from school board, superintendent, central administration to administrators then school staff—is cited as very important to send the message that enumerated nondiscrimination policies should be taken seriously (Macgillivray, 2004). Ignoring issues related to bullying of LGBT youth will not rest until school leaders stand up and address the underlying moral issue of basic human rights (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009).
Interestingly, encouraging a school culture that promotes student achievement is a strong theme in principal leadership (Marzano et al., 2005). As the literature clearly demonstrates, when LGBT students feel safe, they are more likely to learn. Future study might focus on school climate effects after training school administrators on issues and effective strategies pertaining to LGBT students. Perhaps many school leaders do recognize these issues and want to promote equitable treatment of all students but may not have enough information or knowledge to act on behalf of an unjust situation (Capper & Owusu-Yeboa [Reed], 2006). Reflective school leaders can take practical steps in making schools more equitable for LGBT students (Capper & Owusu-Yeboa [Reed], 2006). By learning about the unique needs of LGBT students, self-reflecting, engaging in professional development, and taking practical steps to advocate for LGBT youth, school administrators can create an environment that is safe and welcoming for all students (Capper & Owusu-Yeboa [Reed], 2006). Schools will not be safe until individuals who are honest and open about their sexual orientation are valued and affirmed at every level (Walling, 1996).
CHAPTER 3—METHODOLOGY

Chapter 2 described a variety of literature related to the overall experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. In addition, the chapter explored research concerning actions that may help create safer and more inclusive school environments for LGBT students. However, none of the studies specifically researched a comparably safer school from the perspective of key staff, which is exactly who must drive needed change in schools. This chapter describes the methodology used in the present study to explore what may have contributed to comparably safer schools for LGBT students.

Research Question

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following research question:

What do various stakeholders believe may be contributing to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students?

Research Design

To answer the research question, I employed a collective case study approach. A collective case study is used when the researcher wants to provide an in-depth exploration of multiple bounded systems to better understand a research problem (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010). Case studies are common in educational research where researchers seek to describe what is happening at school or in a classroom (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010). In essence, a collective case study approach allows researchers a glimpse into the complexities of multiple systems so they can be described, build case based themes, and compared in order to provide further insight into an issue or a problem. Often, the
researcher purposefully selects multiple cases to show different perspectives (Creswell, 2007). Yin (2003) suggests that the researcher replicate the procedures for each case.

**School Selection**

A total of three public high schools in California were selected for this study using purposeful sampling. Each school was selected by Carolyn Laub, the Founder and Executive Director of the GSA Network, a nationally known expert whose organization works closely with both students and advisors of Gay and Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs in California schools. The Executive Director of the GSA Network, collectively with her regional staff, were able to identify three stand-out high schools in which LGBT students feel comparably safer and more included. Two of the selected high schools were located in Northern California and one in Southern California. Carolyn Laub submitted her biography as follows:

Carolyn Laub is the Founder and Executive Director of Gay-Straight Alliance Network. Carolyn received a 4-year fellowship from the Echoing Green Foundation in 1999 that helped launch GSA Network. In 2000, she was honored as one of the first U.S. recipients of the international Ashoka Fellowship, a 3-year fellowship that supports her work as a social entrepreneur. In 2012, she received the prestigious James Irvine Foundation Leadership Award in 2012 for her innovative youth empowerment model. Carolyn was a leader of the grassroots youth effort to pass the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000 (AB 537), an historic law that prohibits discrimination based on actual and perceived sexual orientation and gender identity in California schools. She co-founded the Make It Real Project, a youth-led statewide initiative to implement
AB 537. In 2001, Carolyn served on the California Department of Education’s AB 537 Advisory Task Force. In 2002, she co-founded the California Safe Schools Coalition, which is dedicated to the full implementation of AB 537. Carolyn has co-led the coalition since its inception and helped author the coalition’s groundbreaking report, Safe Place to Learn: Consequences of Harassment Based on Actual or Perceived Sexual Orientation and Gender Non-Conformity and Steps for Making Schools Safer. Prior to starting GSA Network, in 1997, Carolyn created Outlet, a support program for LGBTQQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning] youth living on the San Francisco peninsula. Additionally, Carolyn was the Director of the AIDS Prevention Program at the Mid-Peninsula YWCA where she developed innovative HIV prevention curriculum and published her research documenting the link between gender ideologies and adolescent sexual risk-taking behavior. Previously, she has served on the Board of Directors of Transgender Law Center, Bay Area Young Positives, KQED’s Community Advisory Panel, and Stanford Pride, the Stanford University LGBTQQI alumni club. Carolyn graduated from Stanford University in 1995 with a BA in Cultural Anthropology with a focus on the social construction of race, gender, and sexual orientation in the United States.

**Description of Participating Schools**

To ensure discretion, pseudonyms are used for school names, school background data are limited, and many numerals are rounded. In addition, information on each school was gathered from their Accountability Report Cards; therefore, citations are omitted to prevent school or district identification.
American High School

American is a 4-year comprehensive public high school located in a suburban neighborhood of Northern California. The school consists of roughly 1,500 students in Grades 9-12 with fewer than 80 certificated staff. The top three student groups by ethnicity include 30% White, 25% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 25% Hispanic/Latino. Nearly 15% of the student population is economically disadvantaged, and approximately 15% are designated as English language learners (ELLs). American has a graduation rate of 98%, higher than the state average of 79.9%. There are three full-time school counselors, which is equivalent to one for every 500 students.

Central High School

Central is a 4-year comprehensive public high school located in a suburban area of Southern California. The school consists of just over 3,000 students in Grades 9-12 with approximately 130 certificated staff. The top three student groups by ethnicity include approximately 60% White, 20% Hispanic/Latino, and 10% Asian/Pacific Islander. Nearly 20% of the student population is economically disadvantaged, and roughly 5% are designated as ELLs. Central has a graduation rate of 95%, far above state average of 78.9%. There are six full-time school counselors, which is equivalent to one for every 525 students.

Mountain High School

Mountain is a comprehensive public high school located in an urban neighborhood of Northern California. The school consists of roughly 950 students in Grades 9-12 with just over 80 certificated staff. The top three student groups by ethnicity include approximately 35% Hispanic/Latino, 25% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 15%
African American. Approximately 65% of the student population is economically disadvantaged, and 45% are designated as ELLs. Mountain has a graduation rate of approximately 75%, just a few percentage points below the state average of 78.9%. Mountain has five full-time school counselors, which is equivalent to one for every 185 students.

Participants

In this study, participants included interviews with the school principal, one school counselor, and the GSA advisor. In addition, full-time teachers at each school were invited to participate in an online survey.

Principals

The school principal from each site participated in a confidential phone interview with the researcher. Recruitment was accomplished by an email sent by the researcher to each school principal (see Appendix A). Participation was completely voluntary; therefore, a $50 gift card for an office supply store was offered as an incentive to participate. In addition, written consent was obtained prior to each principal being interviewed (see Appendix B). Each principal met the following criteria: (a) must be currently employed full-time at the school site; and (c) must have been employed in that position at the site for the entire 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years.

School Counselors

One school counselor at each school participated in a confidential phone interview with the researcher. Recruitment was accomplished by an emailed flyer sent by the researcher to each school counselor (see Appendix C). Participation was completely voluntary; therefore, a $50 gift card for an office supply store was offered as an incentive
to participate. In addition, written consent was obtained prior to the school counselor being interviewed (see Appendix D). The school counselor met the following criteria: (a) must be employed full-time as a high school counselor at the site; and (b) must have been employed as a full-time high school counselor at the site for the entire 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years.

**GSA Advisors**

The GSA advisor at each school participated in a confidential phone interview with the researcher. Recruitment was accomplished by an emailed flyer sent by the researcher to each GSA advisor (see Appendix C). Participation was completely voluntary, therefore a $50 gift card for an office supply store was offered as an incentive to participate. In addition, written consent was obtained prior to the GSA advisor being interviewed (see Appendix E). The GSA advisor met the following criteria: (a) must be employed full-time as a high school counselor at the site; and (b) must have been employed as a full-time high school counselor at the site for the entire 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years.

**Teachers**

Full-time teachers were invited to participate in an online survey using Qualtrics. Recruitment was accomplished by an emailed invitation from the school counselor who was selected to participate. The school counselor emailed a reminder 1 week following the initial email invitation (see Appendices F and G). Participation was voluntary, and no incentives to participate were offered. All teachers who chose to participate met the following criteria: (a) must be currently employed at the school full-time as a classroom
teacher; and (b) must have been employed full-time as a classroom teacher at the site for the entire 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years.

Instruments and Procedures

All of the protocols in the current study received prior review and approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at San Diego State University (see Appendix H).

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with the principal, one school counselor, and the GSA advisor at each school. Each interview was conducted individually using semi-structured protocol. The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were digitally recorded and transcribed. The interview with the principal occurred before interviews were conducted with the school counselor and GSA advisor at each site. All questions included opportunities for the principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor to provide their perspectives on why LGBT students may feel comparably safer at their school. The semi-structured interview protocol can be found in Appendices I, J, and K.

Survey

All full-time teachers who met specific criteria were invited to participate in an online and confidential survey using Qualtrics. Prior to participating, teachers were asked to waive signed consent to ensure confidentiality (see Appendix L). Each question used either yes or no responses or a 5-point Likert-type scale to gather their perspectives of what may have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer. The school counselor selected for this study forwarded an email invitation from the researcher to all full-time teachers who met particular criteria. The school counselor sent one reminder email after 2 weeks of the initial email invitation. The survey questions focused on
suggestions and recommendations mentioned in the literature review. The online survey questions can be found in Appendix M.

**Data Analysis**

I conducted a within-case analysis one school at a time (Creswell, 2007). Starting with school one, I categorized interview transcripts from the principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor. Lastly, the online survey results were analyzed and compared to data collected through interviews. Once data from all three schools were analyzed, a cross-case analysis was used to identity common themes, assertions, or interpretations of the research findings (Creswell, 2007).

**Limitations**

Like every study, this investigation had a number of limitations. First, an outside expert from the GSA Network and her regional coordinators throughout California recommended the schools that were selected. Although the criteria given for the school selections were specific, there is no guarantee that the selected sites are, in fact, comparably safer schools for LGBT students. Second, only one school counselor at each school was invited to participate in the confidential interview with the researcher. This method left out the voices of other school counselors at each site, preventing their perspectives to be included. Lastly, students’ perspectives were not included in this study. It is a challenge to obtain parental permission for student participation in a study when not all are open about their sexual orientation or gender identity at home.
CHAPTER 4—FINDINGS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that contributed to a comparably safer school climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. Schools were selected by the Founder and Executive Director of the Gay and Straight Alliance (GSA) Network, a nationally known expert whose organization works very closely with both students and advisors of GSA clubs in California schools. The Executive Director of the GSA Network, collectively with her regional staff, were able to identify three stand-out high schools in which LGBT students feel comparably safer and more included. This study includes data collected from interviews with each school’s principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor, along with survey data from teaching staff to determine possible common themes and proven strategies that could potentially be replicated and initiated in other schools. Specifically, the following research question directed this study: What do various stakeholders (Principal, School Counselor, GSA Advisor, and Teaching Staff) believe may be contributing to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students?

Background of Participating Schools

Staff from all three comprehensive public high schools selected for this study agreed to participate provided that their school and personal identities were confidential. To ensure discretion, pseudonyms are used for school names, only female gender pronouns are associated with interview participants, school background data are limited, and many numerals are rounded. In addition, background information on each school
was gathered from their Accountability Report Card; therefore, citations are omitted to prevent school or district identification.

The schools were selected because of their comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. Each was diverse in size, either small, medium, or large. Two are located in suburban areas, while one is in an urban area. One of the schools had an ethnic majority of White students, while the majority at the other two schools were Latino/Hispanic students and Asian/Pacific Islander students. It is also important to note that all three high schools have had an active Gay and Straight Alliance Club for 8 years or more.

**American High School**

American is a 4-year comprehensive public high school located in a suburban neighborhood of Northern California. The school consists of roughly 1,500 students in Grades 9-12 with fewer than 80 certificated staff. The top three student groups by ethnicity include 30% White, 25% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 25% Hispanic/Latino. Nearly 15% of the student population is economically disadvantaged, and approximately 15% are designated as English language learners (ELLs). American has a graduation rate of 98%, higher than the state average of 79.9%. There are three full-time school counselors, which is equivalent to one for every 500 students.

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Nearly 20% of the student population is economically disadvantaged, and roughly 5% are designated as ELLs. Central has a graduation rate of 95%, far above the state average of 78.9%. There are six full-time school counselors, which is equivalent to one for every 525 students.

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This Study

Individual confidential phone interviews were conducted with the school principal, one school counselor, and one GSA Advisor at each school. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. In addition, 53% of the full-time teaching staff participated in a confidential online survey of 15 questions. Both the phone interviews and the survey provided an opportunity for each participant to weigh in on what might have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students.

Some of the semi-structured interview questions were based on the recommendations from the literature review for creating a safer school climate for
LGBT students. In addition, there were opportunities for each stakeholder to explain the impact level of each action taken by the school, particularly compared to other actions. The online survey allowed teachers the chance to include their views and helped to validate the responses from each interview.

In this comparative case study, I report important findings from the interviews and survey data one school at a time. After that, I report on common themes, assertions, and interpretations based on data collected at all three schools.

Factors That May Have Contributed to a Safer School Climate for LGBT Students

A variety of factors appear to have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students at each of the three participating schools. While it might be impossible to measure the impact of each factor precisely, the interview responses and survey data suggested that each school has purposely enacted both policies and practices that have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer.

This section will explain the evidence obtained from each school that may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students, from the perspective of key staff. Specifically, these factors include (a) anti-bullying policies, procedures, and school culture; (b) staff training; (c) gay and straight alliances and visible safe spaces; (d) LGBT-inclusive curricula; and (e) inclusive school-wide activities. Although these factors may overlap, I will describe each factor, as well as its comparative impact, from the perspective of the participants. For the most part, the evidence suggests that the steps taken have significantly contributed to a comparably safer school climate, even though
there was not always agreement on which actions and factors created the most significant impact.

**American High School**

Research findings indicate that staff at American High School have purposefully taken steps to create an inclusive and safe school for LGBT students. These actions may have led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer.

**Anti-bullying policies, procedures, and school culture.** At American, the principal, school counselor and GSA advisor all confirmed that there is a district-wide anti-bullying policy and that a majority of the staff there enforce and follow it. According to the confidential online survey, 35% indicated that they know the district anti-bullying policy “extremely well” and an additional 55% selected “somewhat well” (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Participants’ responses from American to survey question 13.](image)

The policy is enumerated to include sexual orientation and gender identity and, according to the GSA advisor, will add gender expression at the next board meeting. Using a Likert-type scale of one to five, one being “very significant” and five being “not
significant at all,” each interviewee was asked to rate how the enumerated anti-bullying policy has led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer.

The principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor each selected the second option, “somewhat significant.” The principal and school counselor both expanded their response with caveats. The principal stated, “Unless the culture and the people in the school believe in, internalize, and follow through on the policy, it doesn’t matter if you have a policy or not.” The school counselor stated she would have ranked it “very significant” rather than “significant” if the question was specifically about American’s expansion of the district policy called “a cornerstone of mutual respect.” The school counselor stated, “We take the district policy as an umbrella framework, but then we take American’s philosophy with mutual respect, which I think has had a very significant impact on school safety.”

American has treated the district’s enumerated anti-bullying policy as the starting framework and added a policy called “A Cornerstone of Mutual Respect.” The principal explained that about 8 years ago a few staff from American traveled to England and brought back the idea. It was originally just a week of activities around respect but has now been expanded and morphed into a school policy year round. Each classroom and office at the school have three posters that highlight (a) respect for each other, (b) respect for property, and (c) respect for personal space. The school counselor explained that the policy is referenced both inside and outside of the classrooms, with students, as well as at every staff meeting. “We go on a ‘road show’ to all classrooms with administrators for presentations at the beginning of the year, the middle of the year, etc., to talk about the mutual respect policy.” The principal explained, “We shove our mutual respect campaign
down throats as much as possible and are able to shut down bullying very quickly.” The principal confirmed that these conversations purposefully include discussions on diverse student groups, including sexual orientation and gender identity.

**Responding to bullying.** The ways in which the faculty and administration at American responds to bullying behavior is not always the same and many times depends on the severity, according to the school principal. The principal explained:

The kids are good about coming in and talking to administrators or the dean when something is going down and our response varies. It may be, depending upon what was happening and the severity, we may just initially talk to them and provide counseling support. It may be Saturday school, and then if it’s obviously egregious and, which all bullying is, how often it’s been done before, does the person have a history or is this the first time and those kids are just not aware their behavior is considered bullying. So the most egregious then is obviously suspension but we have an alternative to the suspension program. Instead, we send them to Saturday School with our dean and staff where they get counseling. We focus on having students reflect on their behavior, why they did it, and then think about how they can change their behavior.

Although most school staff seems to understand and follow the policy, it also appears that there is a bit of flexibility in responding to bullying incidents. The GSA advisor stated:

The classroom teacher plays a large role with discipline of a student when it comes to bullying. There’s looseness in the policy that allows for both the teacher
and administration to compromise and discuss the best punishment or even a conversation to have in regards to the bullying issue.

Even though this “flexible” policy may seem difficult for staff to implement, the GSA advisor confirms that a majority of them follow the anti-bullying policy procedures. This approach also appears to avoid zero tolerance policies, which have been proven to be unsuccessful.

Counseling staff also plays an important role in responding to bullying incidents. The school counselor stated:

There is usually always some form of counseling, although counselors never do the discipline piece. We are very much into doing conflict resolution, talking, being very open about awareness; we also have an alternative to suspension program that’s a 2-day program on the weekend that counseling is actually a component of. Counselors are called in anytime there are bullying issues around sexual orientation or identity, and we work with the students to provide education and support for both the alleged victim and the perpetrator. Fortunately, I haven’t had to do very much of that this year. I work with all seniors, and by the time our students are seniors, they are really pretty educated about our culture, our climate, and our expectations. In the younger grades, I think our counselors are a little more involved with bullying than I am.

The school counselor suggested that a large majority of the staff feel comfortable and understand how to respond effectively to anti-LGBT bullying.

Conversely, the principal admits that the school is not perfect, and there is still plenty of room for improvement. She stated:
We are a community, and if bullying is going on we tend to hear about it. We work really hard to make sure that we are enforcing policy, so we talk to teachers about not letting harmful language go by. For example, if a kid says, “Oh, that’s really gay,” we tell them to shut it down and have them understand the harm. The biggest complaint from our GSA advisor will probably be that sometimes teachers let it go by without responding immediately.

This does not appear to be the case at American. The GSA advisor stated, “A majority of our staff feel comfortable to respond to anti-LGBT bullying. I don’t think that a majority is enough, but I do think the majority is prepared to respond to these issues.” The school counselor added:

I am not going to say 100%, I mean that would be in a perfect school, but I would say 80% of the staff do. I think there’s always room for improvement. I have had teachers come to me and say, “Hey if this happens in a classroom can you give me ideas on how to respond?” I like that it is really open here, and I think that makes a difference.

According to the teaching staff survey, a majority is responding to anti-LGBT bullying. When asked how likely they are to respond if they witness homophobic or anti-LGBT bullying/harassment, 88% selected “very likely” and 12% selected “likely” (see Figure 2). When asked how comfortable they are when responding to homophobic or anti-LGBT bullying/harassment, 88% selected “very comfortable,” 7% “slightly comfortable,” and 5% “slightly uncomfortable” (see Figure 3).

**School culture and supportive administration.** School administrators play an important role in the experience of LGBT youth by setting the tone and specific policies
that may affect the school’s climate (Kosciw et al., 2011). A prominent way that principals shape school culture and practices is through their beliefs, which is also said to be the core of effective leadership (Marzano et al., 2005). The literature indicates that having LGBT-supportive administration is not the norm. At American, it appears that the school administration has not hesitated to show full support around LGBT, students
as well as support for the staff to advocate for LGBT inclusion. When asked how supportive American’s principal is with regard to LGBT issues, both the school counselor and the GSA advisor confirmed she is very supportive. Through survey data, full-time teaching staff confirmed there was strong support from school administration. When asked if they feel supported by school leadership to advocate for LGBT safety and inclusion, 73% selected “very supported,” 24% “somewhat supported,” and 2% “neutral” (see Figure 4). When asked about LGBT student perceptions of school leadership’s support of their safety and inclusion at school, 54% selected “very supported, 41% “somewhat supported,” 2% “neutral,” and 2% “somewhat unsupported” (see Figure 5). Clearly, American’s administration staff has not shied away from ensuring a majority of school staff and student know that they are supportive of LGBT issues.

![Figure 4. Participants’ responses from American to survey question 7.](image-url)
Figure 5. Participants’ responses from American to survey question 9.

It could be that the principal is perceived to be a strong supporter, in large part, due to a strong GSA advisor. When asked, the GSA advisor confirmed that American’s administration team is extremely supportive of LGBT issues, but that does not necessarily mean they lead in the action steps that create a safer and more inclusive climate. The GSA advisor said:

They do what I say. They know better. They know I am going to do it anyway, I mean that’s kind of my attitude. It’s not a matter of can I do something; it’s more of me telling them what we need and are going to do. For example, when I tell her we are bringing pieces of the AIDS Quilt to campus, she will talk to the health and history departments and say you know, we need to create a curriculum in health and history classes. It’s pretty awesome.
Even though the GSA advisor may come across as strong willed, there appears to be a mutual respect between her and the administration. The principal attributed much of the success with the school’s safe school culture to the GSA advisor. She stated:

It began by having a strong GSA, having people like our GSA advisor, who definitely believe in equity. If for some reason she left next week, I think it would be hard. There have been other GSA advisors, but she brings a unique perspective of not only awareness, but of public relations within the community.

Creating a safe and inclusive school culture takes time and the GSA advisor seemed to agree. She stated:

I have watched the culture change, and it changes for a lot of different reasons. Right now we are focused on common core, and at other times we were very focused on creating a connected community. I think in light of LGBT issues, establishing the fact that it is part of who we are as a school. It’s part of our identity. It has really been one of my goals for the last 5 years. I have always been out as a teacher from the beginning, but I feel it’s important to be out as a school as a place of acceptance. If a student doesn’t feel comfortable with themselves or with their setting, it’s going to be impossible for them to learn.

Similarly, the principal added:

We are pretty much known in the community as having a very open, liberal campus. I have heard from students who have said they did not feel comfortable in middle school, and they come to American and say it’s a much more open and accepting environment. I have also had two out teachers specifically request to work here for that reason. I think it’s just being accepting, welcoming, but also
providing the structures in place that allow people to be and do whatever they want to.

In addition, the school counselor seemed to agree. She added, “Our staff is so open and accepting. For example, I had a student who is biologically male that wasn’t comfortable in a coed class. I made the change to an all female class and all the teachers were completely fine.”

**Staff training.** Having a district-wide enumerated anti-bullying policy and a school campaign of mutual respect may not have been enough if school leadership and staff did not understand LGBT issues. At American, opportunities for staff development appear to be somewhat limited and unclear due to inconsistent feedback from the interviews and survey.

When asked if the school district has provided professional development on LGBT youth, the principal said:

My assistance principal, the GSA advisor, and I recently went to a workshop sponsored by the County Office of Education on the new transgender law but we chose to go. The district simply put it out and said here it is. I don’t feel like there’s been anything that requires us to be trained on. We get information on the laws, but you have to go get your own training on it.

Although the district does not seem to provide or mandate LGBT-focused training for school leaders, they appear to promote opportunities that are available, at least as it pertains to new legal requirements.

At the school site level, professional development and opportunities for staff to dialogue about LGBT student issues has occurred. The GSA advisor stated:
The only professional development we had was done by the GSA students a couple of years ago, one at a faculty meeting and then the other when I invited a former graduate to come talk about her experience of being an out girl as a freshman but then finishing up her career as transitioning into a boy. He talked about how he felt supported and not supported in high school. Annually, our district’s lawyer lectures us, and they do mention LGBT students, and really that’s just sexual harassment information.

Using a Likert-type scale of one to five, one being “very significant” and five being “not significant at all,” the GSA advisor was asked to rate if staff training has led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer. She stated:

I would say that it’s significant. I would not go so far as to say very significant just because it’s been limited. I would say that we are also starting with a staff that is young and accepting, and I think that if our staff was resistant and conservative, I would probably be pushing for more professional development than I am now.

When asked about staff training on LGBT youth, the school counselor described it differently. She said:

There have been discussions in our smaller groups like our “Kid Talk,” which is some of our counselors, our principals, our dean, special ed teachers, and we look at the broad spectrum of different social concerns out there and how it impacts our kids. It’s also talked about at the beginning of the year when we go over mutual respect, but not really in depth on lesbian/gay youth and transgender. In our
weekly meetings that we do in Kid Talk, that topic comes up all the time; however, I think we need to do more of that for our general staff.

The principal did not appear to have much recollection of the training provided and did not mention “Kid Talk.” She stated, “I think we did something; I know our GSA advisor wanted to do something again this year and we haven’t gotten to it yet.” When I asked the question again to clarify, she responded with, “I think that we did something at one of our staff meetings 2 years ago, but I may be wrong.”

It may be time for the school to provide a comprehensive training for all staff on LGBT issues due to the inconsistent feedback from the three interviews and the 7% of the teaching staff who indicated they were only “slightly comfortable” and 5% who were “slightly uncomfortable” responding to anti-LGBT bullying. The school counselor stated, “I just think that’s part of the growth factor, and as you get new staff, more education always needs to be done and more modeling for them.”

The survey data reveals equally inconsistent feedback around the school’s professional development opportunities on LGBT related issues. When asked if they had attended professional development in the past 2 years on how to best support LGBT students, 49% said yes, and 51% said no. It could be that some staff received training at a previous position at another school or some may have assumed the past trainings were done more than 2 years ago.

**Gay and straight alliances and visible safe spaces.** Research informs us that having supportive school clubs, such as Gay and Straight Alliances, contributes to increased feelings of safety among LGBT students. Much of the credit for the comparably safer school climate may not simply be the existence of the GSA club, but
rather the club having a strong and well-respected advisor, coupled with an abundance of visible safe spaces throughout the campus. The principal and school counselor commented many times throughout the interview how amazing the GSA advisor is. In fact, using a Likert-type scale of one to five, one being “very significant” and five being “not significant at all,” the principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor all ranked the club’s existence as being “very significant” in creating a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students.

