# Safe Place to Learn

Consequences of Harassment Based
on Actual or Perceived Sexual Orientation
and Gender Non-Conformity and Steps
for Making Schools Safer

A Report of the
California Safe Schools Coalition

and the
4-H Center for Youth Development,
University of California, Davis

*January, 2004*

California Safe
Schools Coalition

california
**safe
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coalition

4-H Center for
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CYD

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# Executive Summary

The problem of harassment in California schools on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity has been widely reported, but rarely studied. Despite the passage of the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act, which prohibits harassment and other forms of discrimination on the basis of actual and perceived sexual orientation and gender[1], the State of California until recently has not made any consistent attempt to measure such harassment and discrimination, and until now, the available data has not been analyzed.

This study, carried out by the California Safe Schools Coalition and the 4-H Center for Youth Development at the University of California, Davis, analyzes data from two sources. The 2001-2002 California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), designed by WestEd under a contract with the California Department of Education, is a state survey of student health risk and resilience factors and includes a question about harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. The 2003 Preventing School Harassment (PSH) survey, carried out by the California Safe Schools Coalition in partnership with Gay-Straight Alliance Network, is a more detailed examination of school climate and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender non-conformity.

## Major findings:

**1** Harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation is pervasive, according to the California Healthy Kids Survey.

- 7.5 percent of California students reported being harassed on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation. If the results of this large survey are extrapolated to the statewide population of middle and high school students, then **over 200,000 California students are the targets of this type of harassment every year.**

- Harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation is often a repeat occurrence. In the CHKS, **32 percent of students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation were harassed more than four times in the past twelve months.**

**2** Harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation has dangerous consequences for students, according to data from the California Healthy Kids Survey.

- Compared to students who were not harassed, students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are **more than three times as likely to carry a weapon to school; more than twice as likely to report depression** (feeling so sad and hopeless they stopped normal activities for two weeks), use methamphetamines, or use inhalants; and **more likely to report low grades**, to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, use other illicit drugs, or be victims of violence.

- Compared to students who were not harassed, students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are also **more than twice as likely to report seriously considering suicide** and more than twice as likely to report making a plan for suicide. They are **three times as likely to report missing school** in the last 30 days because they felt unsafe.

- Students who experienced harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation reported **weaker connections to school and community and weaker support from teachers and other adults**. For example, 59 percent of students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation agreed that "a teacher or adult at school listens to me when I have something to say," compared to 68 percent of other students. 62 percent of students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation agreed that "a teacher or adult at school believes that I will be a success," compared to 70 percent of other students.

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[1] California law prohibits discrimination and harassment based on gender, and defines gender as "a person's actual or perceived sex, and includes a person's perceived identity, appearance, or behavior, whether or not that identity, appearance, or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with the victim's sex at birth."

**3** School climates are unsafe for LGBT students, students perceived to be LGBT, and gender non-conforming students, according to the Preventing School Harassment survey.

- **91 percent** of students reported hearing students make negative comments based on sexual orientation. 44 percent reported hearing teachers or staff make negative comments based on sexual orientation.

- 46 percent of students said their schools were not safe for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students.

- **Two out of every three** students who identified as LGBT reported harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation.

- Many students reported harassment based on gender non-conformity and unsafe school climates for gender non-conforming students. 27 percent of students surveyed reported being harassed because they were "not masculine enough" or "not feminine enough." 53 percent of students said their schools were unsafe for "guys who aren't as masculine as other guys," and 34 percent said their schools were unsafe for "girls who aren't as feminine as other girls."

**4** Schools can take steps to improve safety and health for all students, according to the Preventing School Harassment survey.

Each of the following steps schools can take is related to a safer overall school climate, to lower rates of harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity, and to stronger student connections to school, community, teachers, and other adults.

Steps schools can take include:
- Establishing a harassment policy that specifically includes sexual orientation and gender, including gender identity, appearance and behavior and making sure students know about it;

- Training teachers and staff to intervene when they hear slurs and negative comments based on sexual orientation or gender presentation;

- Supporting the establishment of a Gay-Straight Alliance or similar club;

- Ensuring that students know where to go for information and support about sexual orientation and gender identity; and

- Introducing curriculum that includes LGBT people and information about sexual orientation and gender identity.

## Recommendations

Four years after the enactment of the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act, harassment and violence on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity are a persistent and prevalent problem in California schools. This problem has severe effects on individual students and profound implications for the overall educational climate. In order to ensure schools are safe places for **all** students to learn, sustained action is needed at the state and local levels.

- State policy makers must implement the recommendations of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's AB 537 Advisory Task Force Report, mandate training for all school staff and students, continue to update safe schools planning materials and trainings, and monitor school districts' compliance with state law.

- Local school officials and school administrators should ensure that all teachers and school staff are trained to prevent and respond to harassment, establish and publicize district policies prohibiting harassment based on sexual orientation and gender, and treat all forms of harassment and discrimination as serious and preventable.

- Teachers and school staff should respond to slurs and negative comments and share with students where to go for information about sexual orientation and gender identity.

- Parents, guardians, and community members should find out about how their schools respond to harassment and discrimination and speak out in favor of steps schools can take to improve safety.

- Students can speak out when they hear slurs or name-calling, find out about school harassment policies, and start or join a Gay-Straight Alliance or similar club that offers a safe haven and fights harassment and discrimination at school.

# A note on language

Every effort was made in this report to use clear and consistent language when discussing findings relating to sexual orientation and gender, within the constraints of the available data sources.

## California Healthy Kids Survey findings

- The CHKS does not ask students to identify their sexual orientation or their gender identity. It does ask students whether they were harassed "because you are gay or lesbian, or someone thought you were." This type of harassment affects all kinds of students, regardless of their actual sexual orientation. When discussing CHKS results, this report uses the phrase "harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation."

- The CHKS does not ask about harassment based on gender identity or non-conformity. (It does ask about harassment based on "your gender [being male or female]".) For that reason, our discussion of CHKS results only refers to harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and not harassment based on gender identity or gender non-conformity.

## Preventing School Harassment (PSH) survey findings

The PSH survey asked about students' own identities, their personal experiences of harassment, hearing negative comments (regardless of to whom the comments were directed), and their perceptions of others' safety.

- Students who identify as LGBT: In the PSH survey, students were asked their sexual orientation and could choose gay/lesbian, straight/heterosexual, bisexual, queer, questioning, or other. In a separate question on the PSH survey, students were asked their gender, and given the choices male, female, transgender, questioning, or other. Students who chose gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, or transgender on either question are referred to as LGBT students. These questions refer to students' identities and not their experiences of harassment.

- Students who identified as transgender: Because only one of the 634 respondents in the PSH survey identified as transgender, the PSH data does not allow us to draw separate conclusions about safety or harassment for students who identify as transgender.

- Harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation: The PSH asks students if they have experienced harassment "because you are gay, lesbian, or bisexual or someone thought you were." Students who experience this type of harassment may or may not personally identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. As with the CHKS, this type of harassment is referred to in the report as "harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation."

- Harassment based on gender non-conformity: The PSH asks students if they have experienced harassment "because you weren't 'masculine enough'" or "because you weren't 'feminine enough'." In the report, this is referred to as "harassment based on gender non-conformity."

- Negative comments based on sexual orientation: The survey asks if students have heard students, teachers, or staff make negative comments based on sexual orientation. There are referred to as "negative comments based on sexual orientation."

- Negative comments based on gender presentation: The PSH also asks if respondents have heard students or teachers or staff make negative comments based on "gender presentation." These are referred to in the report as "negative comments or slurs based on gender presentation."

- Perceptions of safety for LGBT students and others: In several separate questions, the PSH asks if respondents think their schools are safe for others, including LGBT students, students with LGBT parents, LGBT teachers and staff, and straight allies of LGBT students.

