

## **Supporting Queer Youth in Schools**

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQ+) youth experience health and educational disparities compared to their heterosexual, cisgender peers. The 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, conducted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that LGBTQ+ high school students reported higher rates of being bullied, feeling sad or hopeless, seriously considering suicide, and experiencing sexual and physical dating violence (CDC, 2018; Jones et al., 2019). LGBTQ+ students who experience higher rates of victimization, are three times more likely to miss school due to feeling unsafe at or during their commute to school, have lower grade point averages, and are twice as likely to not plan to pursue post secondary education (Kosciw et al., 2018). School social workers, as a member of a multidisciplinary team within schools, can promote the improvement of school policies, procedures, environment, curriculum, and supports to better address the needs of LGBTQ+ students and families.

Part of the ongoing work of school social workers involves ongoing self reflection and education. LGBTQ+ students and families have expertise and their input should be centered when making decisions. After listening to the community and with guidance from the students and families, school social workers can take a tiered approach to provide universal, targeted, and intensive supports for LGBTQ students.

### **What Can School Social Workers Do To Support LGBTQ+ Students?**

- Read and educate themselves on the strengths and challenges of LGBTQ+ students
- Respect the expertise of LGBTQ+ students and families, listen to what they identify as the needs of the school community, and empower and support their advocacy
- Research the school district's harassment policy and see if sexual orientation and gender identity and expression are protected
- Act as a model for students and staff by sharing and asking for names and pronouns throughout the year
- Ensure that posters, books, curriculum, and language is inclusive and reflective of students' intersectional identities in all locations throughout the school
- Critique dress codes and other policies that attempt to regulate sex, gender, and sexuality and advocate for changes through discussions with students, staff, and families
- Review the school's sexuality education curriculum to see what messages and information regarding LGBTQ+ people and sexuality are or are not being given and be prepared to support students in accessing LGBTQ+ inclusive and affirming information that may be missing
- Advocate for the creation of accessible all gender restrooms and locker rooms
- Intervene when derogatory remarks or transphobic, homophobic, racist, sexist, ableist, or other offensive language is used and provide education as an alternative to exclusionary discipline
- Develop and support Genders and Sexualities Alliances (GSAs) and other social spaces
- Outreach to and collaborate with LGBTQ+ specific community based organizations

Students who attend schools with GSAs, inclusive curriculum, supportive school staff, and harassment policies that specifically protect sexual orientation and gender expression and identity were less likely to hear derogatory remarks, less likely to feel unsafe at school, and have a greater sense of school belonging (GLSEN, 2017). By working to implement these supports, school social workers create an educational environment that positively impacts academic, social, and emotional success.

*Source: SSWAA EBell 3/9/2020 (summary probably taken by or from Patrick Mulkern's article "Supporting Queer Youth in Schools Using an Multi Tiered Approach")*