When I asked questions about how the school successfully developed an inclusive and safe culture, the principal said:

I think it began just having a strong GSA and people like the club’s advisor, who definitely believes in equity. Having a large number of staff who are alternative in their own way also created a much more open atmosphere. That’s not to say that there aren’t students or parents on campus that are more conservative and probably don’t believe in what we are doing, but then again, they probably don’t send their kids to our school. We are pretty much known in the community as having a very open, liberal campus.

When I asked the principal to elaborate on how the existence of the club led to a safer school climate, the tone in her response elevated to what I interpreted as full of pride. She said:

Oh, I think the GSA has made a huge difference. I mean if you go to a GSA meeting, they can have up to 100 students there. They have guest speakers come in to talk. It’s also a very accepting club in that you don’t have to be gay to belong to it—it truly is a gay/straight alliance, and I attribute it to having an
incredibly strong advisor and such a large number of students who are involved. The students all the time come to me and say things like, “We want a gender neutral bathroom.” I think we are the first one in the district to actually do that, and it was because they came to me and said we have kids that are uncomfortable and need some place to go. I was like okay fine. The club’s advisor is on my shoulder reminding me, kind of in my ear saying we need to think about this, we need to think about that. So I think having the club has been incredibly important for what we have done and who we are at American.

The school counselor seemed to agree with the principal. Even when I was not asking about the GSA or the club’s advisor specifically, she brought it up. She stated:

I think our GSA is so powerful. In fact, I have been here for 13 years, and I would say in the last 8 years it has been probably the strongest club on campus in terms of really helping students see how important it is to be accepting, to be supportive, and to be caring. I think we have some really special leaders, and, of course, the club’s advisor has really been significant in terms of communicating these messages to our staff and our students.

The school counselor’s comments about the GSA being one of the strongest clubs on campus is evidenced by the survey data from American’s teaching staff. When asked how active the GSA club is compared to other clubs on campus, 39% selected “much more active than others,” 41% “more active than others,” and 20% “about the same as others” (see Figure 6).

When I finally did ask the school counselor about the significance of the GSA club’s influence on the comparably safer school climate, she said:
Figure 6. Participants’ responses from American to survey question 3.

I think the most instrumental factor at our school is providing that feeling of walking on campus and feeling safe and accepted. I can give you examples. I have students who are questioning their own sexual orientation. I have students who people would think are transgender. I have students who sometimes feel like a boy and sometimes feel like a girl. But they tell me, “When I go to this club I feel accepted just for being who I am as a human being.” We have students that go to the club who may not feel like they fit in in terms of not being athletic, not being in music, not being in drama, but they find a safe place in that club. They call themselves allies, and they feel very accepted and are advocates for the cause. I just think that, when you walk into the GSA, it’s a combination of different people to feel comfortable and a place to feel connected. I think it permeates our campus that way.

It seemed clear to both the principal and the school counselor that the existence of a strong GSA was singlehandedly the strongest factor that has contributed to a comparably
safer school climate for LGBT students. Similarly, the GSA advisor said that having a GSA on campus was very significant in creating a comparably safer school. The strength of having a GSA was also evidenced by the survey data from teaching staff. When asked how likely the GSA club has contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students, 95% selected “very likely” (see Figure 7). One of the survey participants selected “not applicable,” which may indicate that the teacher either misread the question, accidentally selected the wrong response, or truly did not know the school had a GSA. Similar questions were asked on the survey about individual actions the school has taken to help determine what actions have contributed most strongly. More respondents selected “very likely” for the existence of the GSA club over all other actions surveyed.

![Figure 7. Participants’ responses from American to survey question 15a.](image-url)
It is also important to note that the strength in the GSA is not just the LGBT-identified students at American. In fact, most of the club’s members and supporters at the school identify as straight allies. The GSA advisor stated:

I never personally saw the value of a GSA until I became the advisor of it. Once I was the advisor, it wasn’t so much about helping the LGBT students, as much as it was about fostering straight allies on our campus. When the GSA, faculty, and the school site can get to a point where they are mainly straight allies, it translates into a culture rather than a school club. I think that there are so many straight allies and so many people here who are a part of the learning and discussing the issue. At American, it’s not just people who are interested in gay issues; it’s about really our school’s culture.

The strength of the club could also be attributed to supportive staff. In fact, a majority of the staff claimed to have participated in the GSA club in some way. According to the teacher survey, 68% of the respondents said they had attended at least part of a GSA meeting or GSA planned event (see Figure 8). The GSA advisor also clarified that not all LGBT students on campus participate in the club. She said, “I think that the majority of those who don’t come recognize the reason the school is so safe is because of the work of the GSA. It just might not be the thing for them, but they do recognize it is important on campus.”

Visible safe spaces. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth often fear rejections and therefore have a difficult time identifying an adult that will be affirming and will keep their conversations confidential. To help ensure students can easily find trusting adults, American has a number of visible safe space signs around campus. When
I asked the GSA advisor a rough percentage of teachers who have a visible safe space sign posted in their classroom, she said:

My goal is 100% of the classrooms to have a safe space poster and a safe space. I will just be conservative and say 90%, although it might be bigger than that.

When you include the fact that they are all over the office, like every counselor has one, the main office has one. In conjunction with that, I am a big fan of the ACLU GSA poster campaign. They are kind of a purplish blue color, and it’s got a whole bunch of derogatory words around a cartoon drawing of a student. It just says that we don’t talk like that around here. Those posters are almost equally as popular around our campus.

The GSA advisor also recounted a few times where students have shared how the safe space signs impacted them. She said, “Kids talk about seeing safe space posters; it’s just golden for them. Just knowing there’s someone in the community who they can talk to, and I know that it’s a lifesaver for some kids, too.”
Similarly, the school counselor agreed that a majority of teachers post safe space posters. Her guess was anywhere from 75%-80% of teachers who have safe space signs posted in their classrooms. She also confirmed that these visible signs were “very significant” in contributing to LGBT students feeling comparably safer and gave a few examples. She recounted:

I have had numerous students talk about the safe space posters and how much that has meant to them. They have said things like, “Gosh, I had no idea that teacher would feel it’s okay for me to feel safe in their classroom.” If you came to our school, you would see a lot of students; they don’t sit outside. You will see students gravitating very often to those classrooms where the safe space posters are, and I feel almost every one of our classrooms is like that. I also had a student who was talking about a particular teacher here and said, “I can’t believe that teacher has that safe space poster. They knew so much more than I thought they would ever know.” The student was beaming.

Interestingly, my conversation with the principal on the existence of safe space signs was much different from my interviews with the GSA advisor and school counselor. She stated:

I am not sure if we do. I am trying to think if we have, but I don’t think so. I think the whole school is a safe place. I have never thought about it. I don’t think we have any signs up that say safe area. I think the word gets out that if you need anything or you need a safe place to go, then go to the front office. Many students hang out in front of my dean’s office, where you can just hang out. If somebody
is sitting on one of the chairs and they have a look on their face, staff will stop and say are you okay? Who do we need to get you to talk to?

I asked once more to clarify and confirm that she did not believe there were safe space posters or signs up in classrooms. Although she seemed uncertain, she said that she did not even think the GSA advisor had one in her room. It could be that the principal does not do many walkthroughs on campus, is not very observant, or did not completely understand what a safe space sign was.

According to the survey taken by the full time teaching staff, 78% confirmed they have a visible safe space poster in their classroom (see Figure 9), and 90% confirmed they feel very supported by school leadership to be a visible LGBT ally (see Figure 10). These data indicate that most staff who feel supported by leadership actually do post a safe space sign in their classroom. In addition, the survey indicated that all participants agreed that a majority of staff provides an affirming, inclusive, and welcoming space for LGBT students on campus. A total of 78% selected the first option, indicating that 80-100% of the school staff provides an affirming, inclusive, and welcoming space. The remaining 22% selected the second option of 60-79% (see Figure 11).

**Openly LGBT staff.** Having openly LGBT staff may allow students another way to locate safe spaces, as well as identify adults that are more like them to look up to. The school counselors said, “We also have some openly gay teachers at our school who present a really positive and powerful force about their beliefs.” The school counselor confirmed that there were about five or six openly LGBT staff members that she could count. She stated, “There’s four that I know are very open about it and have talked about their partners in class.” She continued to discuss the benefit of having openly LGBT staff
Figure 9. Participants’ responses from American to survey question 1.

Figure 10. Participants’ responses from American to survey question 8.
by saying, “I just think having teachers who are comfortable talking about their life, what they have gone through, and their opinions on things. They are still accepted. They can work in an environment that is supportive, and it’s just great role modeling.” When I asked if she felt having openly LGBT staff members on campus contributed to a comparably safer school climate, she confirmed with:

I definitely think it’s significant. Students have talked about it with me privately. They have told me about teachers who shared this information with the class. It just changed their whole outlook about what it is to be in high school. They didn’t feel alone because there are people who are adults who have great jobs, who are accepted, and who are highly respected in a professional field. It’s kind of like they feel there’s a place for them in the world, and I think that’s very, very important.

Similarly, the GSA advisor confirmed there are several openly LGBT staff working at American. She estimated there were 10 or more LGBT staff members, which

*Figure 11.* Participants’ responses from American to survey question 11.
was higher than what was reported by the school counselor. She also stated that only about 75% of them are open with all students and colleagues. The GSA advisor continued, “That includes LGBT staff who are married with children, same sex couples that are engaged, and the students are aware of that.” I asked for more information about the LGBT staff who decided not to come out to students. She said, “There’s just one or two of our LGBT staff that are probably not out to students, and when I talk to them they will bring up the statement of tenure.” Even though a majority of the staff feel school leadership is supportive of LGBT issues at American, it appears newer staff still feel their permanent status could be in jeopardy if they were to be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

According to the staff survey, participants ranked having openly LGBT staff members as the second most strongly related factor that may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate. When asked how likely having openly LGBT staff has contributed to a comparably safer school climate, nearly 85.5% selected “very likely” and 10% selected “somewhat likely” (see Figure 12). This may be due to the supportive climate that helps LGBT staff be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity. The survey also revealed that a large majority believes that both students and staff would support having an openly LGBT teacher. In fact, 90% of the participants say that between 80-100% of the students and staff collectively would support having an openly LGBT teacher, with the remaining 10% who selected between 60-79% (see Figure 13). Whether it is providing positive role models, an adult that may understand their issues on a personal level, or other factors, having openly LGBT staff appears to play a significant role in the comparably safer school at American.
Figure 12. Participants’ responses from American to survey question 15g.

Figure 13. Participants’ responses from American to survey question 14.
LGBT-inclusive curricula. After the passage of Senate Bill 48, also known as the Fair, Accurate, Inclusive and Respectful (FAIR) education act, schools were required to teach about the contribution of LGBT people in history and social studies. Although the law requires such education, there are no formal audits taking place and no funding to help schools purchase curriculum or provide training to staff.

At American, there appear to be some examples of staff using inclusive curricula, although the principal was uncertain if and where it was happening. She stated:

We support everybody to do what they should be doing. Have I done a campaign or sent materials out, no. I am not even sure that we put the word out. When we get new policies, we send it out to teachers and let them know. Do I monitor it to make sure that they are doing it? No. I am supportive; I will do what they want to with it.

The school counselor confirmed that the health curriculum is inclusive of LGBT issues but could not confirm if that included lessons taught in history or social studies on the contributions of LGBT individuals.

The GSA advisor was able to provide a bit more background on the possibility of using inclusive curricula, even though she could not confirm it was actually being used. She stated:

I know that our social studies department head just a couple of weeks ago asked me a little bit more about it. When the bill originally passed, I brought them a whole bunch of resources, which they were very receptive to. I know our social studies department heads have had specific conversations with their teachers
about it. I don’t know how that translates to curriculum, but I do know that they
have been educated and they have been given resources.

According to data collected by the survey, teachers have used inclusive curricula
in their classrooms. When asked approximately how many lessons taught in the
classroom in the past year that have included a positive portrayal of an openly LGBT
individual, only 39% selected none (see Figure 14). In fact, a majority of respondents
suggested they were using inclusive curricula, including 10% who selected one lesson,
17% two lessons, 5% three lessons, and 29% four or more lessons. Collectively, 61%
claimed to have taught at least one lesson in the past year that included a positive
portrayal of an openly LGBT individual.

![Approximately how many lessons taught in your classroom in the past year have included a positive portrayal of an openly LGBT individual?](image)

*Figure 14.* Participants’ responses from American to survey question 2.

Survey data from teaching staff revealed that there may be use of inclusive
curricula, and there also appears to be some benefit. When asked how likely has using
inclusive curricula that includes positive portrayals of LGBT individuals contributed to a
Comparably safer school climate for LGBT students, 37.5% selected “very likely,” and 40% “somewhat likely” (see Figure 15). All others selected either neutral or unlikely.

Figure 15. Participants’ responses from American to survey question 15e.

Implementing the FAIR Education Act does not appear to be a priority at American outside of using inclusive curricula in health classes. It may be that some teachers are including LGBT topics throughout lessons in history and social studies, and the principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor are just unaware of it.

Inclusive school-wide activities. Another reason why students at American feel comparably safer may be due to several school-wide activities where acceptance and open dialogue on LGBT issues is at the forefront. The principal was proud to tell me about the school’s unique Ally Campaign, which has happened for 2 years. She also explained that the GSA has organized pieces of the AIDS Quilt to be on display in the library for the past few years. She said, “The GSA advisor has gotten pieces of the quilt about every
2 years and then we do curriculum around it.” She also shared that about three or four years ago the school was a host site for a Greater Bay Area conference for GSA students. The principal provided more description on how Ally Week turned into a campaign with yearlong, lasting effects. She said:

Students take pictures of others and they write down why they’re an ally. For example, they write, “I believe that all students should be able to express themselves the way they want to” and it will be a picture of a student, a teacher; there are all kinds of pictures. They are great and are still hanging up all over the school.

Lastly, the principal shared that the school has presented plays with LGBT inclusive themes. She explained, “Every 2 years students do either Secrets or another play I think called Out of the Closet. Both deal with gender identity and also drug and alcohol abuse.”

The school counselor also mentioned the Ally Campaign and the play titled Secrets that has been presented on campus. She also recapped that the school hosted a Bay Area GSA conference, confirming there were speakers and workshops for GSA students from schools all over the area. When I asked her to rate how significant having school-wide events on campus contributed to a comparably safer school climate, she said:

I think significant to very significant. But I have to be honest with you. I think it’s really the day-to-day things we do here. Students see the Ally Week posters and our assemblies are important, but I also think just simple things like the GSA meeting is at this time, in this room and just getting the message out there.
When I discussed school-wide events with the GSA Advisor, she went into much more detail about the school bringing pieces of the AIDS Quilt to campus. She shared:

It’s here for a week. I take two class sign-ups each period, and I really don’t have any open space. I worked with teachers at developing curriculum either from an art class perspective, a history perspective, or even a mathematical perspective. I really try to encourage our teachers to think outside of the box. One day out of the week I have it open at lunch, and I am there to talk to kids about it. The last time I had it here was during open house, and so parents and students could come together at the same time. There, I was able to talk to parents about it and explain what we are doing at American.

The GSA advisor also provided additional details about the plays that are brought to American. She said:

We are committed to a 2-year cycle of the play Secrets presented by Kaiser Permanente. Secrets is STD- and AIDS-focused, and we show it to our juniors and seniors. Our freshman and sophomores see a presentation called Other Side of the Closet by the San Francisco Conservatory.

Data gathered from the teaching staff survey revealed that school-wide events at American may have significantly contributed to a comparably safer school climate. When asked how likely it is that school-wide events that promote inclusion on campus have led to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students, 65% selected “very likely,” and 22.5% “somewhat likely” (see Figure 16). Very few selected “neutral” or “unlikely.”
Figure 16. Participants’ responses from American to survey question 15h.

Strongest factor. The principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor were asked to select which factor discussed might have contributed most strongly to American’s comparably safer school climate. The principal said, “I think probably the growth of the GSA, the number of people that have joined it, and the fact that it truly is a gay and straight alliance.” Similarly, the school counselor ranked having the GSA club was the strongest factor. The GSA advisor, on the other hand, felt is was more the school culture that has made the biggest impact. She said, “I think it’s about the culture that we are a safe space.”

The teacher survey revealed similar evidence. Each participant was asked to rank how likely various factors contributed to the comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. The evidence was clear that the existence of the GSA club has had the strongest impact, with 95% selecting “very likely.” The second strongest impact, with 88%
selecting “very likely,” was having openly LGBT staff. Interestingly, the two factors that received the lowest percentages of either “very likely” or “somewhat likely” were the two areas American had very little evidence of including. Although there was some discussion of professional development and using inclusive curricula from the GSA advisor, the principal and school counselor were not able to provide concrete examples of either. Figure 17 showcases the participants who selected “very likely” or “somewhat likely” on the eight different factors.

![Figure 17](image)

**Figure 17.** Participants’ responses from American to survey question 15a-15h.

In summary, American has successfully created a strong GSA club, with an equally strong advisor. The school climate was continuously discussed as being open and accepting, in part, as the result of LGBT-supportive administrators. That has led to a majority of the staff displaying visible safe space signs and even several feeling safe to come out as LGBT. Although there appear to be many factors that have contributed to a
comparably safer school climate for LGBT students, the one that participants felt most strongly impacted the school is the existence of the GSA.

Central High School

In this section, I discuss findings from confidential interviews with the principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor at Central High School. In addition, I include survey data from full-time teaching staff. The focus of each question was to determine what may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students from the perspective of key staff. Central is the only school I studied in Southern California, in a community described as much more conservative than the other two schools in this study. It also has a much larger student and staff population compared to the others.

Anti-bullying policies, procedures, and school culture. At Central, the principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor all confirmed that there is a district-wide anti-bullying policy. The school counselor did not have enough information to describe the policy specifically but did confirm one existed. According to the confidential online survey, 42% indicated that they know the district anti-bullying policy “extremely well” and an additional 36% selected “somewhat well” (see Figure 18). Others selected “neutral,” “not well,” or “not at all.”

The diverse responses from teaching staff may be attributed to a lack of training on the policy provided. When the principal was asked if the staff received training on the anti-bullying policy, she said, “They have, they do, as frequently as they should, probably not. We are probably due for one.”

According to the GSA advisor, the policy is enumerated to include sexual orientation and gender identity, although the school counselor and principal could not
verify that inclusion. The principal stated, “I don’t think it would be that detailed. We state that bullying of any kind will not be tolerated, and that gives us the leeway to jump in any way we want to.” Using a Likert-type scale of one to five, one being “very significant” and five being “not significant at all,” each interviewee was asked to rate if the enumerated anti-bullying policy has led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer. The principal selected the second option, “somewhat significant,” while the school counselor and GSA advisor selected “very significant.” The GSA advisor added, “It is very important because teachers know it’s part of the policy and they begin to include it in their discussions with classes. That is important. It’s also been important for our school board and district level administration as they handle problems with parents. So I would say it’s very significant, but it’s the starting place.”

**Responding to bullying.** Although the principal ranked the effectiveness of the anti-bullying policy and procedures as “somewhat significant” to contributing a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students, she confirmed that it is effective at resolving bullying type issues. She explained:
Students get educated about bullying in the younger grades, and we also work to educate them here with different programs. Once a situation like bullying comes up in a classroom, the teachers know right away to get more adults involved and administration takes it seriously. We interview kids. Mostly getting towards the bottom of it, the root of it. We have a really strong GSA club and a great advisor who is very much in tune with things that are going on. Perhaps, this happens sooner than other schools. She reaches out for that assistance, and we get involved on both sides of that bullying really quickly, and it gets squashed.

It appears that the enumerated anti-bullying policy has been most effective at Central due in large part to a strong GSA advisor where LGBT students feel safe to report incidents of bullying. The GSA advisor explained,

Just this year a student came to my co-advisor and [me] and said, “I am being bullied in a particular class and I don’t know what to do.” We got the information and talked with the teacher to let her know it was going on. The teacher was very supportive, taught a lesson, made a few changes, and made it come to an end.

That same student is now thriving in that class, and there’s no further problems.

The principal confirmed, “When bullying is reported, we go through a whole process. The trick is students being comfortable enough to tell us.” She also added, “It demonstrates to students that if they tell us, it will be taken seriously.” The GSA advisor added, “You don’t have a second chance to make a first impression. When the student finally does come to us with a bullying issue, making sure that it’s dealt with in a satisfactory way is critically important.”
Bullying appears to be taken seriously by the district due to a mandate that each school keep track of incidents. The principal explained, “We are required to keep a Bullying Binder, a report of each incident that gets turned over to the district on a monthly basis. The whole incident is documented.”

The school counselor also intervenes and often gets administrators and others involved in bullying incidents. She explained:

I listen to what’s going on, and if it’s something I can resolve, I resolve it. I talk to the student, hear what the situation is, and then I go to an administrator and say, “Hey, this is what’s going on.” We also sometimes notify the campus security and say, “Hey, this is what’s going on and to keep an eye out for it.”

When I asked the school counselor if Central’s response to bullying has contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer, she confirmed, “I would absolutely hope so. I think we have follow through from adults versus just kind of blowing it off.” The GSA advisor added, “I often get asked by teachers to assist and connect with counselors and administrators. We usually see teachers networking quite quickly with the other adult resources on campus to help.”

Another helpful approach reported by the school counselor is ensuring kids feel comfortable to come talk when in need. She added:

I have an open door policy to allow kids to feel comfortable with me as a counselor. I think that is done by getting your face out there as much as possible and being involved in different things on campus other than sitting in four walls and not being visible outside of my office. I coach the Surf Team, and kids see
me at the beach almost every day after school surfing. They don’t just walk into an office where students don’t know who I am.

Although the principal and school counselor could not confirm Central’s enumerated anti-bullying policy, they both seem to feel comfortable at addressing bullying issues as they arise. In addition, the principal added that she feels that the majority of the teaching staff feels comfortable to address anti-LGBT bullying.

According to the teacher survey, a large majority indicated that when they witness anti-LGBT bullying, they do respond. When asked how likely they are to respond, 91% selected “very likely” and 9% selected “likely” (see Figure 19). When asked how comfortable they are when responding to homophobic or anti-LGBT bullying or harassment, 77% selected “very comfortable, 15% “slightly comfortable,” 1% “neutral, 7% “slightly uncomfortable” (see Figure 20). These numbers suggest that even though almost all teachers address anti-LGBT bullying, they are not all comfortable doing so. This may indicate that teachers need additional training to improve their comfort level, which could also increase the likelihood and their effectiveness at responding to anti-LGBT bullying.

**School culture and supportive administration.** Like American High School, the principal at Central appears to be supportive of an inclusive school for LGBT students. The school counselor stated, “In my opinion, administration has always been supportive.” The GSA advisor added, “I have had support from the new Superintendent, certainly the administration, counseling, the ASB Director. They are most definitely very supportive and inclusive of the GSA Club.”
**Figure 19.** Participants’ responses from Central to survey question 5.

**Figure 20.** Participants’ responses from Central to survey question 6.
Data collected from the survey completed by Central’s full time teachers confirmed the school administration’s support. When asked if they feel supported by school leadership to advocate for LGBT safety and inclusion, 59% selected “very supported,” 17% “somewhat supported,” 23% “neutral,” and 1% “somewhat unsupported” (see Figure 21). When asked about LGBT student perceptions of school leadership’s support for their safety and inclusion at school, 19% selected “very supported, 52% “somewhat supported,” 26% “neutral,” and 3% “somewhat unsupported” (see Figure 22).

**Figure 21.** Participants’ responses from Central to survey question 7.

Although most of the survey participants agree their administration is either supportive or somewhat supportive, there are clearly some varying opinions on the level of support toward LGBT safety and inclusion. Central is much larger than the other two high schools included in this study. Compared to the other two schools, it is also in an area described as more conservative. It could be that with a sizable staff of over 130,
it is a challenge for administrators to ensure all staff and students are aware of where they stand, especially since this is only the principal’s third year at Central. The survey data does demonstrate that the principal is supportive; however, she may want to be more vocal about that support to ensure all staff and students are aware. The GSA advisor confirmed the importance of school administration’s support by saying, “Teachers are not going to be supportive of students if they don’t feel they have the support of their administrator.”

While the school is currently viewed as comparably safer, it may not have been the case several years back. Similar to American, the GSA advisor had to push for change. In fact, she had to become a strong and vocal advocate. She explained how her role has shifted over the years:

It has changed over time. I believe this is our 12th year. So in the beginning when we first went to the Board to start the club, my role was primarily an
advocate and the lightning rod. I basically put myself out there and forced the school district to do what was necessary. That even meant bringing in legal assistance. Being an advocate continues to be my role, but it’s no longer quite necessary in the way it was in the beginning. After the first couple years, we finally established that this is the law, Central was going to follow it, and we had a supportive superintendent. My role then changed to providing a safe place for LGBT students and allies, to help them organize events, both social, as well as advocacy. To provide teacher training and play a facilitating role when there’s LGBT issues on campus.

The GSA advisor appears to be well respected and liked at Central. The principal confirmed, “The advisor has so much social capital in the school.” Similarly, the school counselor stated, “I think a lot of the comfort level from our students and what’s been put in place really goes 100% to our GSA advisor. People respect her as a teacher and as an individual. She is genuine and wants what is best for kids.”

It appears that the GSA advisor uses that social capital and continues to advocate in various ways. She explained,

We are constantly on Central’s TV morning announcements to promote events. I would say that our students are pretty well informed as to what’s acceptable and what’s not acceptable. We also go on the television announcements when there is a new State Law, or to promote an event to end bullying. It is really part of the social fabric of the school.
She continued to talk about the culture of the school by stating, “Our school culture has significantly changed. For example, when a new teacher comes here, they can see it. They recognize the obvious, that this is the culture and what is acceptable.”

**Staff training.** Staff development on LGBT youth issues has been provided at Central, but a few years have passed since the last one. When asked if the school has provided professional development on LGBT youth, the principal said:

We have. As frequently as we should, probably not. We had a great program that the GSA students were actually training the teachers on what they experience. We are due for another round of that. This is my third year here, and they had just finished a round. The kids delivered it to the teachers and talked about what bullying is in their eyes and what the situations are that they deal with.

The school counselor confirmed the power of the past training and that all staff were required to attend. She said:

It’s been a few years, but the students and GSA advisor did an awesome job. It was maybe 3 to 5 years ago during a staff meeting. Students stood up and read what their experience is like in life. Just to listen to stories like coming out to their parents or friends. I thought that was pretty powerful for the staff.