- Perceptions of safety based on gender non-conformity or safety for gender non-conforming students: The PSH asks whether respondents think their school is safe for "guys who are not as masculine as other guys," and "girls who are not as feminine as other girls." In the report, these answers are referred to as perceptions of safety based on gender non-conformity or safety for gender non-conforming students.

- School policies prohibiting harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender, including gender identity, appearance and behavior: The term "gender, including gender identity, appearance and behavior" is used in this report's recommendations, with the intention that school policies should be updated to reflect the broad definition of gender in state law.

# Introduction

*"I have experienced all forms of harassment and discrimination in school, from verbal and emotional to extreme violence. I have had my teachers join their students in mocking LGBT students… I have been hospitalized because I was beat so bad… it's a very, very hostile climate."*

— Sarah Stuebner, reporting to the California Senate Select Committee on School Safety, 2002

In October 1999, the State of California affirmed the right of all students to learn in a safe environment by passing the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000, which prohibits harassment and other forms of discrimination on the basis of actual and perceived sexual orientation and gender in California schools. California was one of the first states to protect students from discrimination and harassment on the basis of actual and perceived sexual orientation and gender, defined broadly to include gender identity, appearance, and behavior.

The California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act took effect on January 1, 2000. In April 2001, a task force convened by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction issued its recommendations for implementing the law to state and local decision makers. These recommendations included adopting and enforcing policies prohibiting discrimination and harassment, training all school personnel to prevent and respond to harassment and discrimination, providing guidance for students on how to report harassment and discrimination, and developing anti-bias education programs for students, among many others. To date, almost none of these recommendations have been implemented.

Despite passage of the law, students report that harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity continues. Anecdotal evidence from across California indicates that many educators and students are unaware of the law, many teachers and administrators have not been trained to prevent and respond to illegal harassment and discrimination, most students do not know how to file a complaint, school districts are responding to complaints in an inconsistent manner, and many districts are failing to address the issue entirely.

In an October 2002 public hearing of the California Senate Select Committee on School Safety, students, teachers, parents, researchers, and advocates from all over the state recounted stories of ongoing harassment and inadequate response from school authorities. In addition, a number of school districts have paid hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages to settle lawsuits by students claiming their schools failed to protect them from harassment, intimidation, and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity. More lawsuits continue to arise. In a sweeping April 2003 decision, the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that school officials could be held liable under the U.S. Constitution for failing to respond to incidents of harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation.[2]

A number of studies from around the U.S. as well as several community-based studies in California also point to an ongoing problem of harassment and violence that has severe consequences for students and schools. A 2001 report by Human Rights Watch documented pervasive violence and discrimination based on actual or perceived sexual orientation through in-depth interviews with 140 youth and 130 teachers nationwide. Studies in other states have documented elevated health and safety risks for students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, and found that the problem affects all students, regardless of their actual sexual orientation. A broad-based study in Seattle schools found that 80 percent of students harassed on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation were in fact heterosexual. (See Appendix 2 for more on other research.)

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[2] Flores v. Morgan High School District, 324 F.3d 1130 (9th Cir. 2003).

Despite the reports of ongoing harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity, until now there has been no comprehensive study of the severity of the problem in California, where more than one in eight of the nation's children are growing up. For this reason, the California Safe Schools Coalition launched a major statewide study of school safety and harassment in California, in partnership with the 4-H Center for Youth Development at the University of California, Davis, and with funding from the California Endowment, the Columbia Foundation, and the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund. The key data sources used were the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), the state health survey designed by WestEd under contract with the California Department of Education and administered by school districts, and the Preventing School Harassment (PSH) survey, administered by the California Safe Schools Coalition in partnership with Gay-Straight Alliance Network.

The CHKS is administered every year to hundreds of thousands of 7th, 9th, and 11th grade students in California schools. While the CHKS is designed to be representative of all students in each school district, its statewide results show very little difference in terms of student risk behaviors and attitudes from the California Student Survey, another state health survey designed to be representative of all students in the state. This study's analysis of CHKS data, with over 230,000 student respondents, is the largest ever study of school-based harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, including 26 times more students than any single previous study on the issue. This analysis is also the only statewide population-based survey of this issue in California.

The Preventing School Harassment (PSH) survey, a statewide survey administered both on paper and online, was open to all middle school and high school students in California but targeted LGBT students through outreach to Gay-Straight Alliance clubs, community organizations, and youth groups. The PSH survey was designed to explore in more detail the links between harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity, school climate, school policies and practices, and factors related to positive outcomes for students. The survey also provides new data about specific steps schools can take to change a hostile environment. By looking not just at victimization, but also at steps schools can take to change their environment, reduce harassment, and increase the resiliency of those students who are harassed, the survey results point the way to reforms that can improve safety and health for all students.

This study's analysis of CHKS data, with over 230,000 student respondents, is the largest ever study of school-based harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation.

# Major Finding One:

## Harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation is pervasive, according to the California Healthy Kids Survey.

The 2001-2002 version of the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) was the first to ask students whether they had been harassed or bullied at school based on each of the following: their race, ethnicity or national origin; their religion; their gender; their physical or mental disability; or their actual or perceived sexual orientation. The survey asked students how many times in the past year they had been bullied on school property and defined bullying as "being repeatedly shoved, hit, threatened, called mean names, teased in a way you didn't like, or had other unpleasant things done to you. It is not bullying when two students of about the same strength quarrel or fight." See Appendix 4 for the text of relevant CHKS questions. The results show that bias-motivated harassment in general and harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation is pervasive in California schools.

### Every year, over 200,000 students in middle school and high school are harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation.

In the 2001-2002 California Healthy Kids Survey, 7.5 percent, or 17,815 of 237,544 students surveyed, reported being harassed or bullied because they "are gay or lesbian or someone thought [they] were." If the results of this large survey are translated to California's total middle and high school enrollment, then *over 200,000* students are the targets of harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation every year.

### Harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation cuts across demographic groups.

Harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation is more common in middle school than in high school: 8.1 percent of 7th graders surveyed reported harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, compared to 7.3 percent of 9th graders and 6.1 percent of 11th graders. See Figure 1. African American, White, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander students reported higher rates of harassment than the statewide average of 7.5 percent. Latino and Asian students reported slightly lower rates of harassment than the statewide average. See Figure 2. Socioeconomic differences between harassed students and all other students appeared to be small. For example, 19 percent of students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation attended schools where at least half of the students qualify for free or reduced price lunch, compared to 22 percent of students overall. 10.5 percent of students who reported moving two or more times in the past year (often used as an indirect indicator of socioeconomic status) reported harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, compared to 7.5 percent of students overall.

*fig 1* Harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation is more frequent in middle school than high school
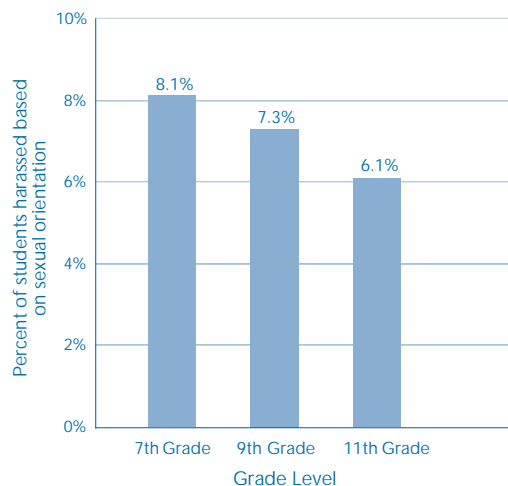


*fig 2* Harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation occurs in all racial and ethnic groups
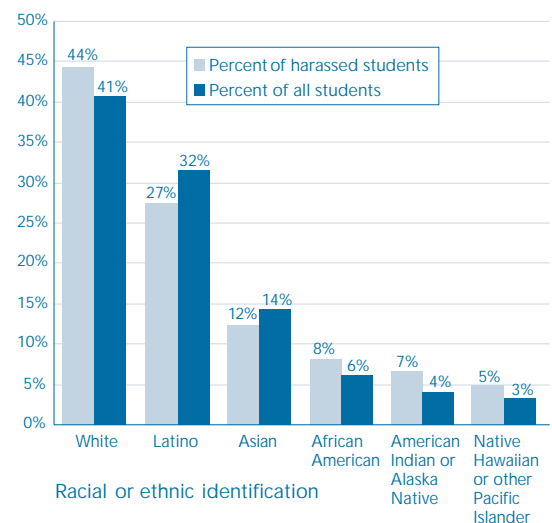
**Bias-related harassment of all types is far too common in California schools.**

While this study focuses on harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, the CHKS data make it clear that all types of bias-motivated harassment and bullying are significant problems with severe impacts for students. A greater number of students experience harassment based on race/ethnicity/national origin, gender, or religion than harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or physical or mental disability. See Table 1. At the same time, students who report harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or disability are more likely to experience repeated attacks. See Figure 3. Student who report harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or disability are also more likely to report negative health, safety, and academic outcomes.

