The 2025 National School Climate Survey

School Experiences of LGBTQ+ Youth in the U.S.

In the 13th National School Climate Survey, we hear from students who are navigating K–12 with courage, creativity, exhaustion, and joy. LGBTQ+ youth, including intersex, asexual, and Two-Spirit students, are whole people with complex lives that defy the tired boxes of "victim" or "leader" that they are so often placed into.

We updated our survey based on feedback from our National Student Council and Glisten-affiliated youth. Between April–October 2024, 2,800 LGBTQ+ students across the U.S. responded to the survey about their 2023–2024 school year. We also organized focus groups in June–July 2025 with 36 students who were either under-represented in national LGBTQ+ research or in our own sample.

Key Findings

- Youth reported that their school climate felt more hostile during the 2024–2025 school year due to an anti-LGBTQ+ political climate.
- Only 1 in 3 LGBTQ+ participants "frequently" or "often" look forward to school.
- 2 in 3 students reported feeling unsafe due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.
- 86% of trans and gender-expansive students avoided certain school areas, and 48% of BIPOC LGBTQ+ students faced harassment due to race or ethnicity.
- 62% of students experienced verbal, physical, or online harassment/assault because of their sexual orientation; 68% reported the same due to their gender identity or expression.
- 53% of respondents said they faced LGBTQ+ related discrimination, such as being prevented from using a locker room consistent with their gender.
- Within our focus groups, transfemme students experienced both unclear policies and weak implementation, intersex students reported harmful representation in sex-ed, and Black LGBTQ+ participants often felt disconnected from GSAs.
- LGBTQ+ students with more supportive educators, anti-bullying policies that explicitly mention sexual orientation and gender identity, LGBTQ+ inclusive learning, and GSA presence report a higher sense of belonging and higher GPAs. Those students are also less likely to miss school due to feeling unsafe.
- Youth emphasized the importance of peer connections and friendships in their schools.

Faced with such difficulties, we asked our focus group participants one crucial question: **What can my school do to be more safe and affirming?** And they had a common response: schools need to support them in concrete ways. This means (1) taking reports of bullying seriously, and addressing it through responsibility and repair; (2) teaching subjects like sex ed in ways that are inclusive and respectful of trans and intersex bodies; and (3) highlighting queer lives across all subjects. Safety is not just the absence of harm; it is active affirmation.

At a moment when young people's identities are being debated and restricted, this study speaks truth to a menacing power. We share this to make space for their brilliance and their dreams. To educators, families, and policymakers: LGBTQ+ students are telling us what they need. The question is whether we are willing to listen and to build schools that don't just tolerate them, but actively affirm and protect their right to learn and belong.



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