According to the GSA advisor, there was a bit more history to the staff training. She stated, “It actually started with a superintendent and all of the District Administrators. After that, we trained the teachers. We even took the training to other sites.” She continued:

The principals were not going to feel comfortable allowing us to do the training unless the superintendent said it was okay. The principal felt that if the
superintendent and the district administrators were trained first, it would create the comfort level to do it. So literally after 2 hours training the superintendent, she got up and said this is important, please get it done.

The training was so successful that the GSA students have taken it to other schools, including each year to a local California State University campus. The GSA advisor also consults with staff at other schools when LGBT-related issues arise. She explained:

I got a call from the middle school principal because they had a transgender student. The teachers didn’t really quite know what to do when she wanted to change her name. They called me to train the teachers. We were able to facilitate this student’s transition from eighth grade to high school. It’s an important role that I play, connecting all the adults who need to be connected to help students.

Using a Likert-type scale of one to five, one being “very significant” and five being “not significant at all,” I asked the principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor to rate how staff training has led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer. The principal selected, “somewhat significant,” and the school counselor and GSA advisor selected “very significant.” The GSA advisor added, “I would say very significant because in the training the students themselves present it. They presented their own stories and the stories of other students. It was so personalized that it had a tremendous impact on teachers.”

Since it has been about three or more years since the last training on LGBT youth, it may be time for Central to provide it again. Based on data from the teacher survey, 8% selected they felt either “neutral” or “slightly uncomfortable” when responding to
anti-LGBT bullying. The survey data also revealed inconsistent feedback around
professional development provided by the school on LGBT related issues. When asked if
they had attended professional development in the past 2 years on how to best support
LGBT students, 29% selected “yes,” and 71% selected “no.” It could be that some staff
received training at a previous position at another school or some have miscalculated how
many years ago the last training was held.

Gay and straight alliances and visible safe spaces. Similar to American, all
three interview participants believe much of the credit for the comparably safer school
climate is the existence of the GSA club coupled with a strong and well-respected
advisor. The principal confirmed, “We have a really strong GSA club and a great
advisor.” In fact, using a Likert-type scale of one to five, one being “very significant” and
five being “not significant at all,” the principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor all
ranked the club’s existence as being “very significant” in creating a comparably safer
school climate for LGBT students. The GSA advisor added, “It’s probably the most
important thing that we can do is to have the club.”

When I asked about how the club has improved feelings of safety among LGBT
students, the principal said:

I think it’s more than just having the club. I think it’s having an identity with the
club and students having a place on campus. We have an amazing GSA advisor
and an amazing ASB that is very inclusive. The club is very active, and there’s a
sense of acceptance. They have a place in the community; therefore, they feel a
part of the community. I think that has allowed them to feel very connected, and I
think the connection is what makes them feel safer.
The school counselor described how the club has become part of the culture. She explained, “It’s been in existence for quite a while, so it’s not something brand new to our school. I think over time, it has been built into the culture of the school.” When I asked her to elaborate, she continued:

Anytime something new is taking place in a school regarding a hot topic, as the one that we are talking about, it’s going to potentially get controversy. Both pros and cons from either direction. So I think it’s just accepted. I don’t hear any negative connotation about the club or the kids going. I see it as just another club on campus.

The GSA advisor added what she felt the existence of the GSA club has done for LGBT students at Central. She explained:

More importantly than anything, it ended isolation for a lot of students. When we started the club, there were literally no openly LGBT students at our school of 3,000. Today we have many. They know they have a place where they have friends, supporters, and aren’t alone. Even students who may not feel comfortable yet coming to the club know it exists and that there are other students out there like themselves and students who are supportive. I think that that has played a really important role in how students feel about being at Central.

He continued by providing an example:

Two weeks ago at the end of one of our meetings, I had a student come up to me and just say thank you so much for this club. It means everything to me, and I have had that comment from students numerous times over the years.
The existence of a strong GSA club is evidenced by the survey data from Central’s teaching staff. When asked how active the GSA club is compared to other clubs on campus, 14% selected “much more active than others,” 38% “more active than others,” and 45% “about the same as others” (see Figure 23). Only 4% selected “less active than others” on campus.

![Figure 23. Participants’ responses from Central to survey question 3.](image)

The strength of having a GSA was also supported by the survey data. When asked how likely the GSA club has contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students, 77% selected “very likely,” 22.5% “somewhat likely,” and 8.8% neutral (see Figure 24). One of the survey participants selected “somewhat unlikely,” which may indicate that the teacher either misread the question, accidentally selected the wrong response, or truly does not feel that the GSA has led to a comparably safer school.

Similar questions were asked on the survey about individual actions the school has taken
Figure 24. Participants’ responses from Central to survey question 15a. to help determine which have contributed most strongly. More respondents selected “very likely” for the existence of the GSA club over all other actions surveyed.

In addition to a strong GSA club, there appears to be a very LGBT-supportive staff. According to the teacher survey, 49% of the respondents said they had attended at least part of a GSA meeting or GSA planned event (see Figure 25).

Visible safe spaces. Fear of rejection often prevents LGBT youth from reaching out when they need support. To combat that issue, Central has taken action by ensuring LGBT students can easily identify supportive adults on campus. When I asked the GSA advisor about the approximate percentage of staff that post visible safe space signs, she explained Central’s unique way that teachers provide these spaces and at the same time raise needed funds for the club. She said:
We have about 30%, I am guessing, staff that have either signs or refrigerator with signs and are actively raising money for us. It would have more, but we need to do another campaign because we haven’t had one for quite a while. So one of the things we are doing over the next couple months is printing up more, and then we put those in every teacher’s mailbox. They will either choose to put them up or not, but I am sure many, many will go up once they have the new ones.

When I asked for additional information about the signs on refrigerators, she said:

We have 20 teachers who have small refrigerators that we provided to sell water [to students], and money is earned for the GSA. Those teachers are easily identified by LGBT students and allies, and visually, they know when they walk in the room. They don’t have to wait until there’s an issue to find out. They know from the beginning that this is a safe and supportive teacher.
The school counselor also spoke about the fundraiser and visible signs on the refrigerators. Her estimate about the number of visible safe space signs was much higher than the GSA advisor. When asked about the percentage of teachers with posted signs, she said, “If I were to guess, around 70%. But it might be higher, I really don’t know to be honest with you.” She also commented about a few of the benefits of teachers who sell waters for the GSA club. She explained:

The club sells water and the money goes to the club. I have noticed when they need me to sub for a few minutes, that they are selling water. The fridge has a sign that says money goes to the GSA club. I have been in there when kids are buying the water. If kids really felt dislike or discomfort for the club, they would probably simply not buy the water.

The principal admitted to losing her safe space sign but confirmed that there are many on campus. She also discussed some other campaigns that address hurtful language. She said:

We link into some other campaigns where we talk about words can hurt. Those posters go around campus too and that we see GSA students being involved in other programs around bullying in general. What’s nice is that when you see campaigns, like our campaign Words Hurt, it’s not just the GSA club that’s doing it. You have the GSA club, you have our Students Against Destructive Decisions Club, you have Rotary. They all partner up and get involved in it. Again it’s our community here at Central.

Using a Likert-type scale of one to five, one being “very significant” and five being “not significant at all,” I asked the principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor to
rate how the visible safe space signs led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer at Central. The principal selected “somewhat significant,” and the school counselor and GSA advisor selected “very significant.” The GSA advisor added, “It’s very significant based directly on the feedback that I am getting from students.” The principal also gave further comment regarding the impact of the school’s safe space signs. She said:

I think it keeps it in the forefront. It reminds people that we have other people here. We also have a community of deaf students, so often we see signs about hard of hearing, which remind us when we are talking about stuff we have to think okay so how are we going to do translation. So it’s just part of those things that we try to keep in our front mirror.

According to survey data taken from full time teaching staff, 55% confirmed they have a visible safe space poster in their classroom (see Figure 26). In addition, 50% confirmed they feel “very supported,” and an additional 30% feel “somewhat supported” by school leadership to be a visible LGBT ally (see Figure 27).

It is noteworthy that nearly the same percentage of survey participants who have safe space signs posted also feel supported by school administration to be a visible ally. It could be a coincidence or may confirm that teachers will not post the signs unless they personally feel school leadership is very supportive. The data also confirm that 20% of the survey participants appear not to be sure how supportive the principal would be if they put up a visible safe space sign. It would likely be helpful if the principal distributed the signs and talked about the importance and value of staff posting them in their classrooms.
Figure 26. Participants’ responses from Central to survey question 1.

Figure 27. Participants’ responses from Central to survey question 8.
It is noteworthy that nearly the same percentage of survey participants who have safe space signs posted also feel supported by school administration to be a visible ally. It could be a coincidence or may confirm that teachers will not post the signs unless they personally feel school leadership is very supportive. The data also confirm that 20% of the survey participants appear not to be sure how supportive the principal would be if they put up a visible safe space sign. It would likely be helpful if the principal distributed the signs and talked about the importance and value of staff posting them in their classrooms.

In addition, the survey indicated that a majority of staff provides an affirming, inclusive, and welcoming space for LGBT students. A total of 42% selected the first option, indicating that they believe 80-100% of the school staff provides an affirming, inclusive, and welcoming space (see Figure 28). An additional 44% selected the second option of 60-79%. Only 13% selected the third option of 40-59%.

![Figure 28. Participants’ responses from Central to survey question 11.](image-url)
**Openly LGBT staff.** Another way LGBT students may find a trusting adult is by having openly LGBT staff. This also provides students with a professional adult to look up to. The school counselor admitted that there are LGBT staff at Central, but she could not confirm if they are open with most students and staff. She stated, “Do I know if there are, yeah I do, but I mean it’s not like a majority of staff know about it. It’s not something that’s talked about.” She continued, “To be honest, I don’t know if anyone would care. I don’t mean that in a negative sense. I am just saying I don’t think it would be made a big deal of. It’s just another person.” When I pressed further about the number of LGBT staff at Central, she replied, “About five or less.”

The GSA advisor was quickly able to answer the same question with certainty. She confirmed there was only one openly LGBT staff person that is out to both students and staff. That suggests that the five or fewer LGBT staff members the school counselor mentioned are probably not out, or at least not out to most. When I asked how having an openly LGBT staff member has contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer, the GSA advisor said:

> A role model. It’s a very, very powerful role model. When we did a training at the University, there were openly gay professors who participated with training. On the bus ride home, I had a freshman girl tell me, “Those were the first gay adults I have ever met. I have a future.” That is the way our students see our one openly LGBT teacher here. They say well that can be me, and that’s something they don’t often see. So when we bring in guest speakers, we also provide that. Having this openly LGBT teacher is very powerful, and I wish there were dozens more.
According to the staff survey, a majority of participants agreed that having openly LGBT staff likely contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. When asked how likely having openly LGBT staff has contributed to a comparably safer school climate, nearly 30.8% selected the “very likely,” and 35.2% selected “somewhat likely” (see Figure 29). There were four participants who selected not applicable, indicating they may not be aware there is an openly LGBT staff member. The survey also revealed that a large majority believes that both students and staff would support having an openly LGBT teacher. In fact, 40% of the participants selected that between 80-100% of the students and staff collectively would support having an openly LGBT teacher, with an additional 46% who selected between 60-79% (see Figure 30).

![Figure 29. Participants’ responses from Central to survey question 15g.](image)

Whether it is providing positive role models as the GSA advisor suggested or an identifiable trusting adult, having an openly LGBT staff person appears to have played a meaningful role in the comparably safer school at Central.
Figure 30. Participants’ responses from Central to survey question 14.

**LGBT-inclusive curricula.** At Central, there appear to be at least some isolated cases of staff using inclusive curricula, although the principal was uncertain if and where it was happening. She stated:

I don’t know if it’s really in the curriculum like that. I think it’s periodically in areas, but I think the two collide within the curriculum. I don’t think it’s been intentional. I think there are areas that are talking about arts and the lifestyle happens to coincide, so then the conversation goes that direction. I think that sometimes in history with historic people but I don’t think it’s intentional. Like there are people that do their lifestyle this way, and there are people who live this way. All of them have a common thread. It’s not that deliberate.

The principal’s use of the word “lifestyle” may signal to some staff that she is not fully supportive, or at least, does not fully understand the issue. Using the term “lifestyle” when talking about LGBT people can be considered offensive to LGBT individuals and their allies. It may be one reason for the varying degree of survey responses on two
questions related to the level of support from administration. When asked if teachers felt
supported by school leadership to advocate for LGBT safety and inclusion, 17% selected
“neutral.” When asked if teachers felt supported by school leadership to be a visible
LGBT ally, 20% selected “neutral.”

The school counselor also could not confirm if LGBT-inclusive curricula was
being used at Central. She simply responded with, “I honestly don’t know.” The GSA
advisor was able to provide some details, but it still appears that Central is not formally or
purposefully using inclusive LGBT-curricula. She stated:

It has gone on within the English department and within the social studies
department, but I would say it’s isolated. There has been no organized effort to do
that. The law in California is now requiring it, but of course there’s no follow-up,
no consequence or anything like that. I think more teachers would do it if they
were provided an easy way to do it. But they are currently working on common
core and everything else that’s on their plate.

She did confirm that even the isolated incidents have had a positive impact. Using a
Likert-type scale of one to five, one being “very significant” and five being “not
significant at all,” the GSA advisor was asked to rate how LGBT-inclusive curricula at
Central has led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer. She selected the second
option, “somewhat significant,” and added, “That is based on the classrooms that have
done it.”

Survey data from teaching staff revealed that there may be use of inclusive
curricula and there also appears to be some benefit. When asked approximately how
many lessons taught in your classroom in the past year that have included a positive
portrayal of an openly LGBT individual, 64% selected none. There were, however, participants who have, including 12% who selected one lesson, 14% two lessons, 3% three lessons, and 8% four or more lessons (see Figure 31). Collectively, 37% have taught at least one lesson in the past year that included a positive portrayal of an openly LGBT individual.

![Figure 31. Participants’ responses from Central to survey question 2.](image)

The survey data provided mixed responses about how likely using inclusive curricula at Central contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. A total of 16.4% selected “very likely,” 29.8% “somewhat likely,” 29.8% “neutral,” 4.4% “somewhat unlikely,” 4.4% “very unlikely,” and 14.4% “not applicable” (see Figure 32). These varying responses may explain why both the principal and the GSA advisor agreed that using inclusive curricula at Central is not purposeful and is certainly not required.

The diverse responses on the value and use of LGBT-inclusive curricula may indicate the need for professional development and easy-to-use supplemental materials. The survey does provide evidence that a large majority of the staff provide affirming,
inclusive, and welcoming classrooms for LGBT students. Training and resources may be the missing pieces to encourage these supportive teachers to use LGBT-inclusive curricula.

**Inclusive school-wide activities.** At Central, there are a few school-wide activities that have allowed students’ concerns to be heard and have provided equitable opportunities for the GSA club to participate in school and community activities. When I asked the principal to describe activities at the school that may have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer, she raved about the PLUS Program. She explained:

*We have our PLUS Program, which stands for Peer Leaders Uniting Students. We have a large variety of students that become leaders and get trained on how to run student forums. Then they select 40 to 60 students at random and run them through a forum to find out what the hot topics are at Central. They then report that out to all students and our school site council. There are about four to six*
forums a year, which are all student run. That gives us a really good idea of what their concerns are and how we can support their needs.

In addition to the PLUS program, the principal explained that the school has a leadership forum that meets every summer. She stated:

GSA students are also part of our leadership forum that runs every summer.

Right before we come back to school, we call the leaders from every club, every football, every team organization on campus. We talk about their role as leaders, what that means and how being a leader is important. We talk about how people in your club are going to be expecting you to know what to do and know how to handle situations. We give them training on how to do that.

The principal also shared that the GSA is always part of the Homecoming Parade, which takes place downtown and becomes a big community event. She described, “Everyone participates in the Parade. The GSA always has a truck and are always part of the show.”

The school counselor recounted that the school participates in the annual “Day of Silence,” a day of action where students from across the country take a vow to remain silent to address anti-LGBT bullying. She explained:

Any student that wants to participate in it can. They announce it on our live broadcast in the morning that teachers put on in their classrooms. Then the GSA sells shirts, or I think actually gives shirts away to staff and students that want to wear them. I know the teachers are respectful to the kids that are participating.

The school counselor also confirmed that the administration is supportive of the “Day of Silence” and allows students who want to participate to remain silent in class.
The GSA advisor described school-wide events a bit differently. She said, “There’s no single event for just GSA. Instead, the GSA is literally at every event the school does. We do a parade, a school club night, and GSA is always there.” She also confirmed that GSA is included in the leadership group that the principal described, which meets over the summer. She explained, “There’s a leadership group that goes to a leadership conference in the summer. The ASB teacher recruits and makes sure that we get leaders from our club as part of that group.” She also mentioned that GSA has a booth during open house for incoming eighth graders and is also represented at assemblies. She said, “Wherever other clubs are participating, GSA club is participating.” Lastly, she described events that are best described as community-wide versus school-wide. She explained that the county recently opened an LGBT Community Center. She said, “Its only 4 or 5 years old, but it’s made a huge difference and added a connection to the community. Some of my students attend support groups there.” In addition to support groups, the LGBT Community Center appears to be connecting various club advisors and GSA students throughout the area. She explained:

We link GSA clubs in our county together to go ice skating, bowling, participate at Gay Pride. There is also an annual awards night where all the county GSA clubs come together and we give everyone an award. This is all being organized by the outside group, but it is very helpful.

When I asked the principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor how significantly these school-wide events have contributed to a comparably safer school climate, they all selected, “very significant.” The principal said:
They really establish themselves as being on the radar as part of the community.

It’s not an afterthought, oh did we invite that club or do we want to invite that club. They are a part of the system, and I think that they are expected, for example, to be in the parade. We make phone calls, “Hey, we don’t have your people for the leadership forum, we need three, you only gave us two, we need three.” So they feel like wow, this is expected of us.

The GSA advisor added, “Basically every time students see LGBT students and allies openly participating, it makes a difference.”

The survey revealed that school-wide events at Central might have significantly contributed to a comparably safer school climate. When asked how likely have school-wide events that promote inclusion on campus led to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students, 41.1% selected “very likely,” 33.8% “somewhat likely,” 14.7% “neutral,” 7.3% “somewhat unlikely,” and 2.9% “not applicable” (see Figure 33).

![Figure 33](image_url). Participants’ responses from Central to survey question 15h.
Most effective factor. The principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor were asked to select which factor discussed might have contributed most strongly to Central’s comparably safer school climate. The principal said:

It goes to school connectedness, but it’s a genuine connectedness which incorporates not just having a club but that inclusion of the club as you would include every club on campus. It just becomes part of our club offerings. I think it’s that connected piece that we have gone to. We have included them and have expectations that they go. We don’t accept them not performing. If you are a club, you are doing this. You are with everybody else and giving them that place where they can feel they are connected. I think that has provided them with the biggest feeling of safety. That they have a place.

The school counselor and the GSA advisor described others factor that may have contributed most strongly to Central’s comparably safer school climate. The school counselor said, “I truly think it’s the GSA advisor. She is the one who is really behind the success of our program. I would say for the awareness and the support that the club has, a lot of the comfort level from students and what’s been put in place really goes 100% to her.” The GSA advisor’s response was quick and short. She said, “That’s easy! It is simply the existence of an active GSA club.”

Data revealed from the teacher survey offered similar evidence. Each participant was asked to rank how likely various factors contributed to the comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. The existence of the GSA club had the strongest impact, with 69.1% selecting “very likely.” The second strongest impact, with 52.9% selecting “very likely,” was having LGBT supportive school administration. The two factors that
received the lowest percentages of selecting either “very likely” or “somewhat likely” were having inclusive curriculum that includes positive portrayals of LGBT individuals and professional development regarding LGBT issues. Interestingly, these findings seem to be in line with the interview responses from the principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor since they confirmed there was no purposeful push to use inclusive curriculum, and there was admission that the staff was due for another round of professional development. Figure 34 displays the participants who selected “very likely” or “somewhat likely” on the eight different factors.

Figure 34. Participants’ responses from Central to survey question 15a-15h.

In summary, through a strong GSA advisor, Central has successfully created an active GSA club that has become equally a part of the school community. Evidence suggests there is a strong expectation that the club and its members play an active role in all school activities. That has created a sense of connectedness and helped students feel a
sense of belonging. Through a strong community resource, the students are participating in community events with GSA students from neighboring schools. Most staff agreed that the school has LGBT supportive administration, although there were a number of responses that indicate some uncertainty of the principal’s level of support. In addition, a slight majority post safe space signs and a large majority confirmed that they do respond when they witness anti-LGBT bullying and harassment.

School connectedness and follow through with bullying incidents were two factors mentioned more than once by participants. There seem to be many factors that have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students at Central; however, the GSA club was the one that participants felt has made the biggest impact.

**Mountain High School**

Mountain High School is the third and final school in this study. The school is located in Northern California, in a community described as more diverse and open-minded compared to the other two schools in this study. Findings from the confidential interviews with the principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor, as well as survey data from teaching staff will be reported. The purpose of all questions asked was to gather their perspectives of what may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students.

**Anti-bullying policies, procedures, and school culture.** The principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor all confirmed that there is a district-wide anti-bullying policy. According to teacher survey, 33% indicated that they know the district anti-bullying policy “extremely well” and an additional 56% selected “somewhat well.”
Others selected “neutral” or “not well,” but none selected “not well at all” (see Figure 35).

![Figure 35. Participants’ responses from Mountain to survey question 13.](image)

It appears that a large majority of the staff actually understand the district’s anti-bullying policy, which may be attributed to staff development. The principal confirmed, “We have an opening week of trainings before the kids come to the building, and that’s one of the areas we look at before we start school. We do it once a year, and then we readdress it again during different faculty meetings.”

The principal lightly confirmed the policy was enumerated to include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. She said:

I am certain it does, you will have to look. We certainly look at it that way. There are other policies particularly for students identifying as transgender, including a pretty detailed bathroom policy where students have the choice of which bathroom they wish to use.
When I asked the school counselor the same question, she was somewhat unsure. She responded with, “I believe so.” The GSA advisor confirmed the enumeration of the policy and explained, “Yes it does, and it also delineates either actual or perceived as well.”

Using a Likert-type scale of one to five, one being “very significant” and five being “not significant at all,” each interviewee was asked to rate if the enumerated anti-bullying policy has led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer. The principal and GSA selected “somewhat significant” and the school counselor selected “very significant.” After her response, the principal continued:

To be honest we have had a strong GSA, a strong sense of community and bringing everybody together in terms of diversity. We are an extraordinarily diverse community, in almost every way you can imagine. For many years, we have embraced and loved diversity, and we want to make sure we respect everybody. Even before I was principal, the school was ahead of the curve. The GSA advisor also clarified that the policy does not appear to be driving a comparably safer school at Mountain. She said:

I think the fact that there is legislation that defends LGBT kids is important. I don’t think the law in and of itself, though, has particularly led to a safer environment. I don’t think the policy has been what really led to the changes here.

**Responding to bullying.** Each interview participant was able to explain different ways that the school responds to bullying. The principal explained:

My role is to obviously enforce the policies, but it’s also to make folks aware of them. Also, my role is to ensure that the students have psychological and
emotional and physical safety at all times in this building. I don’t want to say it’s 100%, I don’t think any school can be. Society is complex, and kids and people come into the building with all sorts of preconceived notions that we have to deal with.

It appears that escalated bullying incidents actually get sent to the assistant principal or the dean. The GSA advisor said:

The first time I witness bullying, I have a talk with the student and they typically understand. Like they get why what they did was wrong, and they can reflect on that in positive ways. If it’s egregious or blatant homophobia, and the student really shows no sign of remorse on the first incident, I will involve the vice principal and the dean. I may even write a referral, which usually entails a facilitated meeting with the bully and the student being bullied.

The school counselor described her role, as well as the school’s Wellness Center, as it relates to their approach in dealing with bullying. She said:

We have a Wellness Center here where we have actual therapists on site. We definitely talk to the student, which sometimes involves the principal or the assistant principal, but sometimes it will get referred to the Wellness Center. If they need continued support, check-ins will happen. We as school counselors get a chance to meet with their wellness counselors regularly, so that’s another way we get students help. There are a few different routes we can go depending on what it is.

She also discussed how her work sometimes involved anti-bullying prevention, especially with sensitive issues. She recounted:
For example, I have a student who has changed gender and no longer goes by her legal name. Before the school year started, she came by and was worried about teachers using the wrong name on the first day of school. She feared bullying. I just notified all the teachers about the situation and to cross the name off the roster. I support kids that way and work with teachers to give them a heads up on sensitive issues.

I also asked the principal to provide a better description of how the school responds to students who are displaying bullying behavior. Her response confirmed what the school counselor mentioned about there being many different avenues available for the school to deal with bullying. The principal explained:

Well, we get rid of bullying. We deescalate it and ultimately stop it from happening here. But we do it in a lot of ways and it really depends. We have a very fleshed out Wellness Center so we might use that for one. A lot of students will report bullying to the Wellness Center, so that’s a conduit for us. But there may be groups. I don’t want to say sensitivity groups, but things like making sure students understand the impact and the dangers of bullying. We also have very strong restorative practices focused here. We actually have a restorative practices coach who runs our restorative justice intervention meetings and circles that we have. We also might go through our Best Buddies program or a wide range of others. We also work with families, as well, to try to make sure they understand the impact and the dangers of bullying. When there is a situation in bullying, we always bring parents involved from both parties. Of course, there’s suspensions, depending on the level, though we are really trying to decrease suspensions and
instead have students think about the harm they have done to others in terms of
the community and interpretive notion of, you know, restorative practices. That is
a way to reenter into the community, having taken full responsibility for their
actions and also trying to change those actions.

It appears that Mountain has found success using multiple avenues at resolving
and preventing bullying. Through the unique existence of the Wellness Center, as well as
having a restorative justice coach, students seem to be using these services and seeking
out support when in need. When I asked the principal if most staff follow the various
procedures regarding bullying, she said:

I would say most of the time. I think in general they do, but I am afraid
sometimes there are pockets where teachers aren’t addressing things the way or
as quickly as they should. We are really working on making sure teachers feel
empowered and comfortable so when they hear a word or something that they
think is bullying or racist or homophobic or sexist that they call the kids on it
immediately rather than waiting.