Table 1: Bias-related harassment is prevalent

| Type of Harassment | Percentage of students |
| --- | --- |
| Any harassment | 37.4 |
| Any bias-related harassment: | 27.4 |
| Race, ethnicity, or national origin | 14.3 |
| Religion | 9.1 |
| Gender (male or female) | 10.3 |
| Actual or perceived sexual orientation | 7.5 |
| Physical or mental disability | 4.9 |
| Harassment for some other reason | 23.1 |
| Not harassed | 62.6 |

Students who report harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or disability are more likely to experience repeated attacks and more likely to report negative health, safety, and academic outcomes.

*fig 3* Victims of harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or disability are more likely to experience repeated attacks
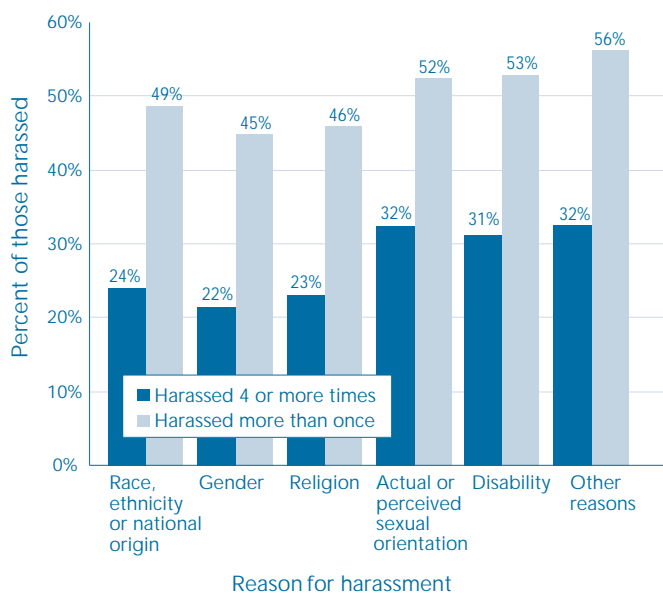
# Major Finding 2:

## Harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation has dangerous consequences for students, according to data from the California Healthy Kids Survey.

As a broad-based survey of student health, the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) asks students about a variety of health factors and risk behaviors, including substance use, violence, victimization, depression, suicidal thoughts, and missing school. The CHKS also asks about academic performance, support from teachers, friends and family, and connections to school and community. This report's analysis of CHKS data found that harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation is associated with much higher levels of health risk and lower levels of resilience. While this analysis cannot test direct cause and effect, it is much more likely that these health risks are consequences of harassment than precursors to harassment. See Table 2 on page 12 for detailed data on risk outcomes of bias-related harassment.

**Students who are harassed because they are gay or lesbian, or because someone thought they were, report higher levels of risk on a wide array of academic, health, and safety measures.**

- Low grades: 24 percent of students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation reported that their usual grades are Cs or lower, compared to 17 percent of students who were not harassed. See Figure 4.

- Missing school[3]: Although data on missing school are not directly comparable to data on other risk factors, students who were harassed on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation were more than three times as likely as students who were not harassed to miss at least one day of school in the last 30 days because they felt unsafe. See Figure 4.

- Depression: 55 percent of students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation reported feeling so sad and hopeless that they stopped doing usual activities for at least two weeks during the previous 12 months, compared to 23 percent of students who were not harassed. See Figure 5.

*fig 4* Students harassed based on sexual orientation are more likely to miss school and have low grades



Legend:
- Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation
- Students not harassed

Usual grades C's or below: 24%, 17%
Missed school in last 30 days because felt unsafe †: 27%, 7%

Type of Risk
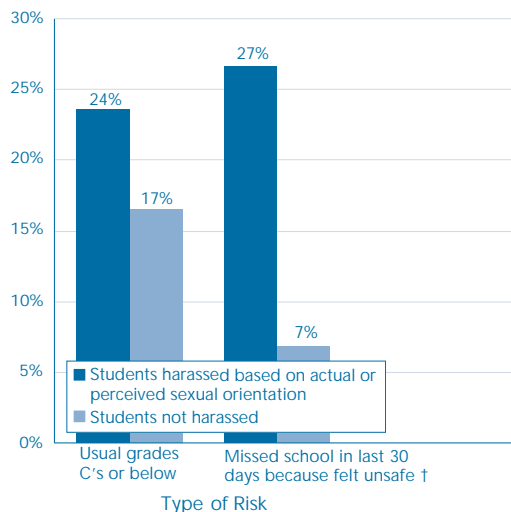
†Data on missing school are not directly comparable to data on low grades

*fig 5* Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are at greater risk for depression and suicide



Legend:
- Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation
- Students not harassed

Depression*: 55%, 23%
Seriously considered suicide†: 45%, 14%
Made a plan for suicide†: 35%, 9%

Type of risk
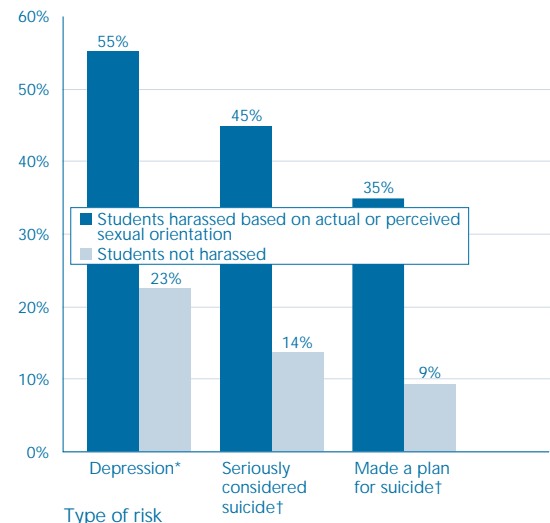
* For at least 2 weeks during the previous 12 months, felt so sad and hopeless that they stopped doing usual activities.
† Data on suicide are not directly comparable to data on depression.

[3] Data on missing school are not directly comparable to the data on other risk factors and resiliency. Questions about missing school are included in an optional module of the CHKS that is not administered in many schools. While approximately 235,000 students answered the question about harassment based on sexual orientation, only about 49,000 students answered the questions about missing school.

- Suicide[4]: Although data on suicide are not directly comparable to data on other risk factors, students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are more than three times as likely as students who were not harassed to seriously consider suicide, and more than three times as likely to make a plan for attempting suicide. See Figure 5.

- Substance use: Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation were much more likely than students who were not harassed to report smoking, drinking alcohol, binge drinking, marijuana use, amphetamine or methamphetamine use, and inhalant use. For example, students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation were more than twice as likely to use inhalants and nearly twice as likely to report binge drinking as students who were not harassed. See Figure 6.

- Victimization: Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation were more likely than students who were not harassed to report being threatened or injured with a weapon, to be a victim of relationship violence, and to have their property stolen or damaged. See Figure 7.

