



Supporting LGBTQ+ Students

Students identifying as LGBTQ+ⁱ have unique needs that some educators may struggle to understand and meet; however, supporting these students is a vital step towards achieving educational equity for all learners. While educators should not be involved in the development of student identities, educators need tools to respond appropriately to and support the ways in which students identify themselves.

Educators working to meet the needs of LGBTQ+ students may find it useful to consider their behaviors and dispositions in four areas – internal, interpersonal, instructional, and institutional.ⁱⁱ— and then seek to expand their professional skillset for supporting students in each of these four areas. This *In Brief* shares the kinds of strategies that educators can implement to support LGBTQ+ students in each of these four areas. A complementary *In Focus* details specific strategies.ⁱⁱⁱ

INTERNAL UNDERSTANDINGS

Educators who seek to support LGBTQ+ students may find it useful to begin by considering their own understandings, beliefs, and experiences related to sex, gender, and attraction orientation. Consider:

- Learning about the differences between and elements of sex, gender, and attraction orientation. You can begin with PSEA's *In Brief* or *In Focus* on this topic.
- Reflecting on your own identity and how it impacts you and your relationships, particularly in terms of sex, gender, and attraction orientation.
- Recognizing how gender impacts everyone, including all students.
- Collecting and analyzing information about how you interact with and respond to members of the LGBTQ+ community, and then seeking to understand your own responses.

INTERPERSONAL BEHAVIORS

Educators seeking to support LGBTQ+ students may find it useful to examine their own interactions, communications, and behaviors that are intentional and explicit (as opposed to those that are implicit and internal) toward and about LGBTQ+ people. Consider the following:

- Using gender inclusive language. This includes using language to reflect all gender identities and adopting names and pronouns that people ask you to use when referring to them.
- Setting expectations for supportive interactions and bully-free environments for all students, deliberately including students who identify as LGBTQ+.
- Modeling inclusive and gender affirming behaviors. This includes engaging all students, families, and colleagues in a professional and welcoming manner; avoiding gender binary grouping designations (*e.g.*, referring to *students* instead of *boys and girls*), and advocating for student rights as appropriate.

INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS

Educators seeking to build school environments to support all students, including those who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community, should consider instructional strategies designed to reflect LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Strategies in this area are most directly aligned to teaching and learning and include the curriculum, lesson plans, and instructional resources used by educators.

Educators must be aware of and follow all school and district policies and practices related to curriculum when considering any of the following strategies:

- Making the curriculum LGBTQ+ inclusive through targeted integrations within district policy such as supplementing lessons with information about prominent LGBTQ+ figures or histories.
- Using expert-developed, LGBTQ+ Inclusive lesson plans.
- Supporting your instruction with LGBTQ+ inclusive resources such as texts, posters, and media.

INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS

Institutional systems designed to support LGBTQ+ inclusivity focus on both a public-facing recognition of LGBTQ+ rights and identities and structural inclusivity for gender, sex, and orientation diversity. Consider:

- Creating recognition through [Safe Zones](#), Gender & Sexuality Alliances ([GSAs](#)), and/or [signage](#).
- Advocating for inclusive policies, forms/documents, and staff training.
- Learning about [legislation](#) that helps to protect all individuals from discrimination, including members of the LGBTQ+ community.
- Preparing for questions and concerns from stakeholders. [Welcoming Schools offers guidance](#) in this area.

SUMMARY

Creating a safe and LGBTQ+ inclusive environment to support all students occurs at various levels. The most effective plans include multi-level approaches. While this can seem overwhelming, educators can begin at the internal level and build up to inclusion at all four entry points.

For more Information

This *In Brief* is supported with an *In Focus* that examines more deeply how educators can support LGBTQ+ students. For additional learning, browse [PSEA's Center for Professional Learning](#), consider completing [PSEA'S LGBTQ microcredential](#) for Act 48 hours or affordable postgraduate credit, or contact Gina Gullo in PSEA's Education Services Division, GGullo@PSEA.org.

ⁱ LGBTQ+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (or Questioning), and others. This is further discussed at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-does-lgbtq-mean-5069804>.

ⁱⁱ These four entry points (internal, interpersonal, instructional, and institutional) are based on the Gender Inclusive Schools Framework shared by Gender Spectrum.org at <https://www.genderspectrum.org/articles/framework-for-gender-inclusive-schools> and summarized at <https://eagleforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Gender-Inclusive-Schools-Framework.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Information shared in this publication is based on evidence-based, scholarly resources. The opinions expressed in those publications may not reflect those of PSEA; however, PSEA maintains an inclusive stance towards all individuals as expressed in the [PSEA Diversity Equity and Inclusion Statement](#).