According to data from the full-time teacher survey, a large majority indicated that
when they witness anti-LGBT bullying, they do respond. When asked how likely they are
to respond, 89% selected “very likely” and 11% selected “likely” (see Figure 36). When
asked how comfortable they are when responding to homophobic or anti-LGBT bullying
or harassment, 67% selected “very comfortable, 22% “slightly comfortable,” 7%
“neutral,” and 4% “slightly uncomfortable” (see Figure 37).
Figure 36. Participants’ responses from Mountain to survey question 5.

Figure 37. Participants’ responses from Mountain to survey question 6.
Like the other two schools in this study, the data suggest that even though almost all teachers address anti-LGBT bullying, they are not all equally comfortable doing so. The GSA advisor mentioned that teachers often come to her for advice on responding to anti-LGBT rhetoric. She said, “My closer colleagues or friends have come to me to say they are hearing homophobic remarks and ask how they respond. Teachers often come to me when this is happening and we have longer discussions about it.” This may indicate the need for specific training on how to best respond to anti-LGBT bullying. If Mountain can increase the comfort level of those few who selected “neutral” or “somewhat uncomfortable,” they may be more likely to respond when hearing anti-LGBT language on campus.

**School culture and supportive administration.** Like the other two schools in this study, the principal at Mountain appears to be very supportive of LGBT inclusion. When I asked the school counselor how supportive the principal is toward staff advocating for the inclusion and safety of LGBT students, she said, “very supportive.” Using a Likert-type scale of one to five, one being “very significant” and five being “not significant at all,” I asked the school counselor if having supportive administrators has contributed to a comparably safer school climate. She selected “very significant” and even added, “The principal even dresses in drag for our drag show.” The GSA advisor also discussed the principal’s strong support for LGBT students. She recounted:

He is very supportive. The principal participates in the drag show every year. They always support our events, and we never had anyone say, “Oh, you shouldn’t be doing that,” or “That’s not appropriate.” It’s been 100% support ever since I have been the advisor.
The principal appears to have taken actions that confirm her support for LGBT student safety and inclusion at Mountain. Besides participating in the school’s annual drag show, she also took several students to see the film “Bully.” She said, “I actually personally took about 35 freshman to see it, and then they came back and we used that as a launching point for a lot of student leadership conversations around the impact of bullying.”

Teachers who participated in the survey confirmed the school administration’s support. When asked if they feel supported by school leadership to advocate for LGBT safety and inclusion, 93% selected “very supported,” 4% “somewhat supported,” and 4% “neutral” (see Figure 38). When asked about LGBT student perceptions of school leadership’s support for their safety and inclusion at school, 52% selected “very supported, 37% “somewhat supported,” 7% “neutral,” and 4% “somewhat unsupported” (see Figure 39).

Figure 38. Participants’ responses from Mountain to survey question 7.
Interestingly, nearly all teachers feel supported by the school administration to advocate for the safety and inclusion of LGBT student, but 11% believe that students perceive administration’s support as equally supportive.

While the school is viewed as comparably safer today, it may not have been the case several years ago. Change takes time, and with purposeful effort, it appears that Mountain has successfully improved school climate. When I asked the principal to share some of that timeline, she explained:

There wasn’t much in place when I got here in 2001. The principal prior to me was very, very supportive of making sure that everybody, including LGBTQ students, felt safe and taken care of. I believe she started to reinvigorate the GSA here, and we had some strong leadership through it. I was assistant principal when we began the drag show, and that just really took off; that I think had a huge change and impact here. Over the course of time, we have had more teacher buy
in and support. It’s just been an evolution. That goes hand in hand with the fact that we are an extremely diverse community. We have really worked in the last 7 or 8 years in building that community and making sure that we are all standing together as one, being a wonderfully diverse place rather than a bunch of separate factions.

In addition to the timeline and school climate evolution, the principal also discussed the power of the school’s mission and vision. She said:

Our mission includes anti-racist teaching. The idea that all students deserve the highest level of education in this building regardless of their race, their religion, their sexual identity, their sexual orientation, etcetera. It is incumbent upon the teacher to figure out how to support students to the highest level in terms of their teaching, the pedagogy, the curriculum and the relationships we build.

How Mountain has approached school safety and connectedness appears to be inclusive of the multiple intersections of race, socioeconomic, ethnicity as well as sexual orientation and gender identity. The principal added, “Our students represent over 52 countries around the world, and we have something we call anti-racist teaching, which focuses on equity and social justice for all students.”

**Staff training.** Training on LGBT issues has been provided to staff at Mountain. When asked about the professional development provided, the principal said:

We have had some LGBT cultural competency trainings, but not this year. It was sponsored by our Wellness Center, by the GSA themselves, and also by the district. I remember about 2 years ago we had a panel of students who had already
graduated come speak about their experiences. They talked about their lives, both in high school and out.

The school counselor agreed that there has been training, but it is not something the school provides frequently. She said:

Since I have been at Mountain, I think we had this training once during a staff meeting. I don’t think it’s happened too often. I would say in smaller counselor and support staff meetings we have talked more about that. It is also discussed at assemblies but not that often.

The GSA advisor provided more detailed accounts of staff development. She shared:

As a GSA advisor, the students and I have done all staff trainings. GSA students have presented to the staff about how to respond to homophobic remarks and using heteronormative language. Students educated teachers on how to respond in appropriate ways, and we mentioned the differences in the law. We don’t need that every year, but we have definitely done it in the past.

Even though the GSA advisor claimed the staff training may not be needed every year, she mentioned that an outside LGBT advocacy organization recommended differently. She said, “We have had the GSA Network come and do training about the law and the legalities surrounding it. They have really encouraged us to inform and discuss with staff members at the beginning of every year.” After talking with her further, there does appear to be some form of educational components to the annual drag show. She confirmed:
There [are] definitely different elements to the show that offer education. Students have given good testimonials on what it’s like to be out and also how difficult it can be to be out. We talk about drag history, and there are videos shown about LGBTQ history and famous LGBTQ members of society.

Not only are there educational components during the annual show, but also teachers are given curriculum and teach lessons to students during an advisory period. “We have an advisor outreach every Thursday, and before the show we have had teachers talk about LGBTQ terminology, vocabulary, brief timelines of LGBTQ history. So there definitely is an educational piece and not just fun and games.”

Using a Likert-type scale of one to five, one being “very significant” and five being “not significant at all,” I asked the principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor to rate how staff training has led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer. The principal and GSA advisor selected “somewhat significant,” and the school counselor selected “very significant.” The principal added, “Now that I am talking about it, I think it needs to come back and we need to do it again.”

Based on data from the teacher survey, it appears that the principal was correct that having another LGBT specific training is due. When teachers were asked if they had attended professional development in the past 2 years on how to best support LGBT students, 37% selected “yes,” and 63% selected “no.” The mixed responses could indicate that some participants counted the educational components of the annual drag show as professional development, since it appears the last formal training was more than 2 years ago.
Gay and straight alliances and visible safe spaces. Similar to both American and Central, all three interview participants from Mountain believe that the GSA club has a strong presence on campus. The principal stated, “We have a really strong GSA here, and they hold a lot of status in this school.”

Using a Likert-type scale of one to five, one being “very significant” and five being “not significant at all,” the principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor all ranked the club’s existence as being “very significant” in creating a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. The principal added, “It’s critical. I don’t think you can run a high school, particularly in our area, or anywhere to be honest, without a GSA. Any school that I run, I would want to have a GSA.”

I asked the principal to provide a bit more of her interpretation of the value of the GSA at Mountain. She explained:

We have had a strong GSA for many, many years. I have been here for 13 years, some of those years as a teacher. I think the GSA advisor has built this incredibly communal faith program for lots and lots of kids. It’s a cool thing to be in the GSA here and lots of different kinds of kids join from athletes, to punk rockers, to second language leaners. I mean, it’s just a huge range of kids, and they have a lot of status. It’s just been very effective and powerful here.

The GSA advisor also gave a detailed description of how the club’s existence has benefited LGBT students. She said:

It provides a safe space for students to come, and we have attracted a lot of students. After they come to the club for a number of times, some will come out and share their sexual orientation or gender identity with the group. It builds a
space where students feel comfortable just talking about LGBTQ issues or really just talking about anything. Students will hang out after school once they meet each other. I think they know my room and the club is a safe space where all identities, all genders will be respected and understood. So I think it definitely has contributed to more students coming out and feeling comfortable.

It is not just LGBT students who attend the club. Like the principal, the club advisor explained that a large number of the club’s members do not identify as LGBT. She said, “We also attract a lot of allies, too. The friends of our LGBTQ youth will come to the club and advocate on behalf of them.”

The strong GSA club at Mountain is evidenced by the survey data from Central’s teaching staff. When asked how active the GSA club is compared to other clubs on campus, 22% selected “much more active than others,” 37% “more active than others,” and 41% “about the same as others” (see Figure 40). In addition, when asked how likely the GSA club has contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students, 92.3% selected “very likely” (see Figure 41).

Having such a strong GSA may have helped encourage other staff members at Mountain to get involved. According to the teacher survey, 81% of the respondents said they had attended at least part of a GSA meeting or GSA planned event (see Figure 42). As students see educators attend their meetings or planned activities, it helps them identify another supportive adult on campus. When I asked the school counselor about staff participating in GSA planned events, she said, “I feel it’s one of the things that helps students feel supported. It lets them see that even staff here are okay with it.”
Figure 40. Participants’ responses from Mountain to survey question 3.

Figure 41. Participants’ responses from Mountain to survey question 15a.
Visible safe spaces. Oftentimes, straight allies are not easy to find for LGBT students. At Mountain, the school has taken steps to ensure there are multiple ways students can clearly identify the many adult allies on campus. The school counselor estimated that there were about 60-65% of staff with visible signs posted. She said, “Students definitely notice mine posted in my office. They have complimented it and asked where I got it, stuff like that.”

The principal discussed the value of having several safe space signs on campus. She explained, “There are signs up and down from time to time, about safe space and some with anti-bullying messages. I think it’s powerful when they see it from their teachers.” The principal also described another unique way that staff shows their support for LGBT students. She explained:

Every Friday many faculty wear t-shirts. I always wear a t-shirt with different sayings. Mine says, “Gay Fine By Me.” So we actually wear those, in solidarity. Thinking about anti-bullying, it’s probably another good symbolic gesture.
Students and faculty wear them on Fridays, and we have been doing that off and on for many years.

The GSA advisor also confirmed there are several safe space signs posted around campus. She said, “I would say probably 80 to 90% of classrooms have some sticker or poster that says this is a LGBTQ safe space.”

Using a Likert-type scale of one to five, one being “very significant” and five being “not significant at all,” I asked the school counselor and GSA advisor to rate if the visible safe space signs led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer at Mountain. They both selected, “somewhat significant.”

According to survey data taken from full time teaching staff, 46% confirmed they have a visible safe space poster in their classroom (see Figure 43). In addition, 93% confirmed they feel “very supported,” and an additional 4% feel “somewhat supported” by school leadership to be a visible LGBT ally (see Figure 44). Interestingly, although almost all staff feels supported by school leadership to be a visible ally, the majority of staff still do not post safe space signs.

Posting a safe space sign is not the only way to ensure students can find an affirming adult to talk to. There appears to be many ways for teachers and staff to show their support for LGBT students, such as attending GSA club meetings, wearing supportive shirts on Fridays, or participating in a club sponsored event.

Event though only 46% of the teaching staff post safe space signs, most indicate that a majority of staff provides an affirming, inclusive, and welcoming space for LGBT students. A total of 56% selected the first option, indicating that they believe 80-100% of the school staff provides an affirming, inclusive, and welcoming space (see Figure 45).
Figure 43. Participants’ responses from Mountain to survey question 1.

Figure 44. Participants’ responses from Mountain to survey question 8.
Figure 45. Participants’ responses from Mountain to survey question 11.

An additional 37% selected the second option of 60-79%. Only 7% selected the third option of 40-59%.

**Openly LGBT staff.** Another way LGBT students may find a safe space is by having openly LGBT staff. With the strong support of the school administration, it appears many have felt comfortable coming out to students and their colleagues. The principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor all mentioned there are multiple staff who are out at Mountain. The school counselor said, “We have teachers here who are out, and I think that is because students feel comfortable about it. That then makes students feel more comfortable to come out and feel accepted themselves.” The school counselor guessed there were about six or more openly LGBT staff at the school, while the GSA advisor estimated there were about four to five.

Using a Likert-type scale of one to five, one being “very significant” and five being “not significant at all,” the school counselor and GSA advisor were asked to rate if having openly LGBT staff has led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer. They both selected “very significant.”
Data from the teacher survey indicated that a majority of participants agreed that having openly LGBT staff has likely contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. When asked how likely having openly LGBT staff has contributed to a comparably safer school climate, nearly 96% selected the “very likely” and 4% selected “somewhat likely” (see Figure 46).

![Figure 46. Participants’ responses from Mountain to survey question 15g.](image)

The teacher survey also revealed that a large majority believes that both students and staff would support having an openly LGBT teacher. In fact, 81% of the participants selected that between 80-100% of the students and staff collectively would support having an openly LGBT teacher, with an additional 19% who selected between 60-79% (see Figure 47).

Whether it is having an available affirming adult or providing someone they can look up to, openly LGBT staff appears to have significantly contributed to a comparably safer school climate.
LGBT-inclusive curricula. At Mountain, there appears to be purposeful use of inclusive curriculum that include positive portrayals of LGBT individuals. The school counselor was not certain if it was being done, but both the principal and GSA advisor were quick to provide confirmation. The principal stated, “Yes, absolutely and it is actually state law as well. I know that my social studies department spent time making their curriculum inclusive. It includes historically gay rights and stories of gay men and women throughout history.”

The GSA advisor also provided a few details. She added:

Yes. After the passage of the FAIR Education Act, I know that our social studies department has worked pretty hard on making an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum. I know that the social studies teachers definitely have included LGBTQ history. Also the Modern World teachers have highlighted LGBTQ people throughout history. There’s definitely a good effort to incorporate it. Instead of a one off lesson, they make it a more significant part of the curriculum.
Both the principal and GSA advisor agreed that the use of inclusive curricula has had an impact on feelings of safety for LGBT students. Using a Likert-type scale of one to five, one being “very significant” and five being “not significant at all,” the principal said, “I am hesitant between very significant and somewhat significant, but I think somewhere between those two. Either the top one or right near it.” The GSA advisor selected “somewhat significant.”

Findings from the teacher survey confirmed Mountain is using inclusive curricula and also that it is benefiting LGBT students. When asked approximately how many lessons taught in your classroom in the past year have included a positive portrayal of an openly LGBT individual, 35% selected none (see Figure 48). There were participants, however, who have, including 35% who selected one lesson, 8% two lessons, 8% three lessons, and 15% four or more lessons. Collectively, 66% have taught at least one lesson in the past year that included a positive portrayal of an openly LGBT individual.

![Figure 48](image)

*Figure 48.* Participants’ responses from Mountain to survey question 2.

Interestingly, the principal and GSA advisor only discussed the social studies and history departments using inclusive curricula. The results above indicate teachers beyond
those departments are at least including positive portrayals of opening LGBT individuals within their lessons.

The survey data provided mixed responses about how likely using inclusive curricula at Central contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. A total of 52% selected “very likely,” 36% “somewhat likely,” and 8% “neutral” (see Figure 49). Clearly, a majority agrees that using inclusive curricula has contributed to a comparably safer school for LGBT students.

![Figure 49. Participants’ responses from Mountain to survey question 15e.](image)

**Inclusive school-wide activities.** The study’s participants described school-wide activities at Mountain as both educational and fun. These events are not simply for students in the GSA but for the entire school. When I asked the principal to describe activities at the school that may have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer, she described a very unique annual assembly:
For many years, the GSA has sponsored an assembly or drag show at Mountain. The concept around the drag show, or a big piece of it, is around anti-bullying. I have often hosted the event in drag. There have also been other folks in the community in drag and also many teachers and students, too. The point is to celebrate drag culture and embrace the differences of everybody. There is always a section around the impact of bullying, particularly as it relates to students that are gay or transgender, and so it’s had a pretty powerful impact. We are kind of known for it throughout the district. It’s pretty fun to be honest with you, although wearing heels is hard for me.

She also described how the concept for the assembly developed and grew over time. She said, “I think I was assistant principal when we began the drag show and it really took off. It used to be smaller, and we did it for just the older kids. Then teachers would sign up and choose to go. Then it just became everybody.”

The school counselor confirmed the educational components, as well as the positive impact, of the annual school-wide event. She explained:

Most people refer to it as the drag show, but the whole thing isn’t a drag show. There are presentations and educational types of things that happen beforehand. The teachers even participate and will dress in drag. The principal does, too. I feel like it’s one of the things that helps students feel supported, and it lets them see that even staff here are really ok with it.

The GSA advisor was able to provide some background on how the event was developed over time. She explained:
The GSA club and myself started the drag show. The first year I became the club advisor, we were talking about how a lot of the cultural groups at the school put on assemblies. We were like what could the GSA do to have a bigger impact and to reach a wider audience. We brainstormed a drag show since it would be a nice, entertaining way to get across messages about LGBTQ people, history, and understanding. We developed it pretty organically at our GSA meetings.

She also confirmed how the assembly evolved over time. She said, “For the first 2 years it was invite only, or like opt in only. For the past 4 years, it’s been a school-wide assembly and everyone attends.”

In addition to the drag show assembly, the principal talked about a few other school-wide events that have made an impact. She explained:

A couple of times a year the GSA club sets up a marriage booth in which anybody can marry anybody. They have a big poster made of pledge sheets. Kids can write, I am coming out as gay, I am coming out as an ally, I am coming out to support everybody in the school. We actually had that poster up on the wall for quite a long time. I think they are redoing it because it was about a year old.

The school counselor confirmed, “These were posted along the main hallway of our school.”

The GSA advisor mentioned few additional school-wide events that may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students at Mountain. She said, “In addition to our drag show assembly and marriage events, we put on Gay Pride, have anti-bullying events, and participate in the annual Day of Silence and National Coming Out Day.”
Lastly, the school counselor talked about how Mountain is the location for an annual weekend event organized by a national advocacy organization. She explained:

For the last few years a large outside GSA organization hosts a weekend event at our site. Students come from all over the area. Some of our teachers were here to volunteer, as well. I still have a student that talks about it because I was there helping out. They noticed who was there. We show our face and are present at these events, and I think it really helps.

When I asked her to describe how this weekend event may have helped LGBT students at Mountain, she said, “Students who go to the event but don’t attend Mountain start to see our school as safe. I think when our students hear what other schools don’t have that we have, it kind of reinforces just how safe it is here.”

Using a Likert-type scale of one to five, one being “very significant” and five being “not significant at all,” each interviewee was asked to rate how these school-wide events have led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer. The principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor all selected “very significant.” The principal added, “I think, the drag show created a huge change and impact here.”

Data from the teacher survey revealed that school-wide events at Mountain have significantly contributed to a comparably safer school climate. When asked how likely have school-wide events that promote inclusion on campus led to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students, 96% selected “very likely” and 4% somewhat likely (see Figure 50).
Figure 50. Participants’ responses from Mountain to survey question 15h.

**Most effective factor.** The principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor were asked to select which factor discussed might have contributed most strongly to the comparably safer school climate at Mountain. The principal said, “It’s going to sound funny, but I think the drag show in some way has really had an impact. Maybe the t-shirts, the GSA meetings themselves, but there’s something about bringing together the entire school community.” The principal did confirm that there are a few students who don’t participate. She explained, “A couple kids will opt out. I always have a parent or two say I don’t want my kid to be there. But by and large, it’s been embraced. I think it’s had a huge impact and people look forward to it.”

The school counselor agreed with the principal. She said, “I would say the drag assembly because staff and students are involved together. They plan it together, and I think it really helps students feel accepted and part of the community.”
According to the GSA advisor, the factor that has most strongly contributed to a comparably safer school climate was the club. She explained, “I would say it’s probably the GSA and the GSA meetings. It’s the base that has been made available for students.” When I asked why the club and not the drag assembly, she explained:

I mean, I definitely think the drag assembly propels the idea that there are people at this school that are LGBTQ. That sends a powerful message to the entire student body, but I feel like for, your question was more about like for the safety of LGBTQ students. A lot of LGBTQ students hang out in my classroom every day. Having the space to go to every week or every day, in the long run, is more valuable than the one day drag show.

The survey provided similar evidence. Each participant was asked to rank how likely various factors contributed to the comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. Interestingly, there was a tie for the top three factors where 96% selected “very likely” and 4% selected “somewhat likely.” Those factors include (a) having LGBT-supportive administration, (b) having openly LGBT staff, and (c) having school-wide events that promote inclusion. The existence of the GSA club followed closely behind by the difference of one vote.

The two factors that received the lowest percentages of selecting either “very likely or “somewhat likely” were having inclusive curriculum that includes positive portrayals of LGBT individuals and professional development regarding LGBT students. Remarkably, these are the same two factors that ended up with the lowest percentages at both American High School and Central High School. Figure 51 displays the participants who selected “very likely” or “somewhat likely” on the eight different factors.
In summary, through a strong GSA, Mountain has successfully created a powerful school-wide event. Evidence suggests there is a strong culture of inclusion and acceptance among both the student body and staff. The club is considered “cool” and involves a diverse group of students, including many that identify as straight allies. A large majority of staff feels supported by administration to advocate for LGBT student safety and inclusion, even though less than 50% of staff agreed they had a safe space sign posted. In addition, a large majority responds when hearing anti-LGBT bullying, as well as feels comfortable in doing so.

It appears that Mountain purposefully includes all groups of students in all that they do. There seem to be many factors that have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students; however, having LGBT-supportive administration, openly LGBT staff, and school-wide events that promote inclusion were the ones that participants felt have made the biggest impact.

Figure 51. Participants’ responses from Mountain to survey question 15a-15h.
Cross-Case Analysis—All Three Schools

All three comparably safer schools included in this study appear to have purposefully taken steps to ensure that LGBT students feel safe and connected. After analyzing these steps more closely, I have concluded that it appears not to be exactly what each school does, but rather how they do it, that has most strongly contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. For example, having a GSA club helps, but having one that is led by a well-respected advisor who strongly advocates for continuous change and improvement may be what creates a standout school.

Interestingly, survey data from the teaching staff indicated that anti-LGBT bullying/harassment does occur, even though these are schools where LGBT students feel comparably safer. When asked how many times each has witnessed homophobic or anti-LGBT bullying/harassment in the past 12 months, only 46% at American, 55% at Central, and 15% at Mountain indicated they have not witnessed such bullying (see Figure 52). Conversely, there were some participants who indicated hearing homophobic and anti-LGBT bullying/harassment four or more times in the past 12 months. This may indicate that (a) even with purposeful actions to curb anti-LGBT bullying/harassment, it may be impossible to eradicate it completely; and (b) even with the existence of anti-LGBT bullying/harassment, the school can still successfully take actions to ensure LGBT students feel comparably safer and more included.

This section will include research findings obtained during a cross-case analysis that identified common themes, interpretation, and assertions. Specifically, the following five factors will be discussed: (a) anti-bullying policies, procedures, and school culture; (b) staff training; (c) gay and straight alliances and visible safe spaces;
Figure 52. Comparing participants’ responses from all three schools to survey question 10.

(d) LGBT-inclusive curricula; and (e) inclusive school-wide activities. The evidence suggests that although each school has established a few unique actions, there are more commonalities that may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students.

Anti-Bullying Policies, Procedures, and School Culture

All three schools were located in a district with enumerated anti-bullying policies that included sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes. Although all participants established that their schools followed a district-wide policy, not all could confirm if the policy was enumerated. In fact, the only participants that could confirm this fact, with certainly, were each of the three schools’ GSA advisors. This fact clearly is more important to the club advisor, which may be one reason why having a GSA club is a recommended strategy to creating a safer school climate for LGBT students.
In addition, most of the teachers who participated in the survey agreed that they understood the district’s anti-bullying policies. When asked how well they understood, 90% at American, 78% at Central, and 89% at Mountain indicated they knew the policy “extremely well” or “somewhat well” (see Figure 53). This may indicate that each school has taken effective steps to ensure staff recognizes the policy, which then may be interpreted as important.

Figure 53. Comparing participants’ responses from all three schools to survey question 13.

**Responding to bullying.** There were several common themes on how each of the three schools respond to incidents of bullying. First, there seems to be flexibility or different routes that can be taken, depending on the situation and severity. This is very different from zero tolerance anti-bullying policies that some schools have implemented. It also appears to be important that students feel comfortable to report incidents of bullying. One way these schools are achieving this is by ensuring students feel bullying is
taken seriously and there is follow-through by staff. Lastly, each school has some level of restorative justice practices to help students who are displaying bullying behavior understand the harm they have caused.

At American, the principal stated:

The kids are good about coming in and talking to administrators or the dean when something is going down and our response varies. It may be, depending upon what was happening and the severity, we may just initially talk to them and provide counseling support.

The principal also confirmed that they have an alternative to suspension for those who are violating the school’s anti-bullying policies. She continued, “We send them to Saturday School with our dean and staff where they get counseling. We focus on having students reflect on their behavior, why they did it, and then think about how they can change their behavior.” The school counselor at American added, “We are very much into doing conflict resolution, talking, being very open about awareness.”

Similarly, the principal at Central explained, “The trick is students being comfortable enough to tell us.” She also added, “It demonstrates to students that if they tell us, it will be taken seriously.” She also explained that the response to bullying incidents requires talking with students to get to the source of the issue rather than simply applying suspension as a consequence. She said, “We interview kids. Mostly getting towards the bottom of it, the root of it.” The GSA advisor discussed how staff has used class lessons to create teachable moments to change unwanted behavior. She explained, Just this year a student came to my co-advisor and [me] and said, “I am being bullied in a particular class and I don’t know what to do.” We got the information
and talked with the teacher to let her know it was going on. The teacher was very supportive, taught a lesson, made a few changes, and made it come to an end. That same student is now thriving in that class and there’s no further problems. Lastly, the school counselor added, “I think we have follow through from adults versus just kind of blowing it off.”

Likewise, the principal at Mountain explained,

We deescalate it and ultimately stop it from happening here. But we do it in a lot of ways and it really depends. A lot of students will report bullying to the Wellness Center, so that’s a conduit for us. We also have very strong restorative practices focused here. We actually have a restorative practices coach who runs our restorative justice intervention meetings and circles that we have.