- Other risk behaviors: 19 percent of students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation carried a weapon to school in the last 12 months, compared to 5 percent of students who were not harassed. See Figure 7. 42 percent of students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation drove after drinking or rode with a driver who had been drinking, compared to 27 percent of students who were not harassed. See Figure 6.

*fig 6* Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are at greater risk for substance use

Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation
Students not harassed

Type of substance use or risk
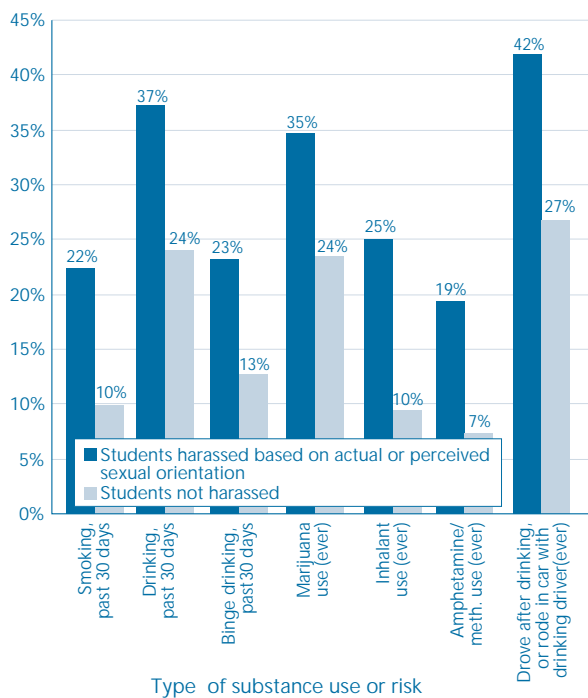
*fig 7* Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are more likely to be victimized and to carry weapons to school

Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation
Students not harassed

Type of risk
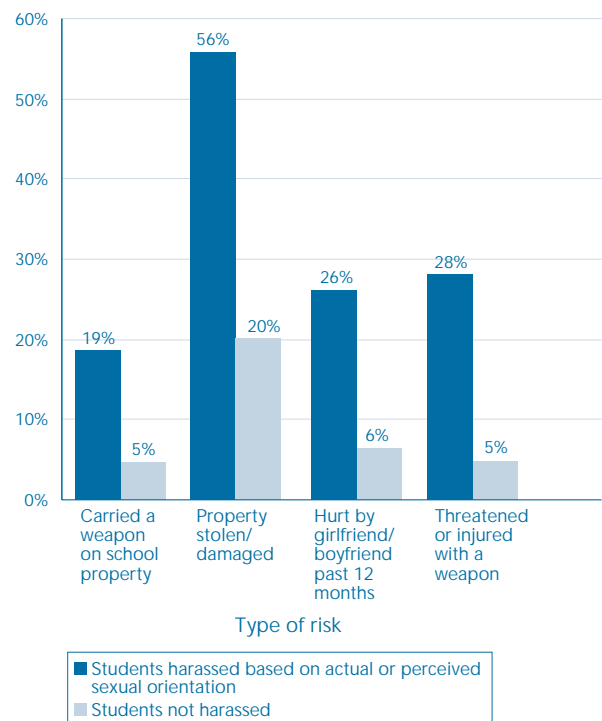
[4] The questions on suicide are also included in an optional module of the CHKS and not directly comparable to data on the other health risks discussed. Approximately 30,000 students answered the questions about considering suicide, and approximately 46,000 answered the question about planning suicide.

**Students who are harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation report weaker connections to school, adults, and community.**

Compared to other students, students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation reported fewer feelings of connections to their communities, schools, and to supportive adults; less support from teachers, family, and friends; and fewer resources for coping with problems. For example, 59 percent of students harassed based on sexual orientation agreed that "a teacher or adult at school listens to me when I have something to say," compared to 68 percent of other students. 62 percent of students harassed based on sexual orientation agreed that "a teacher or adult at school believes that I will be a success," compared to 70 percent of other students. See Figures 8, 9, and 10.

*fig 8* Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation have weaker connections to school and teachers
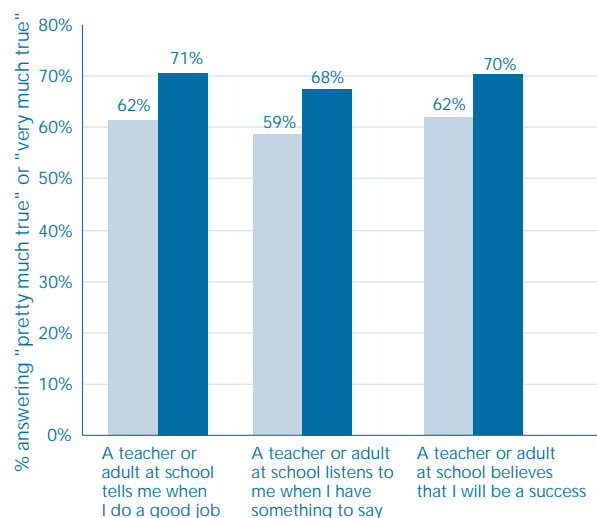


■ Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation
■ Students not harassed

*fig 9* Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation report less support at home
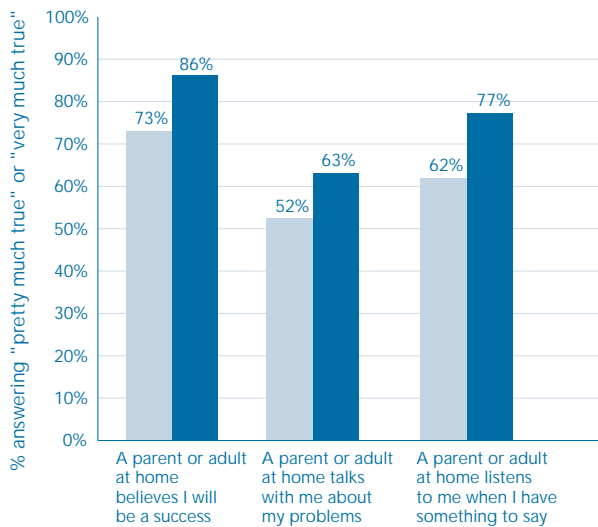


*fig 10* Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation have weaker connections to community and adults outside of home
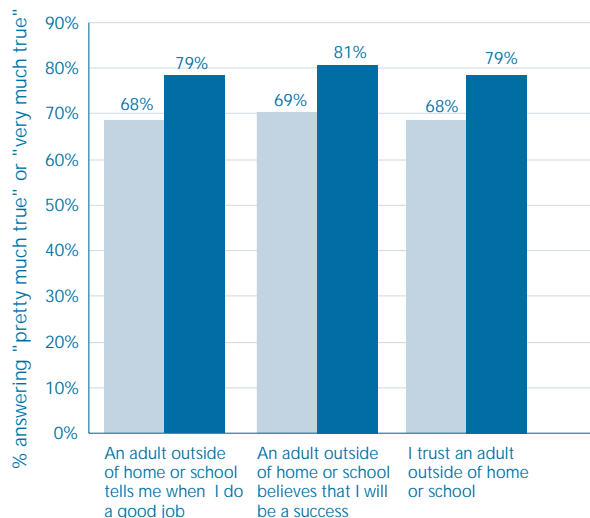
**Negative outcomes associated with harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are more severe than those connected to "non bias-related" bullying and harassment.**

Analysis of the CHKS reveals that the outcomes associated with harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are much more severe than outcomes associated with other harassment and bullying not based on race/ethnicity/national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. For example, students harassed based on sexual orientation were more than twice as likely to binge drink or smoke and more than four times as likely to bring a weapon to school than students who experienced "non bias-related" harassment.[5] In fact, students who experience "non bias-related" harassment reported levels of substance use and low grades that are nearly identical to students who were not harassed at all. See Figure 11. This data has important implications for educators and policy makers with limited resources to devote to school safety and student health. General anti-bullying efforts may be less effective than anti-bias efforts aimed at preventing harassment on specific bases, namely actual or perceived sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, religion, and physical or mental disability.

