A BEST PRACTICE: INCLUSIVE AND RESPECTFUL CURRICULUM FOR ALL STUDENTS

One way that educators can promote safer and respectful school environments is by developing lessons that avoid bias and that include positive representations of intersectional LGBTQ+ people, history, and events. For LGBTQ+ students, attending a school with an inclusive curriculum is related to less-hostile school experiences and increased feelings of connectedness to the school community. Inclusive curriculum benefits all students by promoting diversity and teaching them about the myriad of identities in their communities.

THEORY: CURRICULUM AS WINDOW AND MIRROR

Curriculum can serve as a mirror when it reflects individuals and their experiences back to themselves. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books. At the same time curriculum can serve as a window when it introduces and provides the opportunity to understand the experiences and perspectives of those who possess different identities. These windows can offer views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange.

Applied to LGBTQ+ inclusive curricular content, these mirrors and windows can help create a more positive environment and healthy self-concept for LGBTQ+ students while also raising the awareness of all students. Inclusive curriculum supports students' abilities to empathize, connect, and collaborate with a diverse group of peers, skills that are of increasing importance in our multicultural, global society.[1]

REFLECTION

How inclusive is my curriculum of LGBTQ+ people, history, and events?

How can I ensure that my lessons provide "mirrors" and "windows" for all my students?

LGBTQ+ INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM BENEFITS ALL STUDENTS BY:

- Exposing them to more inclusive and accurate accounts of history.
- Helping them have a better understanding of LGBTQ+ people.
- Encouraging them to question stereotypes about LGBTQ+ people.
- Promoting acceptance
- Validating their existence and experiences.
- Reinforcing their value and self-worth.
- Providing space for their voices.

[1] Rudine Sims Bishop, "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors," Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom 6, no. 3 (Summer 1990): ix–xi.

REFLECTION

- Who am I including from the LGBTQ+ community? What identities do they hold?
- What other pedagogical practices do I need to consider to make my classroom a safe, respectful, and inclusive learning space for all students?

ADVOCACY: ADDRESSING QUESTIONS AND PUSHBACK

Introducing LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum is most successful when it is part of a school-wide commitment to creating a supportive and respectful learning environment for every student. Whenever possible, school and district leaders should communicate this commitment proactively with educators and families through professional learning, curriculum communications, family nights, or back-to-school events. Sharing expectations early helps build understanding, answer questions, and reinforce the school's commitment to ensuring that every student feels valued and represented.

Schools should also be prepared to explain how inclusive curriculum supports their educational mission, aligns with district policies, and, where applicable, meets state or local requirements. Framing LGBTQ+ inclusion as part of providing an accurate, age-appropriate education helps families understand that these lessons prepare students to learn, work, and thrive in a diverse society.

The following talking points may be helpful when discussing LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum with families, colleagues, or community members:

- Inclusive curriculum helps students develop respect, empathy, and an understanding of the diverse people, families, and communities that make up our world.
- All students benefit from learning in environments where differences are acknowledged with respect and every student has the opportunity to experience belonging.
- Age-appropriate conversations about identity, families, and community help students build understanding, reduce bias, and strengthen relationships with their peers.
- Inclusive curriculum reflects the lived experiences of many students, families, educators, and community members, including those who identify as LGBTQ+.
- Representation matters. When students see themselves and others reflected in what they learn, they are more likely to feel engaged, valued, and connected to school.
- Research consistently shows that LGBTQ+ students experience stronger academic, social, and mental health outcomes in schools where they feel represented and supported, contributing to a more positive school climate for everyone.

School leaders play an important role in responding to families' questions with openness, transparency, and respect. Many questions come from a desire to better understand what students will be learning. Creating opportunities for dialogue through curriculum nights, family information sessions, panel discussions, or community conversations can build trust, address misconceptions, and reinforce the school's commitment to supporting every student's learning.