In addition, the GSA advisor said, “The first time I witness bullying, I have a talk with the student, and they typically understand. Like they get why what they did was wrong, and they can reflect on that in positive ways.”

It is clear that all three schools agree that (a) students must feel comfortable to report bullying, which requires consistent follow-through by school personnel; (b) policies that resolve incidents of bullying should be flexible and not just result in suspensions; (c) using restorative style practices helps students improve behavior.

In addition, the survey data from teaching staff confirmed that nearly 9 out of 10 are very likely to respond when witnessing anti-LGBT bullying (see Figure 54). There appears to be heightened sensitivity to anti-LGBT bullying due to the enumerated categories in the policy. Even though the data established that all three schools still
Figure 54. Comparing participants’ responses from all three schools to survey question 5. Experience anti-LGBT bullying incidents, the frequent intervening by teachers may be what has contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer.

While a large majority of teachers at all three schools are likely to respond to anti-LGBT bullying, 5% at American, 7% at Central, and 4% at Mountain feel “slightly uncomfortable” doing so (see Figure 55). Not one survey participant selected “very uncomfortable,” which may be attributed to various levels of professional development in years past that included discussions on LGBT youth at each school.

Figure 55. Comparing participants’ responses from all three schools to survey question 6.
School culture and supportive administration. Another common finding at all three schools was that the principal was viewed as supportive of LGBT student safety and inclusion. This may have contributed to the large majority of teachers who take action when they overhear anti-LGBT language. The GSA advisor at Central stated, “Teachers are not going to be supportive of students if they don’t feel they have the support of their administrator.” If students are able to sense the strong support from the principal and staff, it may be one reason the school is viewed to have a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students.

At American, Central, and Mountain, the school counselor and GSA advisor confirmed the principal is very supportive of LGBT issues. The survey data confirmed that the teachers’ perceptions matched that of the school counselors and GSA advisors. In fact, a majority of the participants at each school selected “very supportive,” the strongest option possible on the survey (see Figure 56).

![Figure 56. Comparing participants’ responses from all three schools to survey question 7.](image-url)
When combining the top two options, “very supportive” and “somewhat supportive,” both American and Mountain totaled 97% of the survey participants. Interestingly, Central, which is located in a comparably more conservative community, had a total of 23% who selected “neutral” and 1% who selected “slightly unsupported.” Central also has more than double the student population, so its size, coupled with the fact that the principal has only been there for 3 years, may play a role in the slightly different survey results. After personally speaking with the principal and believing that she is fully supportive of LGBT student safety and inclusion, I would expect these data would encourage her to become more vocal about her support, a benefit that I did not anticipate this study would provide. Simply talking about the issue at a staff meeting could be a simple way of clearing up any misconceptions about where she stands.

Similarly, data from the teacher survey indicated that a majority of students at all three schools perceive school administration to be supportive of their safety and inclusion. In fact, when combining the top two options, “very supportive” and “somewhat supportive,” American totaled 95%, Central 71%, and Mountain 89% (see Figure 57). Interestingly, all three schools had at least 2% to 4% who selected “somewhat unsupportive.” Although Central did not have a disproportionate number of responses in the “unsupportive” category, it had the highest percentage of responses that selected “neutral.” Again, these data may indicate the principal needs to be more vocal and active about her support.

Creating an inclusive school culture appears to be not only important but something that has been purposefully nurtured at each of the three schools. Below, school culture at each school will be discussed separately.
The principal at American stated, “I think in light of LGBT issues, establishing the fact that it is part of who we are as a school. It’s part of our identity. It has really been one of my goals for the last 5 years.” She continued, “We are pretty much known in the community as having a very open, liberal campus. I think it’s just being accepting, welcoming, but also providing the structures in place that allow people to be and do whatever they want to.”

At Central, the GSA advisor explained how the GSA club has had a big impact on school culture. She explained:

We are constantly on Central’s TV morning announcements to promote events. I would say that our students are pretty well informed as to what’s acceptable and what’s not acceptable. We also go on the television announcements when there is a new State Law or to promote an event to end bullying. It is really part of the social fabric of the school.

*Figure 57.* Comparing participants’ responses from all three schools to survey question 9.
She continued to talk about the evolution of the school culture. She said, “Our school culture has significantly changed. For example, when a new teacher comes here, they can see it. They recognize the obvious, that this is the culture and what is acceptable.”

The principal at Mountain also confirmed the evolving school climate that has improved over the years. She said:

It’s just been an evolution. That goes hand in hand with the fact that we are an extremely diverse community. We have really worked in the last 7 or 8 years in building that community and making sure that we are all standing together as one. Being a wonderfully diverse place rather than a bunch of separate factions.

Safe and inclusive school cultures do not occur automatically and do not happen overnight. Having a supportive and vocal GSA advisor, principal, and teaching staff appears to play an important role at creating a school culture that is comparably safer and more inclusive for LGBT students.

**Staff Training**

The data revealed that all three schools have provided some form of professional development focused on LGBT youth. Interestingly, GSA students at all three schools are who actually led the LGBT-focused professional development.

At American, the GSA advisor explained:

The only professional development we had was done by the GSA students a couple of years ago. One at a faculty meeting and then the other when I invited a former graduate to come talk about his experience of being an out girl as a freshman but then finishing up his career as transitioning into a boy.
It was clear the training is not provided each year. She continued, “If our staff was resistant and conservative, I would probably be pushing for more professional development than I am now.”

Similarly, at Central, professional development has been offered but not on an annual basis. It may be because Central is located in a comparatively more conservative community that the GSA advisor used a top-down-approach to get the LGBT-focused training started. She explained, “It actually started with a Superintendent and all of the District Administrators. After that, we trained the teachers.” She continued, “The principals were not going to feel comfortable allowing us to do the training unless the Superintendent said it was okay.” The principal at Central admitted they may need to provide additional training for staff. When I asked about LGBT focused professional development, she said, “We have. As frequently as we should, probably not. We had a great program that the GSA students were actually training the teachers on what they experience. We are due for another round of that.” The school counselor added, “Students stood up and read what their experience is like in life. Just to listen to stories like coming out to their parents or friends. I thought that was pretty powerful for the staff.”

Similar to American and Central, professional development has been provided at Mountain. The principal said, “I remember about 2 years ago we had a panel of students who had already graduated come speak about their experiences. They talked about their lives, both in high school and out.” The GSA advisor added:

As a GSA advisor, the students and I have done all staff trainings. GSA students have presented to the staff about how to respond to homophobic remarks and
using heteronormative language. Students educated teachers on how to respond in appropriate ways, and we mentioned the differences in the law. We don’t need that every year, but we have definitely done it in the past.

Survey data from the teaching staff at each school revealed inconsistent feedback around the school’s professional development opportunities on LGBT related issues. When asked if they had attended professional development in the past 2 years on how to best support LGBT students, a majority said no (see Figure 58).

![Figure 58. Comparing participants’ responses from all three schools to survey question 12.](image)

Clearly, all three schools have recognized the need and value of providing professional development focused on supporting LGBT students, even though the frequency may need to be improved. Although most teachers indicated they are very comfortable responding to anti-LGBT bullying/harassment, some were not as comfortable doing so. The principals at both Central and Mountain indicated that more training might be needed. The principal at Central agreed that the training is not frequent enough, while the principal at Mountain said, “I think it needs to come back and we need to do it again.”
Gay and Straight Alliances and Visible Safe Spaces

Not only did all three schools have an active GSA club, they also had strong advisors. It appears that much of the success of the three comparably safer school climates may be attributed to the club advisors being vocal advocates for change. Using a Likert-type scale of one to five, one being “very significant” and five being “not significant at all,” each principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor ranked their GSA club’s existence as being “very significant” in creating a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students (see Figure 59). This is evidenced by survey data from the teaching staff at each school. When asked how likely the GSA club has contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students, 95% at American, 77% at Central, and 92.3% at Mountain selected “very likely.”

![Figure 59](image)

*Figure 59. Comparing participants’ responses from all three schools to survey question 15a.*

At American, the principal said, “I think it began just having a strong GSA and people like the club’s advisor, who definitely believes in equity.” She continued:
I think the GSA has made a huge difference. I mean if you go to a GSA meeting, they can have up to 100 students there. They have guest speakers come in to talk. It’s also a very accepting club in that you don’t have to be gay to belong to it—it truly is a gay/straight alliance, and I attribute it to having an incredibly strong advisor and such a large number of students who are involved.

The school counselor seemed to agree. She added, “I think our GSA is so powerful. In fact, I have been here for 13 years, and I would say in the last 8 years it has been probably the strongest club on campus in terms of really helping students see how important it is to be accepting, to be supportive, and to be caring.” She also alluded to the advisor’s strong leadership. She said, “I think we have some really special leaders, and of course the club’s advisor has really been significant in terms of communicating these messages to our staff and our students.” The GSA advisor provided her perspective by saying, “Once I was the advisor, it wasn’t so much about helping the LGBT students, as much as it was about fostering straight allies on our campus. When the GSA, faculty, and the school site can get to a point where they are mainly straight allies, it translates into a culture rather than a school club.”

Similarly at Central the principal confirmed, “We have a really strong GSA club and a great advisor.” She continued, “I think it’s more than just having the club. I think it’s having an identity with the club and students having a place on campus.” The school counselor explained, “It’s been in existence for quite a while, so it’s not something brand new to our school. I think over time, it has been built into the culture of the school.” The GSA advisor added, “It’s probably the most important thing that we can do is to have the club. She continued, “I think that that has played a really important role in how students
feel about being at Central.” In addition, the club at Central appears to have helped encourage students to come out. The GSA advisor explained, “When we started the club, there were literally no openly LGBT students at our school of 3,000. Today we have many.”

At Mountain, similar comments were made about the strength of the club and advisor. The principal stated, “We have a really strong GSA here, and they hold a lot of status in this school.” She added:

I think the GSA advisor has built this incredibly communal faith program for lots and lots of kids. It’s a cool thing to be in the GSA here, and lots of different kinds of kids join from athletes, to punk rockers, to second language learners.

Similar to Central, the GSA advisor explained that the club had helped students be more open about their identity. She said:

It provides a safe space for students to come, and we have attracted a lot of students. After they come to the club for a number of times, some will come out and share their sexual orientation or gender identity with the group.

She continued, “We also attract a lot of allies, too. The friends of our LGBTQ youth will come to the club and advocate on behalf of them.”

According to the survey data from the teaching staff at American, Central, and Mountain, there seems to be agreement that the club has a strong presence on campus. When asked how active the GSA club is compared to other clubs on campus, a majority of participants selected “much more active” or “more active than others” (see Figure 60).
Figure 60. Comparing participants’ responses from all three schools to survey question 3.

Not only are all three GSA clubs considered comparably stronger than other clubs on campus, a majority of teaching staff claim to have participated in the club, in some form. According to the school counselor at Mountain, “I feel it’s one of the things that helps students feel supported. It lets them see that even staff here are okay with it.” When teachers were asked if they have ever attended at least part of a GSA meeting or participated in a GSA planned event, 68% at American, 49% at Central, and 81% at Mountain selected “yes” (see Figure 61).

It is clear that all participants at each school believe the GSA club is not only strong but has a GSA advisor that is vocal about LGBT safety and inclusion. There also appear to be both LGBT and straight identified youth who are part of the club, as well as teachers who show their support by participating in club meetings or activities.

Visible safe spaces. Fear of rejection often causes LGBT youth not to seek support when in need. At American, Central, and Mountain, visible safe space signs are posted throughout the campus to ensure LGBT students can easily find affirming and supportive staff.
Figure 61. Comparing participants’ responses from all three schools to survey question 4.

At American, the GSA advisor discussed the percentage of staff who are visible allies to LGBT students. She said, “My goal is 100% of the classrooms to have a safe space poster and a safe space. I will just be conservative and say 90%, although it might be bigger than that.” She also discussed the benefit that multiple safe space signs provide. She said, “Kids talk about seeing safe space posters; it’s just golden for them. Just knowing there’s someone in the community who they can talk to, and I know that it’s a lifesaver for some kids, too.” Similarly, the school counselor discussed the value of the signs. She recounted:

I have had numerous students talk about the safe space posters and how much that has meant to them. They have said things like, “Gosh, I had no idea that teacher would feel it’s okay for me to feel safe in their classroom.”

Interestingly, the principal couldn’t confirm the existence of safe space signs on campus. She said, “I am trying to think if we have, but I don’t think so. I think the whole school is a safe place.”
Although comparably lower than American, Central also has many visible safe signs posted throughout the campus. The GSA advisor confirmed the percentage of staff that participates in selling water bottles in their classroom to benefit the GSA club. She said, “We have about 30%, I am guessing, staff that have either signs or refrigerator with signs and are actively raising money for us. It would have more, but we need to do another campaign because we haven’t had one for quite a while.” The school counselor’s estimate of visible safe space signs was higher than the GSA advisor’s. She said, “If I were to guess, around 70%.” She also added the value of teachers who sell water to benefit the GSA. She explained, “I have been in there when kids are buying the water. If kids really felt dislike or discomfort for the club, they would probably simply not buy the water.” The principal admitted to losing her safe space sign but confirmed that there are many on campus. She added, “I think it keeps it in the forefront. It reminds people that we have other people here.”

Similar to American and Central, Mountain has numerous posted safe space signs but also uses an additional method to help students identify supportive staff. The school counselor estimated that there are about 60-65% of staff with visible signs posted. She added, “Students definitely notice mine posted in my office. They have complimented it and asked where I got it, stuff like that.” The GSA advisor estimated a bit higher. She said, “I would say probably 80% to 90% of classrooms have some sticker or poster that says this is an LGBTQ safe space.” The principal added:

Every Friday many faculty wear t-shirts. I always wear a t-shirt with different sayings. Mine says, “Gay Fine By Me.” So we actually wear those, in solidarity. Thinking about anti-bullying, it’s probably another good symbolic gesture.
Students and faculty wear them on Fridays, and we have been doing that off and on for many years.

Data collected from the teacher survey confirm there are large numbers of staff with posted safe space signs. When asked if they currently have a visible safe space sign posted in their classroom, 78% at American, 55% at Central, and 46% at Mountain claimed they do (see Figure 62).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you currently have a safe space sign, sticker, placard or some other item that is clearly visible to indicate that your classroom is a safe space for LGBT students?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central</td>
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<td>Mountain</td>
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Figure 62. Comparing participants’ responses from all three schools to survey question 1.

In addition, a large majority of survey participants believe that most staff on campus provide affirming, inclusive, and welcoming classrooms for LGBT students. When asked about the percentage of staff that provide affirming, inclusive, and welcoming spaces for LGBT students, 78% at American, 42% at Central, and 56% at Mountain selected that 80-100% of the staff do (see Figure 63). Most of the other participants indicated that approximately 60-79% do.
Lastly, a majority of survey participants agreed that administration is supportive of them being visible LGBT allies. When asked if they felt supported by school leadership to be visible LGBT allies, 90% at American, 50% at Central, and 93% at Mountain selected “very supported” (see Figure 64). Most of the other participants selected “somewhat supported.”

Figure 64. Comparing participants’ responses from all three schools to survey question 8.
It is clear that administration at each school supports teachers to be visible allies, which may contribute to such large numbers of staff who post visible safe space signs and provide affirming, inclusive, and welcoming spaces for LGBT students. Interestingly, there are higher percentages of teachers that feel supported by administration to be visible allies than actually post the safe space signs. It could be that teachers just need to be reminded or to be provided with the additional tangible posters or stickers.

**Openly LGBT staff.** Another reason that students have been able to identify safe spaces is that all three schools have one or more LGBT staff members who are open about their sexual orientation or gender identity to a majority of students and staff. This not only provides a visible safe person to talk to but may also provide an adult professional they can look up to.

At American, the school counselors said, “We also have some openly gay teachers at our school, who present a really positive and powerful force about their beliefs.” She stated, “There’s four that I know are very open about it and have talked about their partners in class.” The school counselor continued to discuss the benefit of having openly LGBT staff by saying, “It’s kind of like they feel there’s a place for them in the world, and I think that’s very, very important.” Similarly, the GSA advisor confirmed there are several openly LGBT staff working at American but mentioned there were at least two who still fear to come out due to tenure. Even in comparatively supportive environments, it appears some without permanent status still do not feel comfortable being open about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

At Central, the school counselor confirmed there is LGBT staff at Central. She stated, “Do I know if there are, yeah I do, but I mean it’s not like a majority of staff know
about it.” When I asked about an approximate number of LGBT staff at Central, she said, “About five or less.” The GSA confidently confirmed there was only one openly LGBT staff person that is out to both students and staff. When I asked how having an openly LGBT staff member has contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer, the GSA advisor said, “A role model. It’s a very, very powerful role model.”

At Mountain, the principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor all mentioned there were multiple LGBT staff who are out to both students and staff. The school counselor confirmed, “We have teachers here who are out, and I think that is because students feel comfortable with it. That then makes students feel more comfortable to come out and feel accepted themselves.” When I asked her approximately how many LGBT staff are out on campus, she suggested about six or more. The GSA advisor implied a slightly lower number of about four or five. Both the school counselor and GSA advisor confirmed that having openly LGBT staff at Mountain has had a very significant impact on the comparably safer school climate.

The benefit of having the support for openly LGBT staff is evidenced by survey data at all three schools. When asked how likely having openly LGBT staff has contributed to a comparably safer school climate, nearly 96% at American, 66% Central, and 100% Mountain selected “very likely” or “somewhat likely” (see Figure 65). The lower percentage at Central may be due to having only one openly LGBT staff member compared to several at American and Mountain.

In addition, a majority of the survey participants agreed that most of the students and staff would support having an openly LGBT teacher. In fact, 90% at American, 40% at Central, and 81% at Mountain selected that 80-100% of the student and staff
Figure 65. Comparing participants’ responses from all three schools to survey question 15g.

population would be supportive (see Figure 66). Most other survey participants selected a lower but still significant percentage of 60-79%.

The evidence appears clear that having openly LGBT staff has significantly contributed to comparably safer school climate for LGBT students at American, Central, and Mountain. To increase these benefits, school leaders may need to consider ways to increase the comfort level of LGBT staff being open about their sexual orientation or gender identity in the workplace. Interestingly, the school counselor at Central suggested there are about five or fewer LGBT staff, while the GSA advisor confirmed there is only one who is open to students and staff. Comparably, Central also had the lowest level of student and staff support for having openly LGBT staff. This may suggest that LGBT staff may be more likely to come out at work as the level of support increases from students, fellow staff, and administration.
Figure 66. Comparing participants’ responses from all three schools to survey question 14.

**LGBT-Inclusive Curricula**

Once California passed Senate Bill 48, also known as the Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful (FAIR) Education Act, schools were required to teach about the contribution of LGBT people in history and social studies. The law did not include training or resources to help schools with implementation. In addition, there seems to be little to no accountability to encourage schools to take action. Luckily, there appears to be some confirmation that American, Central, and Mountain have various levels of inclusive curricula being used within the classrooms.

At American, the school counselor confirmed that the health curriculum is inclusive of LGBT issues but could not confirm if lessons were taught in history or social studies on the contributions of LGBT individuals. The GSA advisor added some additional background but was not able to confirm exactly what was being used. She stated, “I know our social studies department heads have had specific conversations with
their teachers about it. I don’t know how that translates to curriculum, but I do know that they have been educated and they have been given resources.” The principal seemed to be even less sure. She stated, “We support everybody to do what they should be doing. Have I done a campaign or sent materials out, no. I am not even sure that we put the word out. When we get new policies, we send it out to teachers and let them know.” She did confirm her support. She said, “I am supportive; I will do what they want to with it.”

Similar to American, there appear to be isolated cases of teachers using inclusive curricula at Central. The GSA advisor confirmed, “It has gone on within the English department and within the Social Studies department, but I would say it’s isolated. There has been no organized effort to do that.” She continued, “I think more teachers would do it if they were provided an easy way to do it.” The principal appeared to be even less certain if and where inclusive curricula is being used on campus. She said, “I don’t know if it’s really in the curriculum like that. I think it’s periodically in areas, but I think the two collide within the curriculum. I don’t think it’s been intentional.” The school counselor simply responded with, “I honestly don’t know.”

Mountain was the only school where there seems to be a concerted effort to use inclusive curricula that include positive portrayals of LGBT individuals. Both the principal and GSA advisor were able to provide details. The principal stated, “Yes, absolutely, and it is actually state law as well. I know that my social studies department spent time making their curriculum inclusive. It includes historically gay rights and stories of gay men and women throughout history.” The GSA advisor added:

After the passage of the Fair Education Act, I know that our social studies department has worked pretty hard on making an LGBTQ inclusive curriculum. I
know that the social studies teachers definitely have included LGBTQ history. Also, the Modern World teachers have highlighted LGBTQ people throughout history.

She continued, “There’s definitely a good effort to incorporate it. Instead of a one off lesson, they make it a more significant part of the curriculum.”

Even though not all interviewees at each school were able to confirm the use of inclusive curricula, data collected from the teacher survey did. When asked approximately how many lessons taught in your classroom in the past year that have included a positive portrayal of an openly LGBT individual, collectively, 61% at American, 37% at Central, and 66% at Mountain have taught at least one or more lesson (see Figure 67). These data indicate that more teachers are using inclusive curricula than many of the interview participants realize.

**Figure 67.** Comparing participants’ responses from all three schools to survey question 2.
In addition, it appears that a majority of teachers at American, Central, and Mountain agree there is some benefit to using inclusive curricula. When asked how likely using inclusive curricula has contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students, 77.5% at American, 46.2% at Central, and 88% at Mountain selected “very likely” or “somewhat likely” (see Figure 68).

It may be important to highlight that the school that appears to be using inclusive curriculum the most has a higher percentage of teachers who feel its use has likely contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. Training, as well as the time to develop curriculum, may be the missing pieces to increase the percentage of teachers who use LGBT-inclusive curricula at American and Central.

Figure 68. Comparing participants’ responses from all three schools to survey question 15e.
Inclusive School-Wide Activities

Another reason that may have led to LGBT students at American, Central, and Mountain feeling comparably safer is the school-wide activities where acceptance and inclusion of LGBT students were an integrated component.

At American, the principal was proud to tell me about the school’s unique Ally Campaign. She explained:

Students take pictures of others, and they write down why they’re an ally. For example, they write, “I believe that all students should be able to express themselves the way they want to,” and it will be a picture of a student, a teacher; there are all kinds of pictures. They are great and are still hanging up all over the school.

The school counselor mentioned an area GSA conference, explaining there were speakers and workshops for GSA students from various high schools around the area. The GSA advisor described how she has successfully brought pieces of the AIDS Quilt to campus. She explained, “It’s here for a week. I take two class sign-ups each period, and I really don’t have any open space. I worked with teachers at developing curriculum either from an art class perspective, a history perspective, or even a mathematical perspective.” She also explained the school is the host of two LGBT related plays on campus. She said,

We are committed to a 2-year cycle of the play Secrets presented by Kaiser Permanente. Secrets is STD and AIDS focused, and we show it to our juniors and seniors. Our freshman and sophomores see a presentation called Other Side of the Closet by the San Francisco Conservatory.
There are also school-wide events at Central that may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. The school counselor said that the school participates in the annual “Day of Silence,” a day of action where students from across the country take a vow to remain silent to address anti-LGBT bullying. She added, “They announce it on our live broadcast in the morning that teachers put on in their classrooms. Then the GSA sells shirts, or I think actually gives shirts away to staff and students that want to wear them.” The principal shared that the GSA is always part of the Homecoming Parade, which takes place downtown and becomes a big community event. She described, “Everyone participates in the Parade. The GSA always has a truck and is always part of the show.” The GSA advisor explained, “There’s no single event for just GSA. Instead, the GSA is literally at every event the school does. We do a parade, a school club night, and GSA is always there.” She also confirmed that GSA is included in the leadership group that meets over the summer months. She said, “Wherever other clubs are participating, GSA club is participating.” The principal explained the benefit of the inclusive approach to school events. She said, “They really establish themselves as being on the radar as part of the community.” The GSA advisor added, “Basically every time students see LGBT students and allies openly participating, it makes a difference.”

Probably the most unique school-wide event discussed in this study takes place at Mountain. The principal described an annual assembly that some also call the Drag Show. As she explained, “For many years, the GSA has sponsored an assembly or drag show at Mountain. The concept around the drag show, or a big piece of it, is around anti-bullying. I have often hosted the event in drag.” The school counselor added that the assembly is also educational in nature. She explained, “Most people refer to it as the drag
show, but the whole thing isn’t a drag show. There are presentations and educational types of things that happen beforehand.” She added, “I feel like it’s one of the things that helps students feel supported, and it lets them see that even staff here are really okay with it.” The GSA advisor provided a bit of background on the annual event. She said:

The first year I became the club advisor, we were talking about how a lot of the cultural groups at the school put on assemblies. We were like what could the GSA do to have a bigger impact and to reach a wider audience. We brainstormed a drag show since it would be a nice, entertaining way to get across messages about LGBTQ people, history, and understanding.

In addition to the drag show, the principal talked about a marriage booth the GSA students set up at lunchtime. She explained:

A couple of times a year the GSA club sets up a marriage booth in which anybody can marry anybody. They have a big poster made of pledge sheets. Kids can write, I am coming out as gay, I am coming out as an ally, I am coming out to support everybody in the school. We actually had that poster up on the wall for quite a long time.

Lastly, the GSA advisor added, “In addition to our drag show assembly and marriage events, we put on Gay Pride, have anti-bullying events, and participate in the annual Day of Silence and National Coming Out Day.”

Data collected from the teacher survey confirmed that school-wide events at each school have made significant differences in school climate for LGBT students. When asked how likely school-wide events have contributed to a comparably safer school
climate for LGBT students, 87% at American, 75% at Central, and 100% at Mountain selected either “very likely” or “somewhat likely” (see Figure 69).

![Graph showing school-wide events and safer climate](image)

*Figure 69.* Comparing participants’ responses from all three schools to survey question 15h.

School-wide events at each school appear to be purposefully inclusive of both LGBT and non-LGBT students. Through various school-wide events, LGBT students appear to feel supported and connected to the school, while non-LGBT students gain new understanding and appreciation of diversity. It is clear that these school-wide events have significantly contributed to a safer school climate for LGBT students.

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**Most Effective Factor**

Each interview participant was asked to select which factor discussed might have contributed most strongly to the school’s comparably safer school climate. Based on the
data collected, there appears to be some cohesion among the three schools on what factor has been the most effective.