*fig 11* Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are at greater risk than students harassed for non-bias reasons
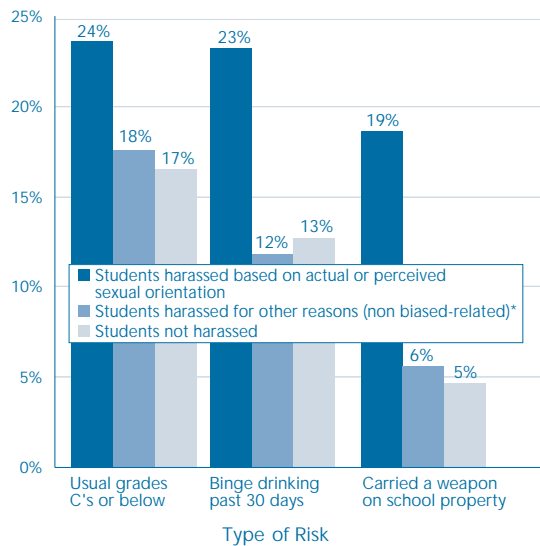


*Harassment for reasons other than race/ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability.

[5] "Non bias-related harassment" refers to harassment or bullying for reasons other than race/ethnicity/national origin, religion, gender, actual or perceived sexual orientation, or physical or mental disability. The CHKS does not ask about harassment based on other categories of bias, such as body size, socioeconomic status, or gender non-conformity.

## Table 2 Bias-related harassment and risk outcomes

| Outcome | Race, ethnicity, national origin | Religion | Gender | Sexual Orientation | Physical or mental disability | Other harassment (not bias-related) | Not harassed | Bias related harassment occurred 4 or more times | More than one type of harassment |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Grades and Attendance** | | | | | | | | | |
| Usual grades C's or below | 21% | 19% | 20% | 24% | 24% | 18% | 17% | 23% | 22% |
| Missed school because felt unsafe† | 22% | 24% | 24% | 27% | 32% | 11% | 7% | 26% | 27% |
| **Depression and Suicide** | | | | | | | | | |
| Depression* | 48% | 48% | 53% | 55% | 55% | 38% | 23% | 55% | 55% |
| Seriously considered suicide† (past 12 mos) | 28% | 31% | 38% | 45% | 41% | 24% | 14% | 38% | 38% |
| Made a plan for suicide† (past 12 mos) | 24% | 26% | 30% | 35% | 34% | 16% | 9% | 32% | 31% |
| **Substance Use** | | | | | | | | | |
| Smoking, past 30 days | 17% | 17% | 18% | 22% | 24% | 10% | 10% | 21% | 20% |
| Drinking alcohol, past 30 days | 33% | 30% | 36% | 37% | 39% | 25% | 24% | 36% | 35% |
| Binge drinking, past 30 days | 19% | 18% | 21% | 23% | 27% | 12% | 13% | 23% | 21% |
| Marijuana use (ever) | 30% | 27% | 30% | 35% | 36% | 22% | 24% | 34% | 31% |
| Inhalant use (ever) | 19% | 19% | 21% | 25% | 27% | 12% | 10% | 24% | 22% |
| Amphetamine/ methamphetamine use (ever) | 12% | 13% | 14% | 19% | 21% | 8% | 7% | 17% | 16% |
| **Risk Behaviors** | | | | | | | | | |
| Carried a weapon on school property (past 12 mos) | 14% | 16% | 14% | 19% | 28% | 6% | 5% | 19% | 18% |
| Drove after drinking, or rode in car with drinking driver (ever) | 37% | 34% | 41% | 42% | 44% | 31% | 30% | 40% | 39% |
| **Victimization** | | | | | | | | | |
| Been threatened or injured with a weapon (past 12 mos) | 23% | 24% | 23% | 28% | 35% | 10% | 5% | 30% | 28% |
| Property stolen/ damaged (past 12 mos) | 52% | 52% | 53% | 56% | 60% | 39% | 20% | 58% | 58% |
| Hurt by girlfriend/ boyfriend (past 12 mos) | 19% | 21% | 22% | 26% | 30% | 10% | 6% | 26% | 24% |

* For at least two weeks during the last 12 months, felt so sad and hopeless that they stopped doing usual activities.

† Not directly comparable to data on other risk factors. Questions on suicide and missing school were in an optional module of the CHKS and were not administered in all schools.

# Major Finding 3:

## School climates are unsafe for LGBT students, students perceived to be LGBT, and gender non-conforming students, according to the Preventing School Harassment survey.

The California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) is useful as a broad-based survey that reaches hundreds of thousands of students every year and examines a number of health risk and resilience factors in addition to harassment. However, it also has significant limitations. The CHKS does not examine school climate factors that may relate to harassment, like slurs and name-calling not directed at specific students. The CHKS also does not ask students' sexual orientation or gender identity, so its data do not reveal rates of harassment or other risk factors among lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) students. The Preventing School Harassment (PSH) survey was designed as an in-depth examination of school safety and harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity, and it found a number of ways in which school climates are hostile and unsafe. In order to get a deeper look at harassment, the PSH survey targeted LGBT students; 46 percent of its 634 respondents identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or transgender. See Appendix 1 for details on survey methodology, and Appendix 3 for the text of the survey.

### Unsafe school climates are common and are closely linked to harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation.

- General feelings of safety at school: Overall, 73 percent of students reported feeling safe at school, and 60 percent said it was "pretty much" or "very much" true that other students felt safe at their school. Students who identified as LGBT were less likely to report feeling safe at school and thinking others felt safe at school. Students who experienced harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation were also less likely to report feeling safe at school and thinking others felt safe at school. See Figure 12.

- Perceptions of LGBT safety at school: The PSH survey asked students whether their schools were safe for LGBT students, students with LGBT parents, LGBT teachers and staff, and straight allies of LGBT students. 46 percent of all students reported it was "not at all true" or "a little true" that their schools were safe for LGBT students. Students who identified as LGBT were less likely to report that their schools were safe for LGBT students, students with LGBT parents, LGBT teachers and staff, and straight allies of LGBT students. Students who had

*fig 12* General feelings of safety at school are weaker among LGBT students and students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation
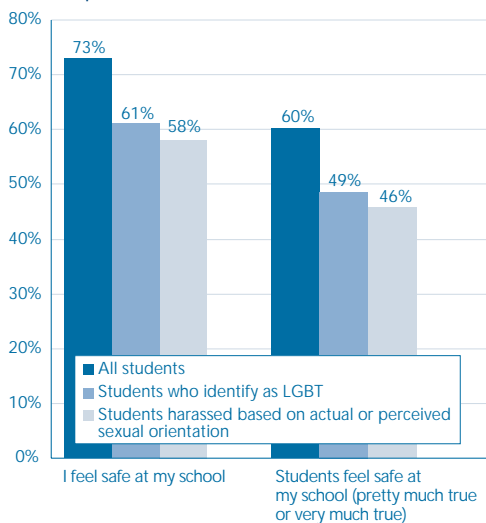
*fig 13* Perceptions of LGBT safety are weaker for LGBT students and students harassed based on sexual orientation

*pretty much true or very much true
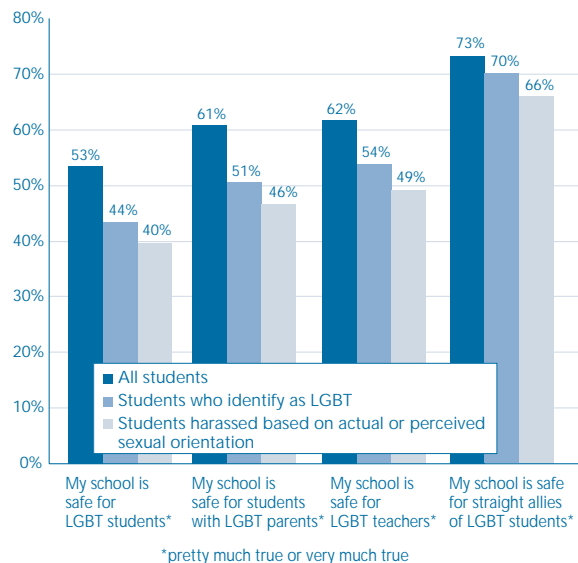
been harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation were even less likely to see their schools as safe for LGBT students, students with LGBT parents, LGBT teachers and staff, and straight allies. See Figure 13.

