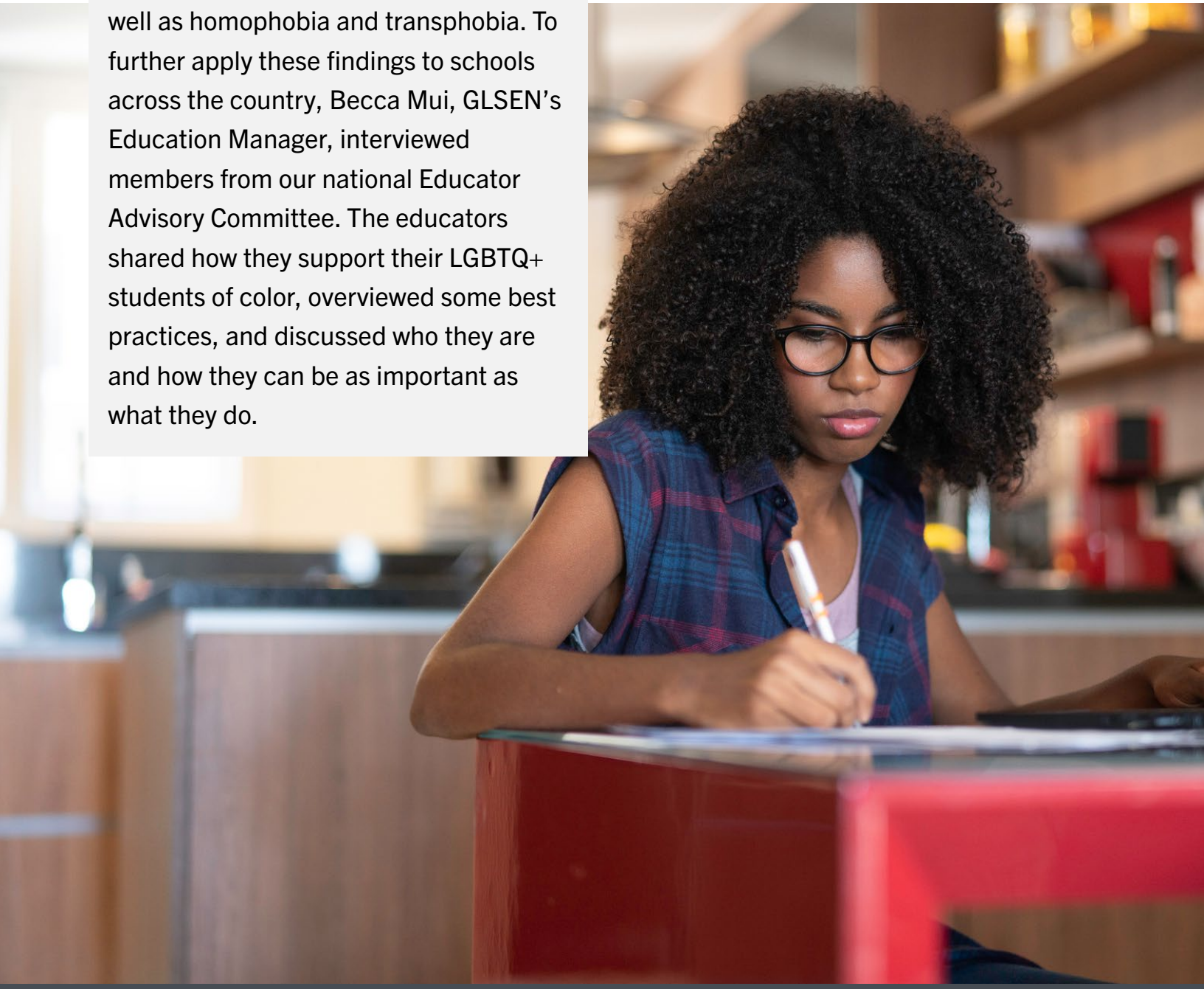
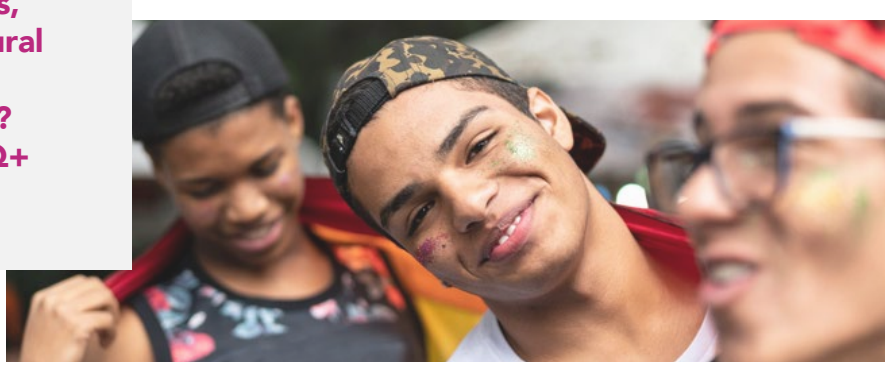
GLSEN

Supporting LGBTQ+ Students of Color

GLSEN's recent research reports on LGBTQ+ Youth of Color highlight the importance of school-based supports that address students facing racism as well as homophobia and transphobia. To further apply these findings to schools across the country, Becca Mui, GLSEN's Education Manager, interviewed members from our national Educator Advisory Committee. The educators shared how they support their LGBTQ+ students of color, overviewed some best practices, and discussed who they are and how they can be as important as what they do.