When asked what factor most strongly contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students, the principal at American said, “I think probably the growth of the GSA, the number of people that have joined it, and the fact that it truly is a gay and straight alliance.” The school counselor seemed to agree with the principal and selected the existence of the GSA as the strongest factor. The GSA advisor, on the other hand said, “I think it’s about the culture that we are a safe space.”

At Central, there were similar opinions among the participants. The principal said, “It goes to school connectedness, but it’s a genuine connectedness which incorporates not just having a club but that inclusion of the club as you would include every club on campus.” She continued, “I think that has provided them with the biggest feeling of safety. That they have a place.” The school counselor gave the GSA advisor the credit. She said:

I truly think it’s the GSA advisor. She is the one who is really behind the success of our program. I would say for the awareness and the support that the club has, a lot of the comfort level from students and what’s been put in place really goes 100% to her.

The GSA advisor’s response was quick and simple. She said, “That’s easy! It is simply the existence of an active GSA Club.”

It came as no surprise when the principal and school counselor at Mountain selected the drag show assembly as the strongest factor that contributed most strongly to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. The principal said, “It’s going to
sound funny, but I think the drag show in some way has really had an impact. Maybe the
t-shirts, the GSA meetings themselves, but there’s something about bringing together the
entire school community.” The school counselor added, “I would say the drag assembly
because staff and students are involved together. They plan it together, and I think it
really helps students feel accepted and part of the community.” Interestingly, the GSA
advisor believed the GSA club was the strongest factor. She explained:

I mean, I definitely think the drag assembly propels the idea that there are people
at this school that are LGBTQ. That sends a powerful message to the entire
student body, but I feel like for, your question was more about like for the safety
of LGBTQ students. A lot of LGBTQ students hangout in my classroom every
day. Having the space to go to every week or every day, in the long run, is more
valuable than the one day drag show.

The teacher survey revealed additional evidence that some factors may have
contributed more strongly at one school over another. At American, the survey data were
clear that the existence of the GSA club has had the strongest impact, with 95% who
selected “very likely.” The second strongest impact was having openly LGBT staff, with
88% who selected “very likely.” Similarly, at Central, the existence of the GSA club had
the strongest impact, with 69.1% who selected “very likely.” The second strongest
impact was having LGBT supportive administration, with 52.9% who selected “very
likely.” Interestingly at Mountain, there was a three-way tie for the factor that
participants felt most strongly contributed to a safer school climate for LGBT students.
A total of 96% selected “very likely,” and 4% selected “somewhat likely” for the
following three factors: (a) having LGBT-supportive administration, (b) having openly
LGBT staff, and (c) having school-wide events that promote inclusion. The existence of the GSA club followed closely behind by the difference of one individual vote.

Remarkably, each school had the same two factors, which received the lowest number of participants who selected “very likely or “somewhat likely.” Those factors were (a) inclusive curriculum and (b) professional development. Although both factors appear to have had value, the survey data revealed they might have contributed to the comparably safer school climates at each school the least.

Figure 70 displays the survey participants who selected “very likely” or “somewhat likely” on the eight different factors at each school.

In summary, American, Central, and Mountain have enumerated anti-bullying policies; take bullying incidents seriously; have multiple visible safe space signs posted; have an inclusive school culture, LGBT-supportive administration, one or more openly LGBT staff; have successfully created active GSA clubs that are led by strong advisors; and have inclusive school-wide events. In addition, each has had varying levels of staff development on LGBT youth, as well as varying use of inclusive curricula. Lastly, the data clearly suggest that these factors did not happen by themselves; rather, there was purposeful effort in these actions in order to create a safe and inclusive school climate for LGBT students.
Figure 70. Participants’ responses from all three schools to survey question 15a-15h.
CHAPTER 5—SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Background

There appeared to be important connections between the research literature and the key findings in this study. In particular, many of the suggested strategies that were recommended in the literature review were being practiced with increased intensity at American, Central, and Mission High Schools.

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. Schools were selected by Carolyn Laub, the Founder and Executive Director of the GSA Network, a nationally known expert whose organization works closely with both students and advisors of Gay and Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs in California schools. Laub and her regional staff collectively identified three stand-out high schools in which LGBT students feel comparably safer and more included. This study includes data collected from interviews with each school principal, school counselor, and the GSA advisor of those three schools, along with survey data from teaching staff to determine possible common themes and proven strategies that could potentially be replicated and/or initiated in other schools. Specifically, the following research question directed this study: What do various stakeholders believe may be contributing to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students? Findings suggest there is not just one factor but several that may have made a positive impact. These factors included (a) anti-bullying policies, procedures, and school culture; (b) staff training; (c) gay and straight alliances and visible safe spaces; (d) LGBT-inclusive curricula; and (e) inclusive school-wide activities. Participants agreed that some factors might have had a stronger impact over
It appeared that each school has created an inclusive school culture that has likely contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students.

**Summary of Relevant Findings**

The findings suggested that purposeful actions were taken at American, Central, and Mountain that contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. None of the participants mentioned these steps were taken based on past research; however, the literature does support many of the steps each school has taken. Interestingly, the findings suggested it may not be exactly what each school has done but rather the way they have enacted various actions that may have helped these three schools become standouts. For example, a school that has a safe space sign posted certainly helps, but when 46% or more of the classrooms have them posted, these repeated visuals of support may be what created increased feelings of safety among LGBT students.

The findings suggested that although each school has established a few unique actions, there are more commonalities that may have contributed to comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. These commonalities are explored in the sections that follow.

**Anti-Bullying Policies, Procedures, and School Culture**

All three schools in the current study were located in districts with enumerated anti-bullying policies that included sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. In addition, the survey data from teaching staff confirmed that nearly 9 out of 10 are very likely to respond when witnessing anti-LGBT bullying. According to Russell and McGuire (2008), enumerated anti-bullying policies provide the basis for school safety policies and provide the institutional backing for school staff to create and enforce the
anti-bullying measures. In addition, supporting research suggested that enumerated policies are especially strong when they include procedures for reporting incidents to school authorities (Kosciw et al., 2011). In the present study, at least one interview participant at each school commented on how important it is for students to feel comfortable reporting incidents of bullying to school personnel. For example, the principal at Central explained, “The trick is students being comfortable enough to tell us.” She also added, “It demonstrates to students that if they tell us, it will be taken seriously.” Nearly all studies examining school safety for LGBT youth have found that comprehensive and enumerated anti-bullying and harassment policies that specifically include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression prove effective (Kim et al., 2009).

**Responding to Bullying**

There were several common themes in how each of the three schools responds to incidents of bullying. First, there seemed to be flexibility or different routes that can be taken, depending on the situation and severity. According to the DOE (2014), states are revising discipline laws to enhance local discretion, curtail zero-tolerance requirements, and encourage the development of alternative disciplinary approaches such as restorative justice. All schools in the current study are using some form of restorative justice practice when dealing with students who are displaying bullying behavior. For example, the principal at American explained, “We send them to Saturday School with our dean and staff where they get counseling. We focus on having students reflect on their behavior, why they did it, and then think about how they can change their behavior.” Lastly, Blackburn (2007) suggested that in cross-sectional studies, researchers have found
that school staff intervention in situations that involve bias-related harassment is associated with students feeling safer at school. Survey data at all three schools confirms that nearly 9 out of 10 teachers are very likely to respond when witnessing anti-LGBT bullying.

**School Culture and Supportive Administration**

Education leaders are clearly concerned with student safety. Yet, when it comes to harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity, principals may respond with an insufficient level of urgency (GLSEN, 2008). Few issues in our schools are more present and simultaneously treated as invisible (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). In a 2011 study, approximately one third of LGBT youth said their school administrators were unsupportive (Kosciw et al., 2011). The GSA advisor at Central stated, “Teachers are not going to be supportive of students if they don’t feel they have the support of their administrator.” Findings in previous research on the lack of support from administrators on LGBT youth issues was not found at American, Central, or Mountain. In fact, all three school principals were viewed as supportive of LGBT student safety and inclusion by all interview participants, as well as a majority of teachers who participated in the survey. According to Capper and Owusu-Yeboa (2006), by learning about the unique needs of LGBT students, self-reflecting, engaging in professional development, and taking practical steps to advocate for LGBT youth, school administrators can create an environment that is safe and welcoming for all students.

School administrators play an important role in the experience of LGBT youth by setting the tone and specific policies that may affect the school’s climate (Kosciw et al., 2011). Unfortunately, discussions around LGBT issues often make school leaders feel
uncomfortable, causing these discussions to be completely avoided (DeWitt, 2012). At American, Central, and Mountain creating an inclusive school culture appeared to be not only important but also something that has been purposefully enacted. For example, the principal at American stated, “I think in light of LGBT issues, establishing the fact that it is part of who we are as a school. It’s part of our identity.” She continued:

We are pretty much known in the community as having a very open, liberal campus. I think it’s just being accepting, welcoming, but also providing the structures in place that allow people to be and do whatever they want to.

Similarly, the principal at Mountain said, “We have really worked in the last 7 or 8 years in building that community and making sure that we are all standing together as one, being a wonderfully diverse place rather than a bunch of separate factions.” If both students and staff are able to sense the strong support from administration, it may have increased the likelihood that staff will speak up when they hear anti-LGBT language, which ultimately results in students feeling comparably safer and more included.

**Staff Training**

Staff development designed to increase the knowledge and ability of staff to respond effectively to anti-LGBT bullying and harassment or to create supportive school climates is rare (Goodenow et al., 2006). Although some studies have reported that school personnel are aware of LGBT issues, other studies have reported that many are lacking in knowledge, are undertrained, are incompetent, or are potentially unwilling to address LGBT issues (Graybill et al., 2009). In addition to lack of knowledge, Mudrey and Medina-Adams (2006) reported that 74% of preservice teachers surveyed on a measure of homophobia scored in the homophobic range, suggesting that they hold
negative views about LGBT individuals. Luckily, staff development on LGBT issues has been provided at American, Central, and Mountain. In fact, it was the GSA students at all three schools who led the LGBT-focused professional development opportunities by sharing their personal stories as a way to inform. Szalacha (2003) revealed that a state-wide study in Massachusetts showed that students reported a safer school climate in schools that provided staff development on LGBT youth violence and suicide prevention. At Central, located in a more conservative area, a top down approach to training was implemented. The GSA advisor explained, “It actually started with the Superintendent and all of the District Administrators. After that, we trained the teachers.” She continued, “The principals were not going to feel comfortable allowing us to do the training unless the Superintendent said it was okay.” DeWitt (2012) agreed that support begins from the top down, and it may help if school administrators feel supported and have a shared vision with district officials. There was consensus by all interview participants that training is not something provided on an annual basis. In fact, the teacher survey confirmed that less than 50% at each school have been provided comprehensive training on LGBT youth in the past 2 years. The principal at Central agreed that the training is not frequent enough, while the principal at Mountain said, “I think it needs to come back and we need to do it again.” Even so, Greytak and Kosciw (2010) found that a single-training focused on LGBT youth had increased teacher self-awareness about LGBT issues and their access to resources and information (Greytak & Kosciw, 2010).
Gay and Straight Alliances and Visible Safe Spaces

Students who attend schools that have GSAs are more likely to report safety for LGBTQ youth (Toomey et al., 2012). Schools that have GSAs are associated with fewer reports of victimization and better academic and health outcomes for LGBT students (Goodenow et al., 2006). For example, according to GLSEN’s national school climate survey, 54.9% of those with a GSA felt unsafe compared to 70.6% in schools with no GSA (Kosciw et al., 2011). This increased feeling of safety may be attributed to less severe victimization in those schools. For example, Kosciw et al. (2011) discovered that 38% of students that attend school with no GSA experienced higher severities of victimization compared to 23% in school with a GSA. Not only did America, Central, and Mountain have an active GSA club, they also had strong advisors. It appeared that much of the success of the three comparably safer school climates may be attributed to the club advisors being vocal advocates for change. Using a Likert-type scale of one to five, one being “very significant” and five being “not significant at all,” each principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor ranked their GSA club’s existence as being “very significant” in creating a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. This is evidenced by survey data from the teaching staff at each school. When asked how likely the GSA club has contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students, 95% at American, 77% at Central, and 92.3% at Mountain selected “very likely.” In fact, Szalacha (2003) revealed GSAs have the most significant influence on school climates for LGBT youth and simply the presence of the club, not necessarily the participation in it, is associated with increased feelings of safety.
One of the benefits of having a GSA is increased school connectedness that benefits many other positive factors, including helping LGBT students feel safe to come out. The principal at Central explained, “It goes to school connectedness, but it’s a genuine connectedness which incorporates not just having a club but that inclusion of the club as you would include every club on campus.” She continued, “I think that has provided them with the biggest feeling of safety—that they have a place.” Feeling valued and accepted in the school community is an important contributor to adolescent development and is closely related to positive educational and psychological outcomes (Roeser et al., 1996). It may also have contributed to students feeling safe to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity at school. The GSA advisor at Central explained, “When we started the club, there were literally no openly LGBT students at our school of 3,000. Today, we have many.” Kosciw et al. (2011) found that LGBT students who are out to other students or to school staff have higher levels of school belonging compared to those who are not out. Survey findings indicated that only 40.1% of LGBT students who were not out to their peers had a positive school belonging compared to 50.6% of LGBT students who were out to their peers (Kosciw et al., 2011). Similarly, 42.1% of LGBT youth who were not out to their teachers had a positive school belonging compared to 54.1% of LGBT youth who were out to school staff (Kosciw et al., 2011).

Visible Safe Spaces

The literature supported that being able to speak with a caring adult in school may have a significant positive impact on LGBT students, particularly for those who are bullied or harassed or feel marginalized (Kosciw et al., 2011). Lesbian, gay, bisexual,
and transgender students have identified school staff as providing an integral role in creating a school climate that can either perpetuate or decrease victimization (Chesir-Teran, 2003). In addition, having supportive school staff improves LGBT students’ grades and increases the likelihood they will attend college (Kosciw et al., 2011). At American, Central, and Mountain, visible safe space signs are posted throughout the campuses to ensure LGBT students can easily identify LGBT-affirming staff. As the GSA advisor at American stated, “Kids talk about seeing safe space posters; it’s just golden for them. Just knowing there’s someone in the community who they can talk to, and I know that it’s a lifesaver for some kids, too.” Data collected from the teacher survey confirm there are large numbers of staff with posted safe space signs. When asked if they currently have a visible safe space sign posted in their classroom, 78% at American, 55% at Central, and 46% at Mountain claimed they do. It is important that educators be visible allies to LGBT students, showing that they will stand up for their safety and right to learn in a respectful environment (Diaz et al., 2010). According to previous research, the perceived presence of school staff who are supportive of LGBT students is one of the most effective predictors of decreased feelings of threat, truancy, and suicide attempts (Kim et al., 2009).

In addition, a large majority of survey participants believed that with or without the visible safe space sign, most staff on campus provided affirming, inclusive, and welcoming classrooms for LGBT students. When asked the percentage of staff that provide affirming, inclusive, and welcoming spaces for LGBT students, 78% at American, 42% at Central, and 56% at Mountain selected that 80-100% of the staff do. According to GLEN’s National School Climate Survey, LGBT students that could
identify no supportive staff had a mean GPA of 2.9 compared to 3.2 for those with six or more supportive staff (Kosciw et al., 2011). It is clear that when students feel safe, they are more likely to learn. In addition, 14.9% of students who could identify no supportive staff say that they do not plan to attend college compared to only 5.1% who could identify six or more supportive staff (Kosciw et al., 2011). At American, Central, and Mountain, there were clearly far more than six supportive staff that LGBT students can visibly identify. Having supportive school personnel can have a positive effect on the educational experiences of all students by increasing student motivation and positive engagement in school (Kosciw et al., 2011).

**Openly LGBT Staff**

Another reason that students at American, Central, and Mountain were able to identify safe spaces is that all three schools have one or more LGBT staff members who are open about their LGBT identity. This not only provides a visible safe person to talk to but also provides an adult professional to look up to. At American, the school counselor said, “We also have some openly gay teachers at our school who present a really positive and powerful force about their beliefs.” She continued to discuss the benefit of having openly LGBT staff by saying, “It’s kind of like they feel there’s a place for them in the world, and I think that’s very, very important.” The GSA advisor at Central discussed the benefit of openly LGBT staff by stating, “A role model. It’s a very, very powerful role model.” Kosciw et al. (2011) found the presence of openly LGBT school personnel may imply to students that the school is supportive and accepting. The benefit of having openly LGBT staff is evidenced by survey data at all three schools. When asked how likely having openly LGBT staff has contributed to a comparably safer school climate,
nearly 96% at American, 66% at Central, and 100% at Mountain selected “very likely” or “somewhat likely.”

**LGBT-Inclusive Curricula**

In previous research, those who attended schools with inclusive curriculum reported higher levels of school belonging and were half as likely to report missing school due to feeling unsafe (Kosciw et al., 2011). Also, those who attended schools with inclusive curriculum reported higher levels of school belonging and were half as likely to report missing school due to feeling unsafe (Kosciw et al., 2011). At American and Central, interview participants suggested there were isolated cases of inclusive curricula being used. At Mountain, the principal confirmed a more purposeful use of lessons that include positive portrayals of openly LGBT individuals. The principal stated, “Yes, absolutely, and it is actually state law as well. I know that my social studies department spent time making their curriculum inclusive. It includes historically gay rights and of gay men and women throughout history.” According to the teacher survey, many are using LGBT-inclusive curricula in their classrooms. When asked approximately how many lessons taught in their classroom in the past year that have included a positive portrayal of an openly LGBT individual, collectively 61% at American, 37% at Central, and 66% at Mountain have taught at least one or more lessons. When asked how likely using inclusive curricula has contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students, 77.5% at American, 46.2% at Central, and 88% at Mountain selected “very likely” or “somewhat likely.” The benefit was also evidenced by a previous study held in California that reported 50.3% of students surveyed attended schools where LGBT inclusive curriculum was taught (Russell et al., 2006). Of those students who identified
as LGBT, 73% reported feeling safe at school compared to 58% who attended schools without inclusive curriculum (Russell et al., 2006).

**Inclusive School-Wide Activities**

School-wide activities that focus on acceptance and inclusion of LGBT students may be another reason American, Central, and Mountain have comparably safer school climates. These may allow LGBT students to feel connected to the school culture. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth often face unique challenges that make it difficult to develop a sense of connectedness to school (Diaz et al., 2010). A significant amount of literature showed that school connectedness predicts a variety of health outcomes, including emotional well-being, substance abuse, suicide ideation, depression, and violent or deviant behavior (Thompson et al., 2006).

It appeared that in addition to active GSA clubs, inclusive school-wide activities at American, Central, and Mountain have significantly contributed to comparably safer schools for LGBT students. Fetner and colleagues (2012) found that GSA students were instrumental in planning and carrying out a variety of activities, bringing a great sense of accomplishment, resulting in feeling empowered to engage in education, activism, and social activities. For example, at American the entire school participated in an annual poster campaign for Ally Week, and all students visited pieces of the AIDS Quilt, which comes to the campus each year. The GSA advisor at Central explained, “There’s no single event for just GSA. Instead, the GSA is literally at every event the school does. We do a parade, a school club night, and GSA is always there.” At Mountain, one of the most unique school-wide activities occurs each year. The principal explained, “For many years, the GSA has sponsored an assembly or drag show at Mountain. The concept
around the drag show, or a big piece of it, is around anti-bullying. I have often hosted the event in drag.” The school counselor added that the assembly is also educational in nature. She explained, “There are presentations and educational types of things that happen beforehand.” The principal at Mountain added:

A couple of times a year the GSA club sets up a marriage booth in which anybody can marry anybody. They have a big poster made of pledge sheets. Kids can write, “I am coming out as gay, I am coming out as an ally, I am coming out to support everybody in the school.” We actually had that poster up on the wall for quite a long time.

The GSA advisor added, “In addition to our drag show assembly and marriage events, we put on Gay Pride, have anti-bullying events, and participate in the annual Day of Silence and National Coming Out Day.” Previous research supports that involvement in extracurricular activities for all students is positively linked to academic achievement and psychological well-being (Darling et al., 2005).

**Implications for Key Staff Members**

This study analyzed a myriad of factors that may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students at three public high schools in California.

Interview data gathered information from principals, school counselors, and GSA advisors to gain their perspective of what actions the school has taken that might have had a positive impact. In addition, full time teaching staff participated in an online survey to allow them to weigh in. Upon comparing the literature review with analyzed data from the current study, there are several implications for staff that desire to create safer and more inclusive school climates for LGBT students.
Implications for School Administration

This study provides valuable findings for high school administrators interested in creating a safer and more inclusive school climate for LGBT students. Based on these discoveries, there are several areas for school administrators to consider, including (a) anti-bullying policies, procedures, and school culture; (b) staff training; (c) Gay and Straight Alliances and visible safe spaces; (d) LGBT-inclusive curricula; and (e) inclusive school-wide activities. Although these factors may overlap, each will be described separately.

Anti-Bullying Policies, Procedures, and School Culture

School administrators may want to collaborate closely with the GSA advisor on potential actions that can be taken to encourage a safer and more inclusive school culture. A first step could be to provide comprehensive professional development to ensure that all staff are culturally competent on LGBT youth. In addition, training may be needed to inform staff on the school’s anti-bullying policy and effective ways to respond to anti-LGBT bullying, as that topic tends to cause some to feel uncomfortable. If staff view school administration as supportive of LGBT student safety and inclusion, it may increase the likelihood they will speak up when witnessing anti-LGBT language on campus. Additionally, if the school district’s anti-bullying policy is not enumerated to include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, the administration should advocate a policy amendment. It is important to stay clear of zero tolerance policies and instead implement restorative justice practices so that students understand the harm they have caused and ultimately curb destructive behavior. Administrators should make sure that students understand how to report incidents of bullying and that pertinent staff
understand how to respond effectively. Students must feel that when they report an incident of bullying, it will be taken seriously and handled effectively.

Some of these steps may help school leaders create an inclusive school culture. This does not happen by itself or overnight, but rather it requires continuous investment and purposeful actions. One strategy for creating an inclusive school culture is making sure the GSA and its members participate and are part of every school activity or event. This will show students, staff, and the community that the GSA and its members are an important and valuable component of the school culture.

**Staff Training**

Providing comprehensive staff training will not only ensure all staff are culturally competent but will also show that the administration team is supportive of LGBT safety and inclusion. Staff are not likely to speak up when they hear anti-LGBT language unless they feel comfortable, have the appropriate language, and feel supported by school leaders. It may be wise to ask current or former GSA members and the advisor to present the training to staff. Students can share their personal stories and make recommendations to staff on actions that may help them feel safer and more included. There may also be community-based organizations that provide staff development, which may supplement what the students are able to provide. To increase the likelihood that staff are aware of school administration’s support, the principal may choose to introduce the trainers and, at the close of the training, encourage staff to take action.

**Gay and Straight Alliances and Visible Safe Spaces**

Having a strong GSA club and a well-respected advisor that effectively advocates for LGBT student safety and inclusion appears to impact most strongly the school climate
for LGBT students. For schools with no GSA club, the administration might want to encourage a well-respected leader on the staff to volunteer as the advisor. Although clubs should be student led and run, a strong GSA advisor could become a spokesperson for school-wide safety and inclusion and provide students resources to keep the club active. The administrator may then talk with the prospective advisor and school counselor about identifying potential students who may be interested in starting the club. These prospective student leaders should be a mixture of both LGBT- and straight-identified students. School administration should make sure the club’s formation follows the same equitable steps as others clubs, preventing added barriers. A GSA that is completely integrated into the school and is fully supported by school administration is likely to have the most impact.

School leaders should find ways to participate in GSA events and activities and talk openly about their support for the club. This may encourage students and staff also to support and participate. Because LGBT students often fear rejection, multiple and continuous efforts should be made to help them feel supported and valued by staff. Visible safe space signs posted in the principal’s office and classrooms have shown to help students feel safe and supported. Administration may want to have safe space signs printed for staff on an annual basis and encourage them to post the signs in their classrooms. School leaders should also send a clear message to staff that if they are LGBT and they choose to come out in the workplace, they will be fully supported. Having openly LGBT staff provides students additional safe spaces, adult role models, and verification that the school is a safe and supportive place to come out.
LGBT-Inclusive Curricula

School leaders should provide training and resources to history and social studies teachers on the implementation of California Senate Bill 48, also known as the FAIR Education Act. Although there is no funding to help schools purchase curriculum or provide training to staff, history and social studies teachers should be allotted time to add supplemental materials that include the positive contributions of LGBT people in history. School administration may want to ask the GSA advisor to help identify such resources and help teachers weave in inclusive lessons to the current curriculum. Schools that use LGBT-inclusive curriculum create safer school climates for LGBT students.

Inclusive School-Wide Activities

School administration should have a strong expectation that the GSA club and its members participate in all school-wide activities. If a principal notices that the GSA did not turn in appropriate forms or sign up to participate in an event, the administrator should visit the GSA advisor and students to remind them. This action will inform students of this strong expectation. In addition, school leaders should always do their best to participate in GSA planned events, such as the Day of Silence and National Coming Out Day, or engage with students if there is a club booth set up during lunch or at an assembly. If the school has morning announcements, school leaders could positively talk about such activities to vocalize support. Both club members and other students are likely to notice, sending an important message that the club and its members are an important part of the school.
Implications for School Counselors

This study provides valuable findings for high school counselors interested in creating a safer and more inclusive school climate for LGBT students. Based on these discoveries, there are several areas for school counselors to consider, including (a) anti-bullying policies, procedures, and school culture; (b) staff training; (c) gay and straight alliances and visible safe spaces; (d) LGBT-inclusive curricula; and (e) inclusive school-wide activities. Although these factors may overlap, each will be described separately.

Anti-Bullying Policies, Procedures, and School Culture

School counselors should strongly advocate for an enumerated anti-bullying policy that includes sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. In addition, they should strongly encourage restorative justice practices when dealing with students who are bullying or harassing others. Although school counselors should never engage in student discipline, they can work closely with these students to get to the root of the problem, help them understand the harm they have caused, and ultimately curve behavior. In addition, the school counselor should monitor the well-being of the student who was targeted and check in to verify the bullying has stopped. Situations that are closely monitored and tracked will send a message to all students that the school takes bullying seriously.