- Negative comments based on sexual orientation, by students and by teachers: 91 percent of students surveyed in the PSH said they have heard other students make negative remarks based on sexual orientation, and 79 percent heard these comments "sometimes" or "often". 44 percent said they have heard teachers or staff make negative remarks based on sexual orientation, and 16 percent heard these comments "sometimes" or "often". Students also reported that teachers or staff were unlikely to intervene and stop bias-motivated comments, particularly comments based on sexual orientation. See Figure 14. While 79 percent of students reported "sometimes" or "often" hearing students make negative comments based on sexual orientation, only 44 percent of students reported "sometimes" or "often" hearing teachers or staff stop those negative comments. There is a clear connection between these climate-setting comments and harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. For example, 90 percent of students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation reported "sometimes" or "often" hearing students make negative remarks based on sexual orientation, compared to 79 percent of students overall. 27 percent of students who were harassed on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation reported hearing teachers or staff make negative remarks based on sexual orientation sometimes or often, compared to 16 percent of students overall. See Figure 15.

- Two in three LGBT students report being harassed or bullied based on actual or perceived sexual orientation: 65 percent of LGBT students surveyed in the PSH were harassed or bullied based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. 47 percent of LGBT students experienced repeated harassment. In addition, substantial numbers of straight students experienced harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation.

91 percent of students surveyed in the PSH said they have heard other students make negative remarks based on sexual orientation, and 44 percent said they have heard teachers or staff make negative remarks based on sexual orientation.

*fig 14* Biased-related comments and teacher/staff response
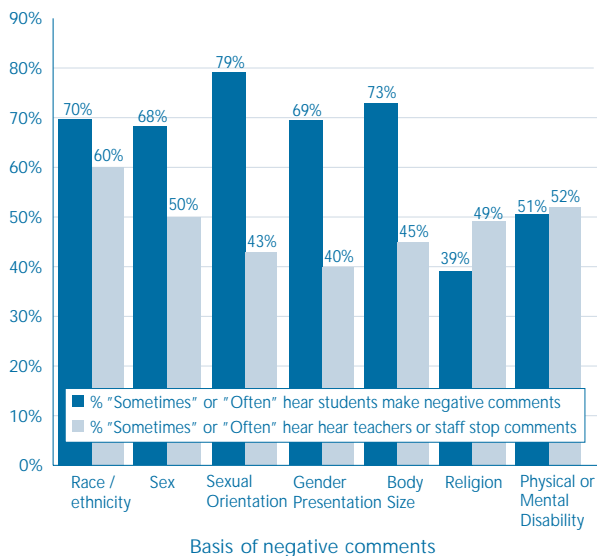


*fig 15* LGBT students and students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation report more slurs and less teacher intervention
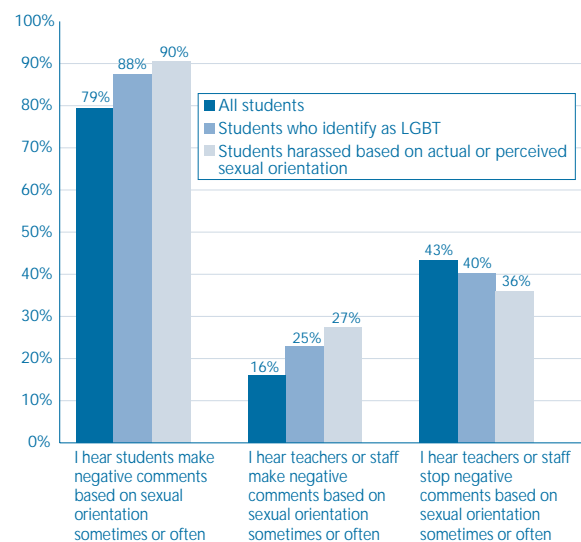
### Many students report unsafe school climates for gender non-conforming students.

The PSH survey breaks new ground by examining school safety and harassment based on gender non-conformity. The survey asked students if their schools were safe for "guys who are not as masculine as other guys" and for "girls who are not as feminine as other girls." It also asked students how often they heard students and teachers or staff make negative comments based on gender presentation, and how often they experienced harassment because they weren't "masculine enough" or "feminine enough." California law prohibits discrimination and harassment based on gender, and defines gender as including "identity, appearance, or behavior, whether or not that identity, appearance, or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with the person's sex at birth." Despite its prohibition by law, harassment based on gender non-conformity is common, according to the results of the PSH survey. The survey also shows that LGBT students are more likely to experience harassment based on gender non-conformity and less likely to feel their schools are safe for gender non-conforming students. In addition, the survey results show a link between safety and harassment based on gender non-conformity and harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation.

■ Harassment based on gender non-conformity: 27 percent of students surveyed, and 40 percent of LGBT students, reported being harassed because they weren't "masculine enough" or "feminine enough." Harassment based on gender non-conformity is clearly related to harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. 49 percent of students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation were also harassed for not being "masculine enough" or "feminine enough," compared to 27 percent of students overall. See Figure 16.

*fig 16* Harassment based on gender non-conformity is prevalent
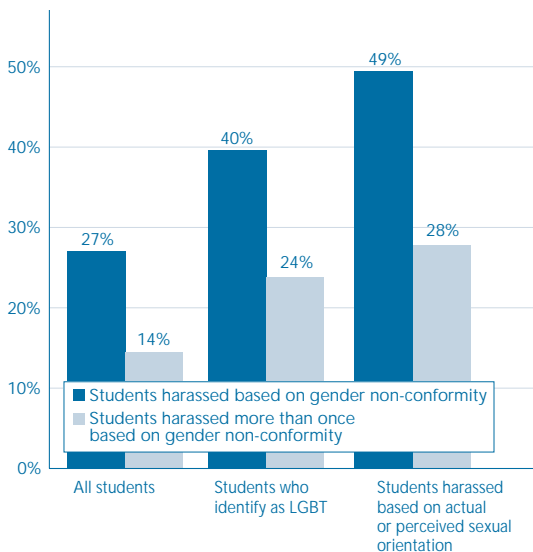


Legend:
■ Students harassed based on gender non-conformity
□ Students harassed more than once based on gender non-conformity

Categories:
- All students: 27%, 14%
- Students who identify as LGBT: 40%, 24%
- Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation: 49%, 28%

> Despite its prohibition by law, harassment based on gender non-conformity is common, according to the results of the PSH survey.

- Negative comments and slurs based on gender presentation: 63 percent of students surveyed, and 76 percent of LGBT students, reported that they "sometimes" or "often" hear students make negative comments based on gender presentation. In addition, 13 percent of students surveyed, and 22 percent of LGBT students, reported that they "sometimes" or "often" hear teachers or staff make negative comments based on gender presentation. Only 40 percent of students surveyed, and only 39 percent of LGBT students, reported that they "sometimes" or "often" hear teachers or staff stop others when they make negative comments based on gender presentation. Negative comments based on gender presentation are also clearly related to harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. 81 percent of students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation said they "sometimes" or "often" hear students make negative comments based on gender presentation, compared to 63 percent of students overall. See Figure 17.