Example statement from school leadership:

"Our school is committed to providing age-appropriate, developmentally appropriate learning experiences that reflect the identities and experiences of our community and prepare students to engage respectfully with others. Our goal is to foster a supportive and respectful learning environment where every student feels valued and has the opportunity to learn. ***We welcome your questions and look forward to partnering with you throughout the school year to support every student's learning and well-being.****"*

PLANNING: REPRESENTATION THROUGHOUT THE CURRICULUM

As educators plan instruction, they can review their curriculum to identify where LGBTQ+ people, perspectives, and experiences are already present or naturally connect to the content being taught. This process helps identify opportunities to broaden representation, address gaps, and ensure students encounter a more complete and accurate understanding of history, literature, science, the arts, and society.

Meaningful representation does not require creating entirely new lessons. LGBTQ+ people, history, and contributions can often be integrated into existing units and discussions in authentic, age-appropriate ways. Teaching about identity, belonging, and the diversity of people and families supports students' social and emotional development while helping them better understand themselves and the world around them. Students benefit from opportunities to reflect on their own identities, appreciate the identities and experiences of others, and recognize that families, communities, and lived experiences are diverse and all deserve dignity and respect.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL): DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Inclusive social and emotional learning helps students develop self-awareness, empathy, respect for others, and an appreciation for the diversity of people, families, and communities.

Early Elementary (Grades K–2)

Help students recognize and celebrate the many ways families, identities, and communities are unique. Include examples of diverse family structures, including LGBTQ+-headed families, in classroom materials and discussions. Encourage conversations about identity, belonging, kindness, and challenging gender stereotypes through inclusive read-alouds and activities such as Glisten's Ready, Set, Respect! toolkit.

Upper Elementary (Grades 3–5)

As students develop a stronger sense of identity and community, create opportunities for them to explore identity, belonging, and respect for differences. Glisten's Rainbow Library lessons for grades 3–5 use literature to help students build empathy, examine diverse experiences, and recognize that every person and family deserves dignity and respect.

Middle School (Grades 6–8)

As students develop a stronger sense of identity and navigate increasingly complex social relationships, provide opportunities to build empathy, practice perspective-taking, and strengthen respectful communication. Resources such as Tanenbaum's Showing Empathy lesson help students explore how understanding another person's experiences and emotions can foster stronger relationships, reduce bias, and contribute to more supportive and respectful school communities.

High School (Grades 9–12)

High school students are ready to engage in deeper conversations about identity, belonging, advocacy, and creating inclusive communities. Glisten's Inclusive Lesson Plans provide opportunities for students to examine LGBTQ+ history and experiences, explore the importance of self-identification, and consider how they can contribute to respectful and inclusive schools and communities.

SCIENCE & SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION

Science helps students develop a deeper understanding of the natural world through curiosity, critical thinking, and evidence-based inquiry. Inclusive science instruction reflects the complexity and diversity found throughout the natural world and within humanity, helping students develop a more complete and accurate understanding of the world around them. As students explore biology, human development, and health, educators can use precise, age-appropriate language that distinguishes between concepts such as biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression while recognizing that each contributes to our understanding of human development and lived experiences.

Elementary (Grades K–5)

Students can explore informational texts about plants, animals, and ecosystems that highlight the diversity found in nature, including different family structures, life cycles, and reproductive strategies. In health education, age-appropriate conversations about bodies, identity, and respect should reflect the diversity of students and families. Resources such as Introducing Gender: Boys, Girls, and More from the Gender Inclusive Schools (GIS) program provide developmentally appropriate activities that help students explore gender, challenge stereotypes, and build understanding and respect for themselves and others.

Middle School (Grades 6–8)

As students study human development, genetics, and body systems, educators can use accurate, inclusive language and resources, such as Glisten's Gender Triangle, to distinguish between biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression. Lessons on healthy relationships, boundaries, and consent should include examples that reflect the diversity of students and families.

High School (Grades 9–12)

As students engage with biology, genetics, evolution, and health, educators can incorporate examples that reflect the diversity of human experiences and family structures. LGBTQ+ scientists and innovators, such as Alan Turing and Sally Ride, can be included when their contributions naturally connect to the curriculum. In sexual health education, educators should provide medically accurate, age-appropriate information using inclusive language and examples that reflect the diversity of students' identities, relationships, and experiences. Resources such as Healthy Teen Network's Gender, Sexuality, & Inclusive Sex Education offer practical strategies for creating learning environments where all students feel represented and equipped to make informed decisions about their health and well-being.