School counselors may also want to collaborate closely with the GSA advisor on actions that can be taken to encourage a safer and more inclusive school culture. Because research indicates that LGBT students experience disproportionate levels of bullying, which many times go unreported, school counselors should frequently engage with the
advisor and club members to monitor issues surrounding their feelings of safety and inclusion. This may increase the likelihood that anti-LGBT bullying will be reported and also show students that the school counselor is an LGBT-affirming adult on campus.

**Staff Training**

Comprehensive staff training will not only ensure all staff are culturally competent but also empower them to take effective action when hearing anti-LGBT language. It may be wise to ask current or former GSA members and the advisor to train the staff. Students can share their personal stories and make recommendations to staff on actions that may help them feel safer and more included. There may also be community-based organizations that provide staff development, which may supplement what the students are able to provide. In addition to staff training, school counselors may wish to seek out additional resources for themselves and for students, covering such topics as the coming out process, dealing with family rejection, or thoughts of suicide. As the school counselor becomes more visible as a safe person to talk to, more students may begin to seek support from an adult when in need.

**Gay and Straight Alliances and Visible Safe Spaces**

Having a strong GSA club and a well-respected advisor that effectively advocates for LGBT student safety and inclusion appears to be the strongest impact on school climate for LGBT students. For schools with no GSA club, school counselors might want to volunteer or encourage another well-respected staff member to become the advisor. Although clubs should be student led and run, the school counselor can support and encourage the GSA advisor to become a spokesperson for school-wide safety and inclusion and provide students resources to keep the club active. Without compromising
student confidentiality or making assumptions around the sexual orientation or gender identity of students, the school counselor may be able to identify prospective students to start the club. It may be best to start with a diverse group of students, such as well known student leaders from a mixture of both LGBT and straight identified youth. School counselors should make sure the club’s formation follows the same equitable steps as other clubs, preventing added barriers. A GSA that is completely integrated into the school and is fully supported by school administration and staff is likely to have the most impact. School counselors should find ways to participate in GSA events and activities and talk openly about their support for the club. Because LGBT students often fear rejection, multiple and continuous efforts should be made to help them feel supported and valued by staff. A safe space sign should be clearly posted inside the school counselor’s office or door so that students can easily identify them as a safe person to talk to. They may also encourage other staff to post them to provide students with many visible safe spaces. Lastly, school counselors may offer to consult with other staff, providing them with a safe space to expand their knowledge and understanding around LGBT youth and how to best create supportive and inclusive spaces.

**LGBT-Inclusive Curricula**

School counselors should encourage the GSA advisor to provide training and resources to history and social studies teachers on the implementation of California Senate Bill 48, also known as the FAIR Education Act. Although there is no funding to help schools purchase curriculum or provide training to staff, school administration may be willing to provide history and social studies teachers time to add supplemental materials that include the positive contributions of LGBT people in history. School
counselors can encourage the GSA advisor to identify such resources and help teachers weave in inclusive lessons to the current curriculum. Schools that use LGBT-inclusive curriculum create safer school climates for LGBT students.

**Inclusive School-Wide Activities**

School counselors should advocate that the GSA club and its members participate in all school-wide activities. If the school counselor notices that the GSA did not participate in an event, then he or she should speak with the GSA advisor to help prevent it from happening again. Having the GSA club involved in all school-wide activities helps to create an inclusive school culture where the club and its members are seen as an important and valuable part of the school. In addition, school counselors should always do their best to participate in GSA planned events, such as the Day of Silence and National Coming Out Day, or engage with students if there is a club booth set up during lunch or at an assembly.

**Implications for GSA Advisors**

This study provides valuable findings for GSA advisors interested in creating a safer and more inclusive school climate for LGBT students. Based on these discoveries, there are several areas for GSA advisors to consider, including (a) anti-bullying policies, procedures, and school culture; (b) staff training; (c) gay and straight alliances and visible safe spaces; (d) LGBT-inclusive curricula; and (e) inclusive school-wide activities. Although these factors may overlap, each will be described separately.

**Anti-Bullying Policies, Procedures, and School Culture**

Gay and Straight Alliance (GSA) advisors should strongly advocate for an enumerated anti-bullying policy that includes sexual orientation, gender identity, and
gender expression. In addition, they should strongly encourage restorative justice practices when dealing with students who are bullying or harassing others. The GSA advisor should encourage the school counselor to work closely with students who are bullying or harassing others to get to the root of the problem, help them understand the harm they have caused, and ultimately curve behavior. In addition, the GSA advisor should work with the school counselor to monitor the well-being of the student who was targeted and check in to verify the behavior has stopped. Situations that are closely monitored and tracked will send a message to all students that the school takes bullying seriously. In addition, the GSA advisor should collaborate with other supportive staff to brainstorm new ways that encourage a safer and more inclusive school culture. There is always room for improvement. Because research indicates that LGBT students experience disproportionate levels of bullying, which many times go unreported, the GSA advisor should monitor issues surrounding their feelings of safety and inclusion. This could happen during club meetings, as well as before or after school. In addition, they should work with school administration and school counselors to ensure all students understand and feel comfortable reporting incidents of bullying. Students will feel more comfortable reporting incidents of bullying if they believe the school takes effective action to resolve the issue. Lastly, GSA advisors should inform and then remind all teachers that they are always available to guide and support their professional growth and comfort in responding to anti-LGBT language or creating an inclusive classroom climate. If teachers feel comfortable and safe around the GSA advisor, they may be more likely to reach out when support is needed.
Staff Training

Comprehensive staff training will not only ensure all staff are culturally competent but also improve their comfort level and empower them to take effective action when they hear anti-LGBT language. The GSA advisor can use student testimonials or research statistics to encourage administration to allot time for such training. It may be important to remind school leadership that students are less likely to learn if they do not feel safe. It may be wise to take the lead and ask current or former GSA members to train the staff. Students can share their personal stories and make recommendations to staff on actions that may help them feel safer and more included. There may also be community-based organizations that provide staff development, which may supplement what the students are able to provide. Providing the staff specific examples on how to respond to anti-LGBT language or bullying may improve their comfort level and the likelihood they will take action. The GSA advisor should print safe space posters for staff and encourage them to post inside the classroom. In addition, the GSA advisor should print other LGBT-focused resources that may be helpful. After the training, the GSA advisor should remind staff that they are always available to guide and support their professional growth and comfort in responding to anti-LGBT language or creating an inclusive classroom climate. It may also be wise to ask school administration both to introduce the training and to state their support for the needed work ahead after the training. Lastly, if the students are successful at training the staff, GSA advisors should request that the administration work with the district middle schools to bring the training to them. If middle school teachers are trained, they may be able to help decrease bullying and bias behavior before students move on to high school.
Gay and Straight Alliances and Visible Safe Spaces

Having a strong GSA club and a well-respected advisor that effectively advocates for LGBT student safety and inclusion appears to impact school climate most strongly for LGBT students. The GSA advisor can work with the clubs’ members to become leaders and effective advocates for their own safety and inclusion. The club should include diverse student populations, including a mixture of both LGBT and straight identified members. Not all LGBT students will join, but the club’s existence is still likely to have a positive impact on their lives. The GSA advisor along with student leaders might become spokespeople for school-wide safety and inclusion and at the same time gather resources that help keep the club active and sustainable. Advocacy may also be needed to ensure the club is always provided with equitable access and inclusion at the school. A GSA that is completely integrated into the school and is fully supported by school administration and staff is likely to have the most impact. The GSA advisor should encourage school administration and staff to participate in all GSA planned events and activities. The GSA advisor should monitor that safe space signs are posted in 50% or more of the classrooms, as well as highly encourage school administration and school counselors to post them in their offices. Regularly printing these for teachers or providing LGBT-focused training may help increase the percentage of posted safe space signs on campus.

LGBT-Inclusive Curricula

The GSA advisor should provide training and resources to history and social studies teachers on the implementation of California Senate Bill 48, also known as the FAIR Education Act. Although there is no funding to help schools purchase curriculum
or provide training to staff, school administration may be willing to provide history and social studies teachers time to add supplemental materials that include the positive contributions of LGBT people in history. The GSA advisor could identify such resources and help teachers weave in inclusive lessons to the current curriculum. Schools that use LGBT-inclusive curriculum create safer school climates for LGBT students.

**Inclusive School-Wide Activities**

The GSA advisor should ensure that the GSA club and its members participate in all school-wide activities. Having the GSA club involved in all school-wide activities helps to create an inclusive school culture where the club and its members are seen as an important and valuable part of the school. In addition, the GSA advisor should encourage administration and staff to participate in GSA planned events, such as the Day of Silence and National Coming Out Day, or engage with students if there is a club booth set up during lunch or at an assembly. Lastly, GSA advisors and club members may want to brainstorm a larger scale annual event designed to celebrate LGBT diversity that has both entertainment and educational components. This may not be recommended for a brand new club but one that has proven sustainable for multiple years and where a majority of staff is supportive. It may be wise to start small by inviting all students and staff but making it an optional event. If successful, the event may expand and become integrated into part of a school day where all students and staff attend.

**Implications for High School Teachers**

This study provides valuable findings for high school teachers interested in creating a safer and more inclusive school climate for LGBT students. Based on these discoveries, there are several areas for teachers to consider, including (a) anti-bullying
policies, procedures, and school culture; (b) staff training; (c) gay and straight alliances and visible safe spaces; (d) LGBT-inclusive curricula; and (e) inclusive school-wide activities. Although these factors may overlap, each will be described separately.

**Anti-Bullying Policies, Procedures, and School Culture**

Teachers should strongly advocate for an enumerated anti-bullying policy that includes sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. In addition, they should strongly encourage restorative justice practices when dealing with students who are bullying or harassing others.

When dealing with bullying situations, teachers should always create teachable moments and follow the school’s anti-bullying policy. Teachers may decide to include lessons on bullying and the harm they cause as both a prevention and intervention when needed. School counselors could be asked to work with students who are displaying bullying or bias behavior to get to the root of the problem, help them understand the harm they have caused, and ultimately curb behavior.

Teachers should check in with the student who was targeted and verify that the bullying has stopped. Situations that are closely monitored and tracked will send a message to all students that the school takes bullying seriously. Teachers may want to discuss the value of diversity and inclusion of LGBT individuals, refrain from using hetero-normative language, and encourage students to report all bullying incidents. This may increase the likelihood that anti-LGBT bullying will be reported and also show students that the teacher is a LGBT-affirming adult on campus.
**Staff Training**

Teachers should advocate for comprehensive training on LGBT youth issues to improve cultural competency and provide suggested ways to respond to anti-LGBT language. It may be wise to ask the GSA advisor if current or former GSA members could present the training. It may be powerful to hear students share their personal stories and make recommendations to staff on actions that may help them feel safer and more included. In addition to staff training, teachers may wish to seek out additional resources online or consult with the GSA advisor or school counselor about providing a more supportive and affirming environment for LGBT students.

**Gay and Straight Alliances and Visible Safe Spaces**

Having a strong GSA club and a well-respected advisor that effectively advocates for LGBT student safety and inclusion appears to have the strongest impact on school climate for LGBT students. For schools with no GSA club, teachers might want to volunteer or encourage another well-respected staff member to become the advisor. A GSA that is completely integrated into the school and is fully supported by school administration and staff is likely to have the most impact. Teachers should find ways to participate in GSA events and activities and talk openly about their support for the club, when appropriate. Because LGBT students often fear rejection, multiple and continuous efforts should be made to help them feel supported and valued by staff. Teachers should have a visible safe space sign posted inside the classroom so that LGBT students can easily identify them as a safe person to talk to. They may also encourage other staff to post them to provide students with many visible safe spaces.
LGBT-Inclusive Curricula

All teachers should research or request the GSA advisor provide resources on inclusive lessons designed to promote a safe and inclusive classroom for LGBT students. History or social studies teachers should request the GSA advisor provide training and resources on the implementation of California Senate Bill 48, also known as the FAIR Education Act. Although there is no funding to help schools purchase curriculum or provide training to staff, school administration may be willing to provide history and social studies teachers time to add supplemental materials that include the positive contributions of LGBT people in history. History and social studies teachers can encourage the GSA advisor to identify such resources and begin to weave inclusive lessons into the current curriculum. Schools that use LGBT-inclusive curriculum create safer school climates for LGBT students.

Inclusive School-Wide Activities

Teachers should advocate that the GSA club and its members participate in all school-wide activities. This helps to create an inclusive school culture where the club and its members are seen as an important and valuable part of the school. In addition, teachers should always do their best to participate in GSA planned events, such as the Day of Silence and National Coming Out Day, or engage with students if there is a club booth set up during lunch or at an assembly.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study may suggest areas for future research. This study focused on factors that may have contributed to comparably safer school climates for LGBT students in California public high schools. Future studies could explore these
same factors in other states or even focus on the middle and elementary school levels. Additionally, future research may focus on just one of the contributing factors, such as having a GSA, while spending more time describing the implementation stages and suggested steps for sustainability. Lastly, it may be wise to examine best practices in districts that have effected positive change in LGBT student safety and inclusion with a top down approach.

This study focused on three schools, which were all public high schools located in California. Because there is currently no federal law protecting LGBT students or LGBT staff from discrimination, state specific studies may help school leaders enact suggested changes while following legal parameters in their respective states. In addition, a similar study at the elementary or middle school level may help those leaders implement age appropriate changes for students who are LGBT or perceived to be LGBT. Previous research suggested that students in the lower grades are hearing anti-LGBT language and experiencing increased levels of bullying and harassment. If schools can address bias-based behaviors earlier, high schools may be more likely to have comparably safer and more inclusive schools.

One of the strongest factors identified in the current study is the existence of an active GSA club with a strong and well-respected advisor. A study that focuses on how to create a comparably stronger and more active GSA club may provide guidance needed to increase the impact level where these clubs are less dynamic. Because all factors explored in this study appeared to have some level of impact, individual, in-depth studies on each factor may contribute to a better understanding of how to implement each with greater success. For example, a study that focuses on schools that have successfully
implemented LGBT-inclusive curricula and exactly how that has contributed to increased feelings of safety for LGBT students may provide the guidance and encouragement needed for more schools to take action.

In previous research, as well as the current study, it was suggested that a top down approach, from the district level down to the schools, is likely a successful approach to creating safer and more inclusive schools for LGBT students. For example, a study could focus on three or more districts that have followed this path to determine best practices and common themes that may be replicated in other districts that desire to create change. This may include participants such as superintendents, school board members, district directors, as well as school principals to gain their perspectives of what may have successfully contributed to improved student safety and inclusion for LGBT students.

All in all, more research needs to be done to address the factors that may decrease the negative statistics associated with LGBT youth and provide safe and inclusive learning environments so they have an equitable chance to succeed.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT youth. Furthermore, the intent of the research was to identify common themes and proven strategies that could potentially be replicated and initiated in other schools. Three public high schools in California that were identified as comparably safer for LGBT students participated, which included interviews with each school principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor, as well as a confidential survey taken by full-time teaching staff. The findings that emerged provide a potential roadmap for schools that wish to create a safer and more inclusive school climate for LGBT
students. More specifically, the areas of focus included (a) anti-bullying policies, procedures, and school culture; (b) staff training; (c) gay and straight alliances and visible safe spaces; (d) LGBT-inclusive curricula; and (e) inclusive school-wide activities. It will likely take time and investment to change the overall school culture, but the outcomes could be well worth it. Those schools with a vision or mission statement that include the words “all students” will be closer to achieving that goal. Additionally, as LGBT students feel safer and more included, they are more likely to learn and thrive.
REFERENCES


Gretytak, E., & Kosciw, J. (2010). *Year one evaluation of the New York City Department of education respect for all training program.* New York, NY: GLSEN.


Dear School Principal (Name)

My name is Vincent Pompei and I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Department at San Diego State University. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my doctorate degree in education leadership and I would like to invite you and your school to participate.

**Title of Study:** Factors That May Have Contributed to a Comparably Safer School Climate for LGBT Students

Your high school is one of three selected to participate in this study based on your school’s success at creating a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. Schools were selected by the executive director and support staff at the Gay and Straight Alliance Network, an organization that works closely with students of GSA clubs throughout California.

**Purpose of Study:** The purpose of this Collective Case Study is to research three public high schools in California that have created comparably safer schools for LGBT youth. Phone interview and online surveys will help determine possible common themes and proven strategies that could potentially be replicated and initiated in other schools.

**Procedures:** I will conduct confidential phone interviews with representatives from the following roles: school principal, school counselor, and GSA advisor. Ideally, all three roles will be represented at each of the schools, but this may not be feasible and will not impact the continuation of the study. Phone interviews will last no more than 60 minutes and be scheduled at the convenience of the participant. Once you, the school principal, agrees to participate and have emailed me back the signed a letter of consent, I will use publicly available information to email a flyer inviting one of your school counselors and GSA advisors to participate. Once all possible phone interviews are concluded, I will request one of the study’s participants to send an email inviting full-time teaching staff to complete a confidential survey of 15 questions. This online survey will be voluntary, confidential and will require approximately 5 minutes of their time.

No student participation, or student interviews will be included in this study. In addition, the researcher will not have to conduct a site visit or meet study participants in-person.

**Confidentiality:** School and participant names will be kept confidential, except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents.
Compensation: As an incentive, after you complete the confidential phone interview, I will email you a $50 electronic gift card for an office supply store to use for online or in-store purchases. This same incentive will be provided for the school counselor and GSA advisor that respond to the invitation flyer and complete a confidential phone interview.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with San Diego State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time.

Person to Contact: If you have any questions about the research, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact me directly at 916-548-4909 or my dissertation chair and research supervisor, Doug Fisher, PhD at (619) 594-2507.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Division of Research Administration San Diego State University (telephone: 619-594-6622; email: irb@mail.sdsu.edu).

Consent and Next Steps: Once I hear back from you regarding your interest in participating in this research study, I will email you a Letter of Authorization and a Consent Form. Once these are signed, please scan and email back to me. I will then schedule a time with you to conduct a phone interview.

Thank you in advance for considering to participate in this research study. I look forward to hearing back soon.

Vincent Pompei, doctoral candidate, San Diego State University (Principal Investigator/Researcher)
Department: PK-12 Education Leadership
Home Address: 3759 7th Ave, San Diego, CA 92103
Mobile Phone: 916-548-4909
E-mail: Vincent_Pompei@hotmail.com
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form for School Principals

Consent to Act as a Research Subject - School Principal

Title of Study:
Factors That May Have Contributed to a Comparably Safer School Climate for LGBT Students

Principal Investigator:
Name: Vincent Pompei, doctoral candidate, San Diego State University
Department: PK-12 Education Leadership
Address: 3759 7th Ave, San Diego, CA 92103
Phone: 916-548-4909
E-mail: Vincent_Pompei@hotmail.com

Background:
You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Researcher:
Vincent Pompei, doctoral candidate in the PK-12 Education Leadership Program at San Diego State University, is conducting this study. The Faculty Sponsor for this study is Doug Fisher, PhD., and professor at San Diego State University.

Purpose of Study:
The purpose of this Collective Case Study is to research three public high schools in California that have created comparably safer schools for LGBT youth. Phone interviews and online surveys will help determine possible common themes and proven strategies that could potentially be replicated and initiated in other schools.

Participants will include the school principal, one school counselor, and one GSA advisor from each of the three schools. In addition, all full-time teaching staff will be invited to participate in a voluntary online survey of 15-questions using yes, no and Likert-type scale responses. The names of each school and study participants will remain confidential. Instead, your participation in the study may be described as “a school principal from School A.”

Study Procedures:
As the school principal, you would be invited to participate in a semi-structured phone interview with the researcher that will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The date and time of the interview will be scheduled depending on your availability. The questions
will include opportunities for you as the school principal to share what may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students.

Each school principal will meet the following criteria to participate: 1) must be currently employed full-time as school principal; 2) must have been employed as the school principal, at the same site for the entire 2012-2013 school year.

After you sign this Consent Form, scan and email it back to me at Vincent_Pompei@hotmail.com, I will schedule the confidential phone interview at a time that is convenient for you. I will record each interview using a speakerphone that will sit next to a digital recording device to capture all questions and answers. This will allow the phone interview to be transcribed. The recordings and transcribed data will remain with me and stored in a locked file cabinet until the dissertation process is complete. After that, the recording and transcribed data will be completely destroyed.

No student participation or student interviews will be included in this study.

**Data Analysis:**
Once data from all three schools are analyzed, a cross-case analysis will be used to identity common themes, assertions or interpretations of the research findings among the three participating public high schools. At the conclusion of the study, you will receive a copy of the research findings that may help reinforce the steps and strategies that have been taken to create comparably safer school climates for LGBT students.

**Confidentiality:**
School and participant names will be kept confidential as described above, except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse or suicide risk. The only time when any of the information would be shared is if you report any kind of abuse or serious harm to self or others. If this should happen, a confidential report to authorities will be completed reporting the abuse or threat of harm. Authorities could include law enforcement or child protective services. A report may result in their investigating the reported information. Confidential reports to authorities will not include any research information.

**Benefits:**
The results of this Collective Case Study may provide common themes among the three schools that could be shared and replicated in other schools that wish to create safer school climates for LGBT students. I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study.

**Risks:**
This research study will have minimal psychological risks or discomfort as a result of participating. For example, you may feel uncomfortable responding to questions regarding school climate for those students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or
transgender. If so, you may ask to not respond to particular questions or discontinue participation, either temporarily or permanently.

Compensation:
In appreciation of your time, once your confidential phone interview has been completed, I will email you an electronic $50 gift card for an office supply store to use for either online or in-store purchases.

Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with San Diego State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

Person to Contact:
If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact me directly at 916-548-4909 or my dissertation chair and research supervisor, Doug Fisher, PhD at (619) 594-2507.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Division of Research Administration San Diego State University (telephone: 619-594-6622; email: irb@mail.sdsu.edu).

Consent:
Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. In addition, your signature below indicates that you have been given a copy of this consent form for your records.

____________________________________
Name of Participant (please print)

_____________________________________ __________________
Signature of Participant Date

_____________________________________ __________________
Signature of Investigator Date
APPENDIX C

Recruitment Flyer

One School Counselor &
One GSA Advisor

NEEDED FOR

DISSERTATION RESEARCH ON:

Factors That May Have Contributed to a Comparably Safer
School Climate for LGBT Students

I am looking for one school counselor and one GSA advisor at your school to complete
an confidential phone interview for my dissertation research on comparably safer school
climates for LGBT high school students in California. Each confidential phone
interview will last no more than 60 minutes and will be scheduled at a time
that is convenient for you.

As a confidential participant in this study, you would be asked questions that help to
determine what might have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for
LGBT students at your school.

In appreciation of your time, once your confidential phone interview has been completed,
I will email you an electronic $50 gift card for an office supply store to use for either
online or in-store purchases.

If you are interested, please email me at Vincent_Pompei@hotmail.com or call me at
916-548-4909. The school counselor and GSA advisor who contact me first, will be
invited to participate first. Once I hear from you, I will email a Consent Form, which
must be signed before scheduling of the phone interview.

Thank you for considering to participate in this dissertation research on comparably safer
school climates for LGBT high school students in California.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the
Institutional Review Board (IRB) at San Diego State University
APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form for School Counselors

San Diego State University

Consent to Act as a Research Subject - School Counselor

Title of Study:
Factors That May Have Contributed to a Comparably Safer School Climate for LGBT Students

Principal Investigator:
Name: Vincent Pompei, doctoral candidate, San Diego State University
Department: PK-12 Education Leadership
Address: 3759 7th Ave, San Diego, CA 92103
Phone: 916-548-4909
E-mail: Vincent_Pompei@hotmail.com

Background:
You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Researcher:
Vincent Pompei, doctoral candidate in the PK-12 Education Leadership Program at San Diego State University, is conducting this study. The Faculty Sponsor for this study is Doug Fisher, PhD., and professor at San Diego State University.

Purpose of Study:
The purpose of this Collective Case Study is to research three public high schools in California that have created comparably safer schools for LGBT youth. Phone interviews and online surveys will help determine possible common themes and proven strategies that could potentially be replicated in other schools.

Participants will include the school principal, one school counselor, and one GSA advisor from each of the three schools. In addition, all full-time teaching staff will be invited to participate in a voluntary online survey of 15-questions using yes, no and Likert-type scale responses. The names of each school and study participants will remain confidential. Instead, your participation in the study may be described as “a school counselor from School A.”

Study Procedures:
As the school counselor, you would be invited to participate in a semi-structured phone interview with the researcher that will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The date and
time of the interview will be scheduled depending on your availability. The questions will include opportunities for you as the school counselor to share what may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. The researcher will record the interview using a speakerphone that will sit next to a digital recording device to capture all questions and answers. This will allow the phone interview to be transcribed. The recordings and transcribed data will remain with the researcher and stored in a locked file cabinet until the dissertation process is complete. After that, the recording and transcribed data will be completely destroyed.

Sometime after your phone interview has been conducted, you will also be asked to forward two emails (an initial email and one reminder email 7 days after the initial) to invite full-time teaching staff to participate in a confidential online survey of 15 questions. This will help provide their perspective of what may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. I will provide you with both email texts so you can easily forward to the school’s full-time teaching staff. This online survey is confidential and will take 5-10 minutes for them to complete.

To participate in this study, you must meet the following criteria; 1) must be currently employed as a school counselor; 2) must have been employed in that same position, at the same site for the entire 2012-2013 school year.

No student participation or student interviews will be included in this study.

**Data Analysis:**
Once data from all three schools are analyzed, a cross-case analysis will be used to identity common themes, assertions or interpretations of the research findings among the three participating public high schools. At the conclusion of the study, each school principal will receive a copy of the research findings that may help reinforce the steps and strategies that have been taken to create comparably safer school climates for LGBT students.

**Confidentiality:**
School and participant names will be kept confidential as described above, except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse or suicide risk. The only time when any of the information would be shared is if you report any kind of abuse or serious harm to self or others. If this should happen, a confidential report to authorities will be completed reporting the abuse or threat of harm. Authorities could include law enforcement or child protective services. A report may result in their investigating the reported information. Confidential reports to authorities will not include any research information.

**Benefits:**
The results of this Collective Case Study may provide common themes among the three schools that could be shared and replicated in other schools that wish to create safer
school climates for LGBT students. I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study.

**Risks:**
This research study will have minimal psychological risks or discomfort as a result of participating. For example, you may feel uncomfortable responding to questions regarding school climate for those students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. If so, you may ask to not respond to particular questions or discontinue participation, either temporarily or permanently.