- Perceptions of safety for gender non-conforming students: 47 percent of students surveyed, but only 36 percent of LGBT students, agree "pretty much" or "very much" that their school is safe for "guys who aren't as masculine as other guys." 66 percent of students surveyed, but only 57 percent of LGBT students, agree "pretty much" or "very much" that their school is safe for "girls who aren't as feminine as other girls." Safe climates for gender non-conforming students are also clearly related to harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. 33 percent of students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation agree "pretty much" or "very much" that their school is safe for "guys who aren't as masculine as other guys," compared to 47 percent of students overall. See Figure 18.

*fig 17* Negative comments based on gender presentation are common, and teacher or staff intervention is uncommon



Legend:
- I hear students make negative comments based on gender presentation sometimes or often
- I hear teachers or staff stop negative comments based on gender presentation sometimes or often

X-axis: All students; Students who identify as LGBT; Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation
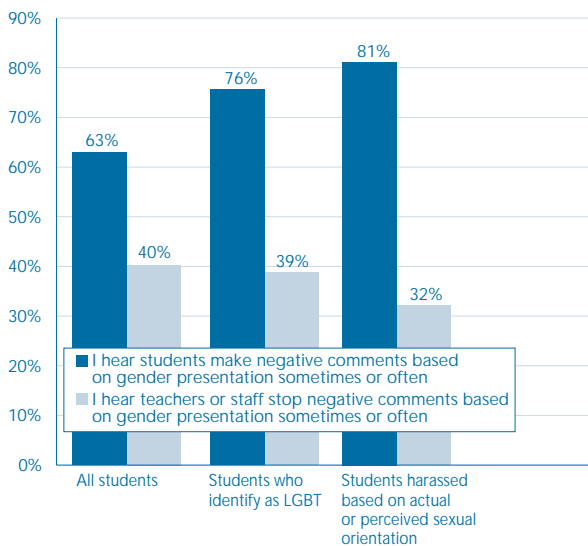
*fig 18* School climates are unsafe for gender-non-conforming students, especially for gender non-conforming boys



Legend:
- All students
- Students who identify as LGBT
- Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation

X-axis: My school is safe for girls who aren't as feminine as other girls (pretty much or very much true); My school is safe for guys who aren't as masculine as other guys (pretty much or very much true)
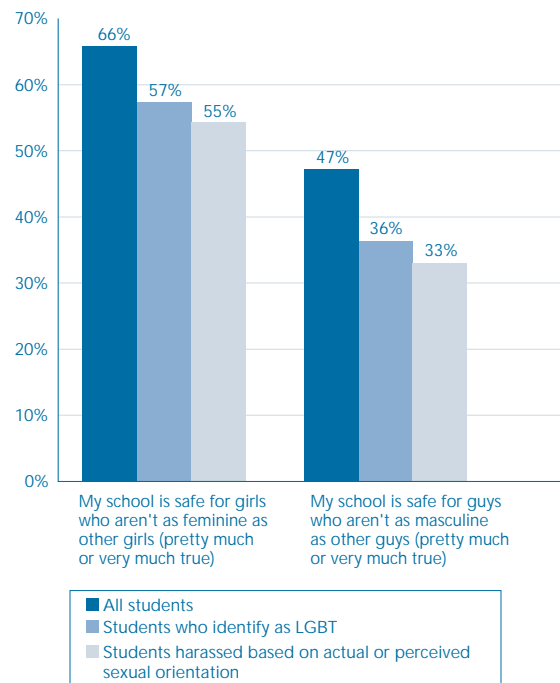
# Major Finding 4

## Schools can take steps to improve safety and health for all students, according to the Preventing School Harassment survey.

A more detailed look at harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity in the PSH survey shows that schools can take concrete steps that reduce violence and harassment, reduce name-calling, improve students' feelings of safety at school, and improve students' connections to school, community, and supportive adults. Taking these five specific steps will help create an environment where all students are safe to learn and reach their full potential.

### STEPS
### Schools Can Take

- Establish and publicize a **harassment policy** that specifically includes sexual orientation and gender, including gender identity, appearance, and behavior.

- **Train teachers and staff** to intervene when they hear slurs or negative comments based on sexual orientation or gender non-conformity.

- Support the establishment of a **Gay-Straight Alliance** or similar student club.

- Ensure that students know where to go for **information and support** related to sexual orientation and gender identity.

- **Introduce curriculum** that includes LGBT people and information about sexual orientation and gender identity.

### OUTCOMES
### for Students and School Environment

- Fewer incidents of harassment and bullying.
- Fewer bias-related comments and less name-calling.
- Greater feelings of safety.
- Improved connections to school, community, and supportive adults.

Taking these five specific steps will help create an environment where all students are safe to learn and reach their full potential.

## Step 1: Establish and publicize a school policy that specifically prohibits harassment on the basis of actual and perceived sexual orientation and gender, including gender identity, appearance, and behavior.

Students who know that their school has a harassment policy that specifically mentions sexual orientation felt safer at school, reported safer school climates in general, and were less likely to be harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. For example, 61 percent of students who reported knowing of such a school policy say students at their school feel safe, compared to 50 percent who reported that their school has no such policy. See Figures 19 and 20. Students whose schools have a policy were also more likely to feel they have a voice at school and make positive contributions to school. They were more likely to have an adult outside of school or home who cares about them and wants them to succeed, more likely to report that teachers treat them fairly, and more likely to report that teachers care about students. See Figure 21 for how school policies relate to student scores on common multiple-question scales of youth resilience.

*fig 19* Harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity is less common among students whose schools have harassment policies that include sexual orientation



*fig 20* Feelings of safety at school are stronger among students whose schools have harassment policies that include sexual orientation



*Pretty much true or very much true
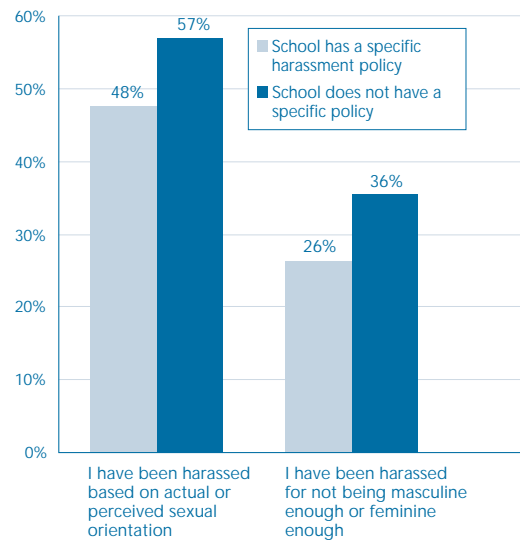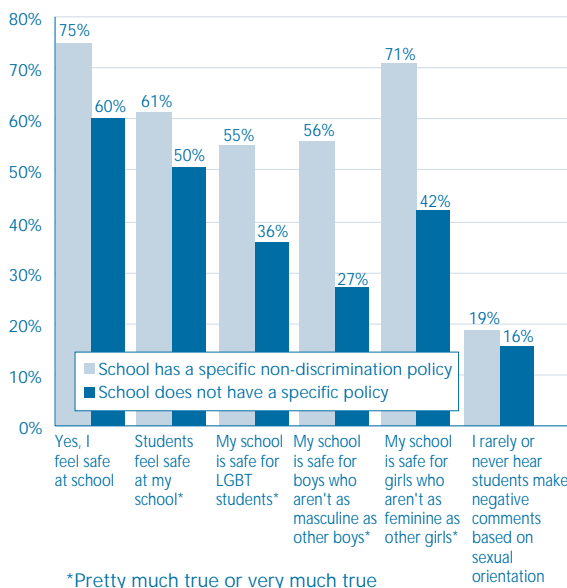
*fig 21* Students have stronger support and connection when schools have harassment policies that include sexual orientation
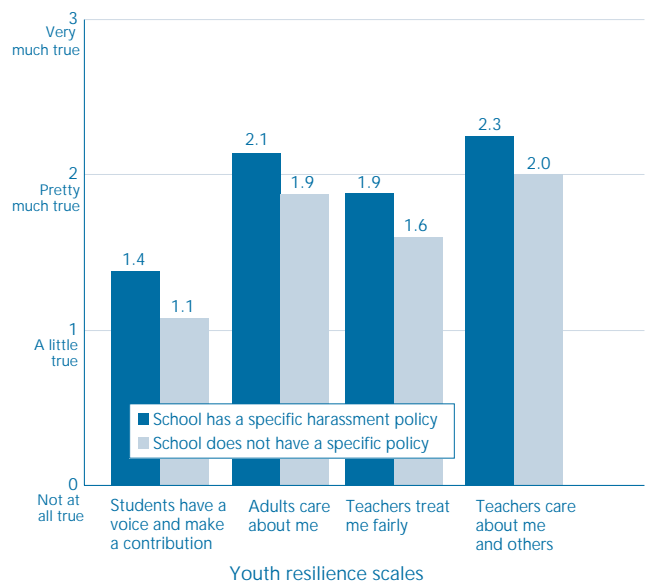
## Step 2: Train teachers and staff to stop slurs and harassment.