COMMON CORE: CONNECTING CURRICULUM TO STANDARDS

Implementation of the Common Core State Standards is one way that many states and school districts are making efforts to ensure a quality education for all students. The examples below demonstrate how an examination of the standards can lead to locating multiple opportunities for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ related content across all disciplines including Mathematics, English Language Arts, History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. Many standards also pair well with all of the examples in the section above.

Common Core Standards are written for two separate categories, 1) Mathematics and 2) English Language Arts, which includes standards for literacy across all other content areas. The resources below are written into three sections for user ease, separating the literacy standards into separate categories. Each example suggests a standard that is most relevant to a lesson plan, however the lessons are meant to be adaptable to a variety of standards or outcomes, for use at any time in the school year. Decisions about alignment to curriculum and student needs are of course, up for teacher review and changes. For state level specifics, please refer to each state's standards.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (ELA)

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, Writing & Reading
Common Core Standards: Various

Suggested LGBTQ+ Inclusive Learning Opportunity:

- *Glisten's Ready, Set, Respect!*: Glisten's elementary toolkit has common-core aligned lessons that focus on name-calling, bullying and bias, LGBTQ+ inclusive family diversity and gender roles and diversity. The digital version is free for download.
- *Reading the Rainbow: LGBTQ+ Inclusive Literacy in the Elementary Classroom*: This book offers approaches, examples, and resources for inclusive literacy instruction in the elementary classroom including how to talk with parents and administrators, classroom examples, and more.

MIDDLE SCHOOL, Writing
Common Core Standard: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content

Suggested LGBTQ+ Inclusive Learning Opportunity:

- Glisten's LGBTQ+ History Timeline Lesson facilitates a much needed discussion about the erasure of LGBTQ+ history in what is considered American history, and the value of critical thinking in history classes. After examining the LGBTQ+ visibility (or invisibility) in their current history curriculum or textbooks, students write informative newspaper articles to highlight the stories of LGBTQ+ leaders.

HIGH SCHOOL, Writing
Common Core Standard: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Suggested LGBTQ+ Inclusive Learning Opportunity:

- Students use Glisten's National School Climate Survey to examine LGBTQ+ student experiences at school. Teachers lead students through generating their own questions from the data. Then, students create a data chart with the survey data in one column and matching/contrasting claims from at least two outside sources in adjacent columns. The outside sources requirement offers a fruitful opportunity for students to gather data in their own school community through informal interviews or surveys. Students then write a synthesis statement explaining what the combined evidence suggests. Finally, students write a proposal to school leadership answering: what does the data show, what does their school already do well, and what could their school do better to ensure an inclusive and respectful climate for all students?

MIDDLE SCHOOL, Reading

Common Core Standard: Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

Suggested LGBTQ+ Inclusive Learning Opportunity:

- **S**tudents read *Rabbit Chase* by Elizabeth LaPensée and create a storyboard/comic strip retelling by illustrating/sketching 4 - 6 key episodes in sequence, with captions describing the event and a thought / speech bubble showing the character's reaction or shift.

HIGH SCHOOL, Reading

Common Core Standard: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

Suggested LGBTQ+ Inclusive Learning Opportunity:

- Students read *Simon vs. the Homosapiens Agenda* by Becky Albertalli and watch the movie *Love, Simon*. Students conduct a Relationship-to-Belief Timeline (or other character study). Students create a timeline of 5- 6 key moments in Simon's character arc. For each moment, students note: 1) the *relationship or interaction* that triggered a change, 2) the *internal shift* in belief or choice that resulted, and 3) a brief description connecting each timeline moment to the overall themes.

LITERACY IN HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES, SCIENCE, AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, History/Social Studies
Common Core Standard: Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect.