**Compensation:**
In appreciation of your time, once your confidential phone interview has been completed, I will email you an electronic $50 gift card for an office supply store to use for either online or in-store purchases.

**Voluntary Participation:**
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with San Diego State University and the school at which you are employed. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

**Person to Contact:**
If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact me directly at 916-548-4909 or my dissertation chair and research supervisor, Doug Fisher, PhD at (619) 594-2507.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Division of Research Administration San Diego State University (telephone: 619-594-6622; email: irb@mail.sdsu.edu).

**Consent:**
Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study, and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. In addition, your signature below indicates that you have been given a copy of this consent form for your records.

____________________________________
Name of Participant (please print)

_____________________________________ __________________
Signature of Participant Date

_____________________________________ __________________
Signature of Investigator Date
APPENDIX E

Informed Consent Form for GSA Advisors

San Diego State University

Consent to Act as a Research Subject - GSA Advisor

Title of Study:
Factors That May Have Contributed to a Comparably Safer School Climate for LGBT Students

Principal Investigator:
Name: Vincent Pompei, doctoral candidate, San Diego State University
Department: PK-12 Education Leadership
Address: 3759 7th Ave, San Diego, CA 92103
Phone: 916-548-4909
E-mail: Vincent_Pompei@hotmail.com

Background:
You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Researcher:
Vincent Pompei, doctoral candidate in the PK-12 Education Leadership Program at San Diego State University, is conducting this study. The Faculty Sponsor for this study is Doug Fisher, PhD., and professor at San Diego State University.

Purpose of Study:
The purpose of this Collective Case Study is to research three public high schools in California that have created comparably safer schools for LGBT youth. Phone interviews and online surveys will help determine possible common themes and proven strategies that could potentially be replicated and initiated in other schools.

Participants will include the school principal, one school counselor, and one GSA advisor from each of the three schools. In addition, all full-time teaching staff will be invited to participate in a voluntary online survey of 15-questions using yes, no and Likert-type scale responses. The names of each school and study participants will remain confidential. Instead, your participation in the study may be described as “a GSA Advisor from School A.”

Study Procedures:
As the GSA Advisor, you would be invited to participate in a semi-structured phone interview with the researcher that will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The date and
time of the interview will be scheduled depending on your availability. The questions will include opportunities for you as the GSA Advisor to share what may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students. The researcher will record the interview using a speakerphone that will sit next to a digital recording device to capture all questions and answers. This will allow the phone interview to be transcribed. The recordings and transcribed data will remain with the researcher and stored in a locked file cabinet until the dissertation process is complete. After that, the recording and transcribed data will be completely destroyed.

To participate, you must meet the following criteria: 1) must be currently employed at the school full-time; 2) must have been employed at the school full-time the entire 2012-2013 school year; 3) must have been a GSA advisor for the entire 2012-2013 school year.

No student participation or student interviews will be included in this study.

**Data Analysis:**
Once data from all three schools are analyzed, a cross-case analysis will be used to identity common themes, assertions or interpretations of the research findings among the three participating public high schools. At the conclusion of the study, each school principal will receive a copy of the research findings that may help reinforce the steps and strategies that have been taken to create comparably safer school climates for LGBT students.

**Confidentiality:**
School and participant names will be kept confidential as described above, except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse or suicide risk. The only time when any of the information would be shared is if you report any kind of abuse or serious harm to self or others. If this should happen, a confidential report to authorities will be completed reporting the abuse or threat of harm. Authorities could include law enforcement or child protective services. A report may result in their investigating the reported information. Confidential reports to authorities will not include any research information.

**Benefits:**
The results of this Collective Case Study may provide common themes among the three schools that could be shared and replicated in other schools that wish to create safer school climates for LGBT students. I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study.

**Risks:**
This research study will have minimal psychological risks or discomfort as a result of participating. For example, you may feel uncomfortable responding to questions regarding school climate for those students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or
transgender. If so, you may ask to not respond to particular questions or discontinue participation, either temporarily or permanently.

**Compensation:**
In appreciation of your time, once your confidential phone interview has been completed, I will email you an electronic $50 gift card for an office supply store to use for either online or in-store purchases.

**Voluntary Participation:**
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with San Diego State University and the school at which you are employed. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

**Person to Contact:**
If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact me directly at 916-548-4909 or my dissertation chair and research supervisor, Doug Fisher, PhD at (619) 594-2507.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Division of Research Administration San Diego State University (telephone: 619-594-6622; email: irb@mail.sdsu.edu).

**Consent:**
Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study, and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. In addition, your signature below indicates that you have been given a copy of this consent form for your records.

__________________________
Name of Participant (please print)

__________________________ ________
Signature of Participant Date

__________________________ ________
Signature of Investigator Date
Dear Staff,

I have been asked to forward you the following message from a researcher and doctoral candidate at San Diego State University.

Our school was one of three selected to participate in a dissertation research study on California high schools that have comparably safer school climates for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students.

The researcher has already conducted confidential phone interviews with a few of our colleagues, and now full-time teaching staff who meet a certain criteria are being invited to participate by taking a confidential online survey with 15 questions. Answering the questions will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

Participation is completely confidential and voluntary. If you are willing to participate, please click the link below to learn more about the research, participation criteria, consent process to participate followed by 15 survey questions. Your answers will help the researcher determine what may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students at our school.

Link to confidential research survey:
https://sdsueducation.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_bkH0q1sXEp1BnHn

The deadline to participate is in exactly 14 days from the date you received this email.

Person to Contact:
If you have any questions about the research, please contact the researcher, Vincent Pompei at 916-548-4909 or his dissertation chair and research supervisor, Doug Fisher, PhD at (619) 594-2507.
Dear Staff,

I have been asked to forward you this reminder from a researcher and doctoral candidate at San Diego State University. If you have already taken the online survey or have chosen not to participate, please disregard the message below.

As a reminder, our school was one of three selected to participate in a dissertation research study on California high schools that have comparably safer school climates for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students.

The researcher has already conducted confidential phone interviews with a few of our colleagues, and now full-time teaching staff who meet a certain criteria are being invited to participate by taking a confidential online survey with 15 questions. Answering the questions will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

Participation is completely confidential and voluntary. If you are willing to participate, please click the link below to learn more about the research, participation criteria, consent process to participate followed by 15 survey questions. Your answers will help the researcher determine what may have contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students at our school.

Link to confidential research survey: https://sdsueducation.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_bkHOq1sXEp1BnHn

The deadline to participate is in exactly 7 days from the date you received this email.

Person to Contact:
If you have any questions about the research, please contact the researcher, Vincent Pompei at 916-548-4909 or his dissertation chair and research supervisor, Doug Fisher, PhD at (619) 594-2507.
APPENDIX H
Institutional Review Board Approval

Expediting Approval
Reg: 45 CFR 46.110(6)(7) – minimal risk
Submit Report of Progress by: November 23, 2014

December 23, 2013

Student Researcher: Vincent Pompei
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Doug Fisher
Department: Educational Leadership
Contract/grant number: N/A
vIRB Number: 1553089

Re: Comparably Safer California Public High School Climates for LGBT Students

Dear Vincent Pompei:

The above referenced protocol was reviewed and approved as expedited in accordance with SDSU’s Assurance and federal requirements pertaining to human subjects protection within the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46). This approval applies to the conditions and procedures described in your protocol. Please notify the IRB office if your status as an SDSU-affiliate changes while conducting this research study (you are no longer an SDSU faculty member, staff member or student). This approval expires December 23, 2014.

- Please submit a Report of Progress by: 11/23/2014
- The following approved consent form(s) have been uploaded to your protocol file within the vIRB system, within the Supporting Documents section:
  - FINAL Consent form - Principal STAMPED expires 12.23.14.pdf

Waiver: 45 CFR 117(c)(2) - the requirement to obtain signature has been waived (not normally required outside research context) – for online survey portion ONLY.

Graduate Students: This notification may be used as documentation to register in Thesis 799A. Attach a hard copy of this notice to your Appointment of Thesis/Project Committee form prior to submitting the completed form to Graduate and Research Affairs - Student Services Division. For questions related to this correspondence, please contact the IRB office ((619) 594-6622 or e-mail irb@mail.sdsu.edu).
Sincerely,

Ramona Pérez
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Vicki Jakushokas
Research Affairs Analyst

Important information for ALL expedited and Full Committee studies:

Report of Progress:
Please note your expiration date. To request continued recruitment, data collection and/or data analyses, a Report of Progress must be submitted prior to the expiration date of your study. A lapse in approval requires that all research with human subjects be suspended until approval is obtained and may result in a temporary hold on funds, if your study is funded. The investigator will be out of compliance with federal regulation and university policy if human subjects continue to be involved in this project without a valid IRB approval.

The approved consent form has been uploaded to your protocol file within the vIRB system, within the Supporting Documents. This document bears the SDSU IRB's stamp of approval. Print a copy of this stamped form to use when documenting informed consent from research participants. Changes may not be made to the consent document without prior review and approval of the IRB. You are required to keep signed copies of the consent document for three years after your project has been completed or terminated.

To submit a request to extend IRB approval:
- log in to your WebPortal account and access the protocol
- On the protocol Main Page, click on "Progress Reports"
- under Protocol Maintenance and enter a report
- Once you have filled in your responses on the report form, click "submit".
- You should receive an automated email verifying IRB receipt of your Report of Progress.

REQUIREMENT! Within the description box of the Report of Progress form, indicate which, if any, consent form(s) you are requesting to renew. Refer to the Consent Form Development section of the protocol and provide the IRB with the specific file names and date(s) of upload of the consent document(s) you are requesting to renew.

Modifications:
If any changes to your study are planned, you must submit a modification request and receive IRB approval prior to the implementation of study changes. To submit a modification request, please follow the necessary steps below:
Modification steps:
- Access the protocol via the Webportal
  (https://sunspot.sdsu.edu/pls/webapp/web_menu.login/)
- Protocol main page click on "Modifications" to enter a report
- Once the report has been fill out completely, click “submit”
- Make sure to email the IRB (irb@mail.sdsu.edu) notifying them that a modification has been submitted.

Requirements:
- To document your modification in detail, access your currently approved protocol in the “Full Document Viewer.”
- Copy and paste the document into Word and use “track changes” to document revisions to your protocol.
- Save the file (Name_Modification_Date) and upload it to your protocol file.
- When approved by the IRB, this document will be the current version of your approved protocol.

Please note the following:

a) For studies requiring consent translation: The SDSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) does not verify the accuracy of the translated document. IRB approval of this document for use in subject recruitment is based on your assurance that the translated document reflects the content of the IRB approved English version of the document.

b) If recruitment will take place through an outside agency or organization, confirm with that institution that you have permission to conduct the study prior to initiation of any study activities.

c) Approval is contingent upon the completion of the SDSU human subjects tutorial (found at: http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~gra/login.php) by all members of the research team. This certification must be renewed every 2 years.

d) The SDSU IRB requires investigators to report any problems that arise during the course of an IRB approved research study. Serious adverse events or unanticipated problems that are life-threatening or have resulted in serious injury or death must be reported to the IRB immediately whenever possible or within at least 48 hours from the onset of the incident. All other problems must be reported to the SDSU IRB within 5 days. To complete and submit an adverse event report, go to the Protocol Main Menu, click on “Adverse Events” under “Protocol Maintenance” and follow the instructions. For more information and consultation, contact the IRB office directly via Email at: IRB@mail.sdsu.edu or telephone: 619-594-6622, Monday through Friday from 8:00AM to 4:00PM.
APPENDIX I

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for School Principals

1. Can you explain what the school policy is with regard to the student who is displaying bullying behavior? How strictly is this policy and procedure followed by a majority of the staff? All the time, most of the time, sometimes and hardly never, or never? Explain your answer by providing a few possible reasons why.

2. What is the school principal’s role in the policy and procedures with regard to a student who is demonstrating bullying type behavior? What other staff get involved and how so? Do you think this procedure has helped create a safer school climate for LGBT students?

3. Does your school and/or district have a comprehensive anti-bullying and harassment policy and procedures for staff to follow? If so, is the policy enumerated and include listed protected classes, such as sexual orientation and gender identity and expression? If there is a policy, was all staff provided training on the policy implementation? If there is a policy, how were students informed of the policy and how often are they reminded? Do you believe the policy and procedures has contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer? From your perception, please rate how significant the policy and procedure lead to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

4. Would you say that most of the school staff feel comfortable and understand how to effectively respond to anti-LGBT bullying or harassment? Do you think these responses have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer? If yes, how so? If no, why?

5. I understand your school has a Gay and Straight Alliance (GSA club). How do you think having such a club has improved feelings of safety among LGBT students? Can you provide specific examples? How supportive has your school leadership team been toward the existence of the GSA club? If supportive, please provide a few examples. From your perception, please rate how significant having a GSA club has led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

6. Are there any signs/posters on campus that clearly identify classrooms or offices as a safe space for LGBT students? Can you provide an estimated percentage of classrooms/offices that have these visible safe space signs? If so, do you feel this may have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer? Can you provide specific examples? From your perception, please rate how significant the these safe space signs/posters have lead to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.
7. What school-wide events, if any, have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer? Can you explain the events in detail, such as who requested them and who planned them? Please also provide examples of why these events may have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer? From your perception, please rate how significant these school-wide events have lead to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

8. From your perspective, is staff at this school supported by the school leadership team to teach inclusive curriculum that includes positive portrayals of openly LGBT individuals? If yes, in what content areas and grades? Please explain how this came about. Was it a request from the district, a parent, a staff member/s or some other reason? Do you believe teaching inclusive curriculum has contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer? If yes, how so? If no, why not? From your perception, please rate how significant teaching inclusive curriculum has led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

9. Has the district provided professional development to school leaders that included LGBT youth? If so, how often and who presented the training? Was it mandated training and if so, for who? Do you feel this may have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer at this school? If yes, how so?

10. Has your school staff received professional development that included LGBT youth? Were all staff or just some staff included? If yes, can you share the history of proving such staff training and explain who presents the training? Do you feel this may have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer at this school? If yes, how so? From your perception, please rate how significant the staff training lead to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

11. Change takes time, and I imagine creating a school climate for LGBT students at your school also took time. Can you share a brief timeline of the most significant efforts that most likely contributed to the comparably safer school climate for LGBT students today?

12. There are probably many factors that have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer. If I asked you to rank the ideas we have discussed thus far, what is the one that you feel most strongly contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students? Can you explain your answer with examples?

13. Is there anything I have not asked that you believe may have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer at this school? If so, please explain and provide examples.
Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for School Counselors

1. Does your school and/or district have a comprehensive anti-bullying and harassment policy and procedures for staff to follow? If so, is the policy enumerated and include listed protected classes, such as sexual orientation and gender identity and expression? If there is a policy, were all staff provided training on the policy implementation? If there is a policy, how were students informed of the policy and how often are they reminded? Do you believe the policy and procedures has contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer? If yes, how so? If no, why? From your perception, please rate how significant the policy and procedure lead to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

2. What is the school counselor’s role in the policy and procedures with regard to a student who is demonstrating bullying type behavior? What other staff get involved and how so? Do you feel that a majority of teaching staff follows this same policy and procedure and if so, why or why not? Do you think this procedure has helped create a safer school climate for LGBT students?

3. Explain the role of school counselors at this school site with regard to school climate and anti-bullying initiatives? Feel free to provide one or two examples of this that you feel most strongly contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students.

4. Would you say that most of the school staff feel comfortable and understand how to effectively respond to anti-LGBT bullying or harassment? Do you think these responses have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer? If yes, how so? If no, why?

5. I understand your school has a Gay and Straight Alliance (GSA club). How do you think having such a club has impacted feelings of safety among LGBT students? Can you provide specific examples? How supportive has your school leadership team been toward the existence of the GSA club? If supportive, please provide a few examples. From your perception, please rate how significant having a GSA club has led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

6. Are there any signs/posters on campus that clearly identify classrooms or offices as a safe space for LGBT students? Can you provide an estimated percentage of classrooms/offices that have these visible safe space signs? If so, do you feel this may have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer? If not, why? Can you provide specific examples? From your perception, please rate how significant these safe space signs/posters have led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.
7. To your knowledge, does staff teach inclusive curriculum that includes positive portrayals of openly LGBT individuals? If yes, please explain if these are isolated cases or if entire content areas plan and purposefully include these inclusive lessons throughout the school year. If yes, do you believe this has contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer? If yes, how so? From your perception, please rate how significant teaching inclusive curriculum has led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

8. Has your school staff received professional development that included LGBT youth? Were all staff or just some staff included? If yes, can you share the history of proving such staff training and explain who presents the training? Do you feel this may have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer at this school? If yes, how so? If no, why? From your perception, please rate how significant the staff training led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

9. What school-wide events, if any, have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer? Can you explain the events in detail, such as who requested them and who planned them? Please also provide examples of why these events may have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer? From your perception, please rate how significant these school-wide events have led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

10. Without mentioning names or giving any clue to true identities, including the gender, are there any openly LGBT staff at the school? Definition: Openly LGBT for purposes of this interview question mean that this staff member is open about being LGBT with all or a majority of the students and school staff. If so, would you say there are: 1) one; 2) two-three: 3) four-five: 4) six or more who are openly LGBT? If so, and again, without mentioning names or providing any clue to true identities, including their gender, explain how this may have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer at your school site? From your perception, please rate how significant having openly LGBT staff has lead to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

11. Have either the staff or students experienced barriers to creating a safer and more inclusive school climate for LGBT students? If so, can you share one-two and if and how those barriers were overcome?
12. How supportive do you believe the school principal is with regard to other staff advocating for the inclusion and safety of LGBT students? a) Very Supportive b) Somewhat Supportive c) Neutral d) Somewhat not supportive e) Not supportive at all. From your perception, please rate how significant school principal’s support has led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

13. There are probably many factors that have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer. If I asked you to rank the ideas we have discussed thus far, what is the one that you feel most strongly contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students? Can you explain your answer with examples?

14. Is there anything I have not asked that you believe may have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer at this school? If so, please explain and provide examples.
APPENDIX K

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for GSA Advisors

1. Does your school and/or district have a comprehensive anti-bullying and harassment policy and procedures for staff to follow? If so, is the policy enumerated and include listed protected classes, such as sexual orientation and gender identity and expression? If there is a policy, was all staff provided training on the policy implementation? If there is a policy, how were students informed of the policy and how often are they reminded? Do you believe the policy and procedures has contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer? If yes, how so? From your perception, please rate how significant the policy and procedure led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

2. What is the role of certificated staff in the policy and procedures with regard to a student who is demonstrating bullying type behavior? What other staff get involved and how so? Do you feel that a majority of teaching staff follows this same policy and procedure and if so, why? Do you think this procedure has helped create a safer school climate for LGBT students?

3. Explain the unique role of the GSA Advisor at this school site with regard to school climate and anti-bullying initiatives? Feel free to provide one or two examples of this that you feel most strongly contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students.

4. Would you say that most of the school staff feel comfortable and understand how to effectively respond to anti-LGBT bullying or harassment? Do you think these responses have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer? If yes, how so?

5. How do you think having a GSA Club has improved feelings of safety among LGBT students? Can you provide specific examples? How supportive has your other school leadership team been toward the existence of the GSA club? If supportive, please provide a few examples. From your perception, please rate how significant having a GSA club has led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

6. Are there any signs/posters on campus that clearly identify classrooms or offices as a safe space for LGBT students? Can you provide an estimated percentage of classrooms/offices that have these visible safe space signs? If so, do you feel this may have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer? Can you provide specific examples? From your perception, please rate how significant these safe
space signs/posters have led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

7. To your knowledge, does staff teach inclusive curriculum that includes positive portrayals of openly LGBT individuals? If yes, please explain if these are isolated cases or if entire content areas plan and purposefully include these inclusive lessons throughout the school year. If yes, do you believe this has contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer? If yes, how so? From your perception, please rate how significant teaching inclusive curriculum has led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

8. Has your school staff received professional development that included LGBT youth? Were all staff or just some staff included? If yes, can you share the history of proving such staff training and explain who presents the training? Do you feel this may have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer at this school? If yes, how so? From your perception, please rate how significant staff training led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

9. What school-wide events, if any, have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer? Can you explain the events in detail, such as who requested them and who planned them? Please also provide examples of why these events may have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer? From your perception, please rate how significant these school-wide events have led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

10. Without mentioning names or giving any clue to true identities, including the gender, are there any openly LGBT staff at the school? Definition: Openly LGBT for purposes of this interview question mean that this staff member is open about being LGBT with all or a majority of the students and school staff. If so, would you say there are: 1) one; 2) two-three; 3) four-five; 4) six or more who are openly LGBT? If so, and again, without mentioning names or providing any clue to true identities, including their gender, explain how this may have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer at your school site? From your perception, please rate how significant having openly LGBT staff has led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

11. Have either the staff or students experienced barriers to creating a safer and more inclusive school climate for LGBT students? If so, can you share one-two and if and how those barriers were overcome?
12. How supportive do you believe the school principal is with regard to other staff advocating for the inclusion and safety of LGBT students? a) Very Supportive b) Somewhat Supportive c) Neutral d) Somewhat not supportive e) Not supportive at all. From your perception, please rate how significant school principal’s support has led to LGBT students feeling comparably safer: 1) Very Significant 2) Somewhat Significant 3) Neutral 4) Somewhat Not Significant 5) Not Significant at all.

13. There are probably many factors that have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer. If I asked you to rank the ideas we have discussed thus far, what is the one that you feel most strongly contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students? Can you explain your answer with examples?

14. Is there anything I have not asked that you believe may have contributed to LGBT students feeling comparably safer at this school? If so, please explain and provide examples.
Dear Teaching Staff,

You are being invited to take part in a voluntary research study by answering 15 survey questions online. Whether you participate is completely up to you.

EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Research Study: Factors That May Have Contributed to a Comparably Safer School Climate for LGBT Students

Purpose of Research Study: The purpose of this Collective Case Study is to research three public high schools in California that have created comparably safer schools for LGBT youth. Phone interviews have already been conducted with your school’s principal, and two other full-time staff members. This study may help determine common themes and proven strategies that could potentially be replicated and initiated in other schools.

Criteria to Participate: Each teacher who is invited to participate in the online survey should meet the following criteria: 1) must be currently employed at the school full-time as a classroom teacher; 2) must have been employed full-time as a classroom teacher at the site for the entire 2012-2013 school year. If you do not meet the criteria listed above, please do not participate in this survey.

Procedure: If you agree to participate in this anonymous voluntary survey, you will be asked to answer 15 online survey questions using Likert-type and Yes or No responses. The questions will help the researcher determine what may have contributed to a comparably safer climate for LGBT students at your school.

Confidential: To further protect each participant of the online survey, the study will waive documentation via a signed consent form. The researcher will not collect any identifying information within the online survey, such as email address, name, IP address, etc. The online survey is being hosted on Qualtrics where data are secure and only summative information is available to the researcher. Participants will log in anonymously and the system will provide the researcher with summary statistics. Your employer will NOT know who participated and who didn’t.

Benefits: The results of this Collective Case Study may provide common themes among the three schools that could be shared and replicated in other schools that wish to create safer school climates for LGBT students. I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study.
Compensation: You will not receive any incentive to participate.

Expected Time: 5-10 minutes.

Risks: This research study will have minimal psychological risks or discomfort as a result of participating. Some individuals may feel uncomfortable answering questions related to sexual orientation, gender identity or school climate related issues. If you begin to feel uncomfortable, you may skip questions or discontinue participation, either temporarily or permanently.

Voluntary Nature of Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with San Diego State University and the school at which you are employed. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

Withdraw: If you wish, you may withdraw from this study at any time for any reason. If you wish to withdraw from the study, you may do so by closing your web browser. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all data provided by you (i.e., partial survey responses) will be destroyed.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, please contact: Vincent Pompei, Principal Investigator, Doctoral Student, College of Education, San Diego State University at (916) 548-4909; or Dr. Doug Fisher, Faculty Advisor and Professor, College of Education, San Diego State University by at (619) 594-2507.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Division of Research Administration San Diego State University (telephone: 619-594-6622; email: irb@mail.sdsu.edu).

If you agree to waive signed consent and wish to participate in this study, please select “Yes” below. Otherwise, please close this page.

☐ Yes, I agree to waive signed consent and wish to participate in this study.
Teacher Survey Questions

1. Do you currently have a safe space sign, sticker, placard or some other item that is clearly visible to indicate that your classroom is a safe space for LGBT students? Yes____ No____

2. Approximately how many lessons taught in your classroom in the past year have included a positive portrayal of an openly LGBT individual? 0____ 1____ 2-3____ 4 or more____

3. Compared to other clubs on campus, how active is the Gay and Straight Alliance at your school? 1. Much more active 2. More active 3. About the same 4. Less active 5. Much less active

4. Have you ever attended at least part of a GSA meeting or participated in a GSA planned event? Yes____ No____

5. If or when you witness homophobic or anti-LGBT bullying/harassment, how likely are you to respond? 1. Very likely 2. Likely 3. Neutral 4. Unlikely 5. Very Unlikely


10. How many times did you witness homophobic or anti-LGBT bullying/harassment at your school in the past 12 months? 0____ 1____ 2____ 3____ 4 or more____

11. What percentage of staff do you feel provide an affirming, inclusive and welcoming space for LGBT students? 1. 80%-100% 2. 60%-79% 3. 40%-59% 4. 20%-39% 5. 0%-19%
12. In the past two years, have you attended a professional development provided by the district or school that included how to best support LGBT students? Yes ____  No ____

13. How well do you understand your school’s anti-bullying policy and procedures?

14. Collectively, what percentage of students and staff would support having an openly LGBT teacher? 1. 80%-100%  2. 60%-79%  3. 40%-59%  4. 20%-39%  5. 0%-19%

15. How likely have the following contributed to a comparably safer school climate for LGBT students at this school? If any of the following do not apply to your school, please mark “Not applicable.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very likely</th>
<th>Somewhat likely</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat unlikely</th>
<th>Very unlikely</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Having a GSA club</td>
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<td>* Having professional development on LGBT students</td>
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<td>* Having multiple visible safe spaces for LGBT students on campus</td>
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<td>* Having an anti-bullying policy that includes sexual orientation, gender identity/expression</td>
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<td>* Having inclusive curriculum that includes the positive portrayal of LGBT individuals</td>
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<td>* Having LGBT supportive school administration</td>
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<td>* Having school-wide events that promote LGBT inclusion</td>
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