Our YoC reports showed that student clubs, including LGBTQ+-focused and ethnic/cultural clubs, are important supports for LGBTQ+ students of color. Do you have these clubs? How do they reach and support the LGBTQ+ youth of color in your school?



Our campus is located in the southside of San Antonio, Texas — a predominantly Latinx area. We take pride in our community and have cultural clubs such as Spanish and Art clubs that celebrate our heritage. Many of our GSA members attend these cultural clubs where they are encouraged to embrace their intersectional identities. Although we are a K-12 school, we are a close-knit family, and for this reason, we are able to collaborate to support our LGBTQ+ youth of color. For instance, we participate in each other's club meetings to show solidarity.

Additionally, it's been a priority since my first year teaching to make my classroom an inclusive safe space. This includes Safe Space posters, incorporating LGBTQ+ icons in lessons, and being 100% open with my kids about my identity. I want to acknowledge my privilege as a white-passing Latinx, and my abilities always require me to truthfully check that privilege. This allows me to bring up topics such as colorism in our community and how those of us who have white-passing privilege need to further elevate the voices of our YoC, and step aside when needed to. Furthermore, I value the beauty of Latinx culture and also understand the toxic traditions involved, like machismo. I get to bring my own experiences as queer Latinx from the border to empower our LGBTQ+ students of color, and provide them with resources that helped me get through challenges. I've learned that being real with my own struggles, as well as privileges, has been a huge support system altogether.
- Jessica

Our school is predominately made up of Latinx students that come from a Catholic household. Our LGBTQ+ students can struggle with these different aspects of their identity. They are often not out to their families due to conflicting views about being Catholic and part of the LGBTQ+ community. I started T.E.A. (The Equality Association) which is a club on campus that supports LGBTQ+ students and celebrates other aspects of a student's identity. Our club accepts all students and no one assumes you are LGBTQ+ because you are there. This club is an avenue for students to speak about their experiences. Since many of our students are not out, our club gives them a space they can go to but still keep their identity to themselves for now. This allows a range of students to attend without feeling like they are outing themselves.
- Antonella

GLSEN recommends Dignityusa.org for LGBTQ+ Catholic Advocacy Support and the LGBTQ+ Religion-based advocacy organizations listed in our blog The Need for Allyship in LGBTQ+ Faith-Based Communities.

In general, our reports showed a mistrust of educators and the school system by LGBTQ+ students of color, resulting in them being unlikely to report harassment. How do you work to combat this in your school or district? How do you include families in these discussions in a culturally responsive way?

Because I know LGBTQ+ youth of color are less likely to report harm or harassment from educators, students, and administrators, I try to approach students instead of waiting for them to come to me. I cannot take credit for this strategy. I was inspired by my transcestors, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, who created STAR, as well as Ms. Major who, provided health services in disadvantaged communities by bringing healthcare to them. I attend LGBTQ+ youth support groups and I travel to various GSAs around the school district to listen to the needs of students. I model vulnerability by sharing my story, I promise to keep their stories anonymous if possible when reporting, and I always allow students to determine how they feel comfortable moving forward. Most students don't want to "report" anyone; they want justice. They want someone to explain to the harasser why what they said was unacceptable. They want accountability. I am always there to assist based on their guidance.
- Kezia

Reporting can be scary. As an administrator, I have an anonymous tip line that goes only to my cell that is the avenue most kids use; the district has a link to report online. I also survey all kids twice a year through SurveyMonkey and I chat with different groups of kids to follow up. It takes everyone (staff, coaches, bus drivers, yard duty, families, etc.) to address issues that come up and oftentimes, it takes mindset shifts, especially in our community. Parent/family chats are scheduled so that we have information, discussion, and student input. Mental Health and LGBTQ+ conversations tend to be the most uncomfortable in my community so it takes a concentrated effort that links various agencies to the families directly. Relationships Matter! Educators, school systems, etc. have to build relationships in order to support students. Teaching, especially good teaching, requires relationships. It is important for leaders to reflect on our communities, who we SERVE, and how we best interact. This requires us to be vulnerable in acknowledging we do not know everything and being willing to ask, learn, and collaborate with others to best serve the kids/teens. We may not always culturally "match" our population, but when we come to the table to work together, it is important that we recognize our internal bias, how we reflect on that bias, work to overcome it, and ensure all kids have a safe and affirming place to learn. As a cisgender, straight female, I know that I do not have the experience that my LGBTQ+ students bring to the table. I acknowledge that, I take the time to learn, ask questions, and be open about my journey to this point. I do, however, bring a lens that experienced racism, gender identity bias, homelessness, multi ethnic cultures, neighborhood trauma, etc. I own my experiences, I am up front with those experiences and I seek out folks with other experiences to help me best serve my community. Until every kid is affirmed and feels safe, we all have a lot of work ahead of us.
- Amber

What message do you want to give to other educators who want to support their LGBTQ+ students of color? What best practices do you recommend?