Suggested LGBTQ-Inclusive Learning Opportunity:

- Students learn about critical events in LGBTQ History through exploring read-aloud books such as *Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag* by Rob Sanders (Grades 1-3) or *The Stonewall Riots: Coming Out in the Streets* by Gayle E. Pitman (Grades 4-6) and charting them in a timeline format.

MIDDLE SCHOOL, History/Social Studies
Common Core Standard: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

Suggested LGBTQ+ Inclusive Learning Opportunity:

- Students listen to, read, and analyze the primary sources of individuals who bore witness to or helped shape LGBTQ+ history in our country, citing specific evidence to support their analysis. Find inclusive oral histories by searching for national oral history or preservation projects like Storycorps, or local oral history and preservation projects at local museum websites, local libraries, and local LGBTQ+ organizations. Some examples include The Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum in New Mexico and The LGBTQ History Project from the Center on Colfax in Colorado

HIGH SCHOOL, History/Social Studies
Common Core Standard: Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

Suggested LGBTQ+ Inclusive Learning Opportunity:

- Students compare and contrast primary and secondary sources from The Stonewall Riots, jigsaw, and analyze. Students divide into two groups, one reading a primary source like Gay Power Comes to Sheridan Square - The Village Voice and the other group reading a secondary source like Stonewall Riots: What Happened at the 1969 Uprising -History.com. Each small group becomes an "expert" on one source, and collaboratively charts: What does this source say caused/characterized the riot? What's its tone/perspective? What's included or left out? Then, students complete a Gallery walk or other share out to compare charts. Finally, students write a synthesis paragraph answering: What's the fullest picture of why Stonewall happened and why it mattered to those taking action?

MATHEMATICS

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Common Core Standard: Use multiplication and division within 100 to solve word problems in situations involving equal groups, arrays, and measurement quantities.

Suggested LGBTQ+ Inclusive Learning Opportunity:

- Ensure that word problems are inclusive, and use this opportunity to highlight diversity in names, gender, and family structure. For example, “Anqelique and her moms bought fifteen apples from the market.” or “Miguel and his dads love to draw with chalk.” “Rene had 5 apples. They gave away 2, now how many do they have?” Consider the activities that are highlighted and use this as an opportunity to explore a range of gender expression and activities. Encourage students to write story problems with characters who break gender stereotypes, and have their peers solve them.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Common Core Standard: Statistics and Probability: Use random sampling to draw inferences about a population. Understand that statistics can be used to gain information about a population by examining a sample of the population; generalizations about a population from a sample are valid only if the sample is representative of that population.

Suggested LGBTQ+ Inclusive Learning Opportunity:

- Share sample statistics from Glisten’s National School Climate Survey to show how researchers use a sample to draw inferences about a larger population, using LGBTQ+ student experiences as the context. Then have students design and conduct their own random sample (e.g., surveying a subset of classmates or grade levels) and draw inferences about the whole school population, evaluating whether their sample was representative.

High School

Common Core Standard: Statistics and Probability Interpreting Categorical and Quantitative Data: Summarize, represent, and interpret data on a single count or measurement variable. Summarize, represent, and interpret data on two categorical and quantitative variables.

Suggested LGBTQ+ Inclusive Learning Opportunity:

- Have students analyze LGBTQ+ demographic data from Glisten’s National School Climate Survey’s executive summary and graphics, then work in small groups to summarize and represent one variable (e.g., GSAs, inclusive curriculum, policies) using an appropriate chart or graph, and interpret what the data reveals about national trends.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **Inclusive Curriculum Lessons**: All of Glisten's resources and lesson plans for inclusive curriculum can be found at glisten.org/resources/inclusive-lesson-plans/
- **Changing the Game**: Resources that center sports, play, and movement can be found at glisten.org/campaigns/changing-the-game/
- **GSA/ Affinity Club Resources**: Find more activities and discussion topics at glisten.org/resources/complete-gsa-kit/
- **Days of Action/ Campaigns**: Materials and resources to activate your school at glisten.org/campaigns/
- **Learning for Justice:** Resources and lesson plans for inclusive curriculum can be found at splcenter.org/learning-for-justice/