Students deserve to have a safe and accepting environment to explore who they are, and schools should be this environment for our students. As a middle school teacher, I have seen students struggle with their identity at a young age. Refusing them acceptance is dangerous and a huge disservice. As educators, we need to provide resources and materials in our classrooms that represent our students. We should recognize how our curriculum primarily shows white, Christian, abled, straight, cisgender men and be creative in representing more diversity into our lessons. Best practices for educators working with LGBTQ+ students of color is giving your students agency. Ask your students of color what they want to learn about and how they can feel centered. Be sure to celebrate people of color in LGBTQ+ History month in October, and highlight LGBTQ+ leaders during Black History Month or Latinx Heritage Month to show connections between these communities. Recently, we had a GSA advisor arrange a Q & A of LGBTQ+ authors via Zoom that was open to all staff and teachers in the county. You can show solidarity with your LGBTQ+ students through the books in your class library or the posters you hang on the wall. Visibility is the first step to showing students how we think about them and their identities. Moments like these have to be intentional because they haven't been naturally woven into our education system. We also have to consider intersectionality when working with our LGBTQ+ students of color. They are likely facing racism as well as discrimination for their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. When they feel discriminated against on campus, give them a space so they can report it and be heard. Be that space if needed.
-Antonella

First and foremost, being an educator requires SO much for so little. Therefore, you know people who love working in education are true gems. My message is to keep being the empathetic heroes that our youth needs to shape our future into a more inclusive and equitable one. I believe some of the best practices are to uplift voices of LGBTQ+ youth of color in your classrooms, incorporate materials in your lesson that YoC can see themselves in, and to not make your classroom the only safe space. Connect and collaborate with your community to make your entire school a safe and welcoming space for our most vulnerable students. Always remember that whether our LGBTQ+ YoC are able to be visible or not, they should still be celebrated and supported.
-Jessica

Please listen to the needs of your students. Students are the experts of their own experiences. Don't wait for students to ask for help. Post resources and state affirmations freely and often. It is the educator's job to educate themselves about their own privileges as well as the oppressions and histories of the LGBTQ+ community. It is also the allied educator's job to educate and sometimes report other educators. Please take that burden off of students.
-Kezia

Don't be afraid to be vulnerable! Ensure your lessons include people from all backgrounds. Provide resources that mirror experiences they may be facing, find main characters in books that show different experiences. Most importantly to all of those who are not in the classroom, teachers and students rely on you to provide safe places for them! Don't be afraid to ask hard questions and sit with the uncomfortable data and then do something about it. We all hold a unique piece to the puzzle to make systematic change. We have to remember as leaders that it is our job to ensure all people that interact with the school feel safe, included, and accepted.
-Amber

I know that when students see me as a visibly genderqueer/trans, young, Black person, they see a possible future. They see what is possible after surviving harsh school environments or unaccepting families. They see a possible future as an educator who can dress in a way that affirms their gender. They see room in LGBTQ+ movements for people of color as well, and seeing is believing.
-Kezia

What can you do next to better support LGBTQ+ students of color?

- Research privilege and recognize the impact it can have on your students.
- Reflect on your own identities, privileges, and power.
- Consider the best practices and recommendations shared and determine which will work best for you and your students, now and in the future.
- De-center whiteness in LGBTQ+ history, inclusive curriculum, and visual representation.
- Connect your GSA to other identity-based clubs.
- Participate and/or advocate for both LGBTQ+ and anti-racist education training at your school.
- Share this resource with colleagues and administrators.
- Watch and share the entire webinar on Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth of Color.

Adapted from GLSEN Education Webinar featuring these panelists from our Educator Advisory Committee:

Jessica Alanis
She/Her/They/Them is a 7th Grade English Teacher and a GSA Advisor in San Antonio, TX.
Amber Andrade
She/Her/They/Them is a Middle School Principal in San Jose California.
Kezia Gilyard
They/Them, is the LGBTQ+ Coordinator for Broward County Public Schools in South Florida.
Antonella Makdessi
She/Her, is a Middle School Math Teacher from Florida & a Board member for GLSEN Tampa.

Resources for Additional Learning:

- Abolitionist Teaching in Action: Q&A with Bettina L. Love
- We Came to Learn: A Call to Action for Police-Free Schools
- The Black Organizing Project
- White Privilege Toolkit by Teaching Tolerance
- Understanding Race and Privilege by NASP
- 9 Things Every Educator Needs to Know When Teaching Black Students

GLSEN Resources:
You can find our research, resources, webinars, and blogs for LGBTQ+ Youth of Color at

- www.glsen.org/Black
- www.glsen.org/latinx
- www.glsen.org/aapi
- www.glsen.org/native

Find lessons on LGBTQ+ History like our LGBTQ+ History Timeline Lesson that asks students to consider what stories are being told in their textbooks, and our LGBTQ+ History cards that highlight QTBIPOC (Queer Trans Black Indigenous People of Color) icons and events.