Students who reported that teachers or staff intervene to stop negative comments based on sexual orientation were more likely to feel safe, more likely to report safe school climates, and less likely to be harassed. For example, 37 percent of students who said teachers or staff "sometimes" or "often" intervene have been harassed on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation, compared to 50 percent of students whose teachers or staff "never" or "rarely" intervene. See Figures 22 and 23. Students whose teachers or staff "sometimes" or "often" intervene when they hear slurs were more likely to feel they have a voice at school and make positive contributions to school. They were more likely to have an adult outside of school or home who cares about them and wants them to succeed, more likely to report that teachers treat them fairly, and more likely to report that teachers care about students. See Figure 24 for how teachers stopping slurs relates to student scores on common multiple-question scales of youth resilience.

*fig 22* Harassment based on sexual orientation and gender is less common among students whose teachers stop negative comments and slurs based on sexual orientation



- Students whose teachers sometimes or often stop comments
- Students whose teachers never or rarely stop comments

*fig 23* Feelings of safety at school are stronger among students whose teachers stop negative comments and slurs based on sexual orientation



- Students whose teachers and staff sometimes or often stop comments
- Students whose teachers and staff never or rarely stop comments
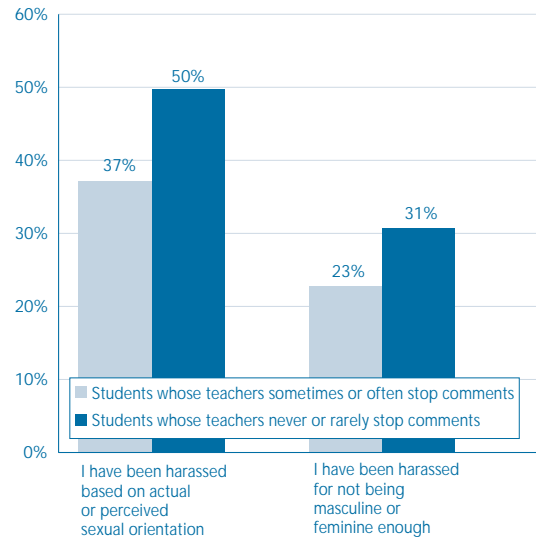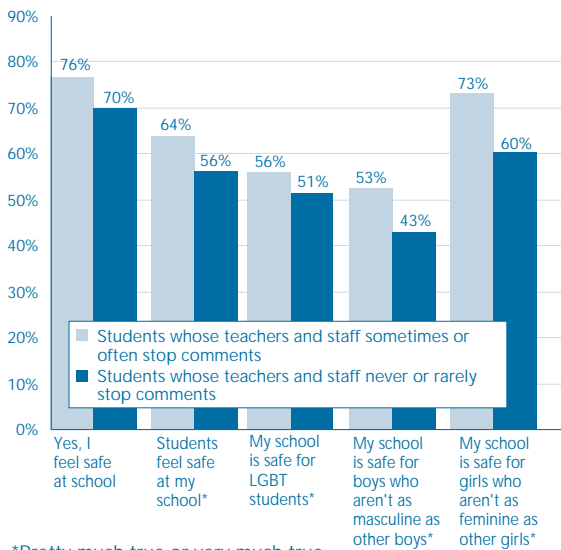
*Pretty much true or very much true

*fig 24* Students have stronger support and connections when teachers and staff stop slurs and negative comments based on sexual orientation



- Teachers and staff sometimes or often stop negative comments based on sexual orientation
- Teachers and staff rarely or never stop negative comments based on sexual orientation

Youth resilience scales
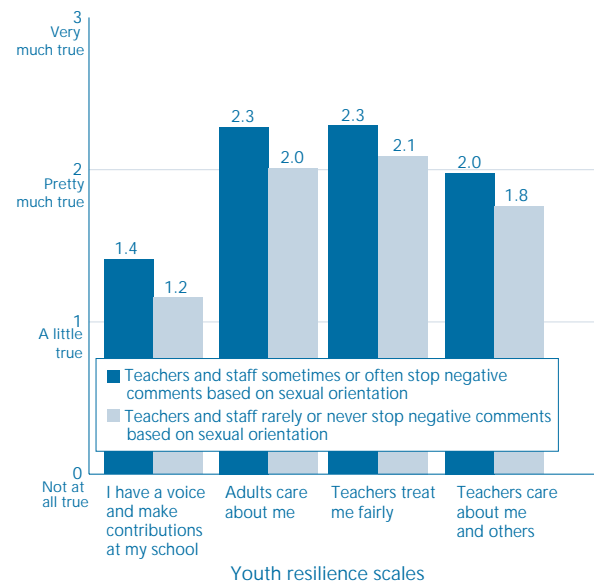
## Step 3: Support the establishment of a Gay-Straight Alliance or similar student club.

Students whose schools have a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) or similar student club felt safer at school, reported safer school climates in general, and were less likely to be harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. For example, 75 percent of students whose schools have a GSA said they personally felt safe at school compared to 61 percent of students whose schools have no club. See Figures 25 and 26. Students whose schools have a GSA were also more likely to report that teachers treat them fairly and more likely to report that teachers care about students. Students who are **members** of the GSA at their school were also less likely to be harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender non-conformity, more likely to feel their school is safe for LGBT students, more likely to have an adult outside of school or home who cares about them and wants them to succeed, and more likely to report that teachers treat them fairly. See Figures 27 and 28 for how having a GSA and membership in a GSA relate to student scores on common multiple-question scales of youth resilience.

*fig 25* Harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity is less common among students whose schools have a Gay-Straight Alliance or similar club

*fig 26* Feelings of safety are stronger among students whose schools have a Gay-Straight Alliance or similar club

*Pretty much true or very much true
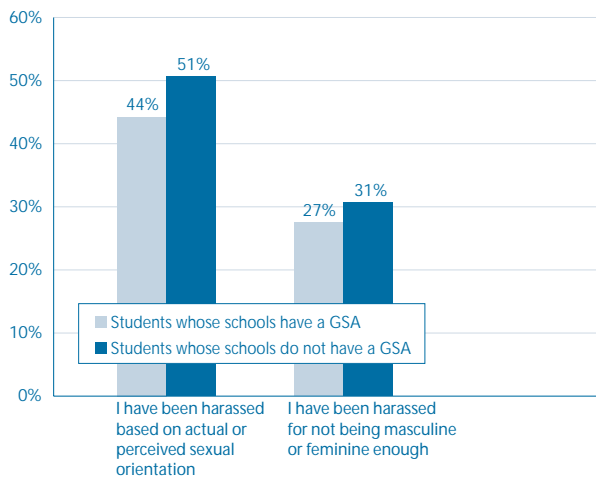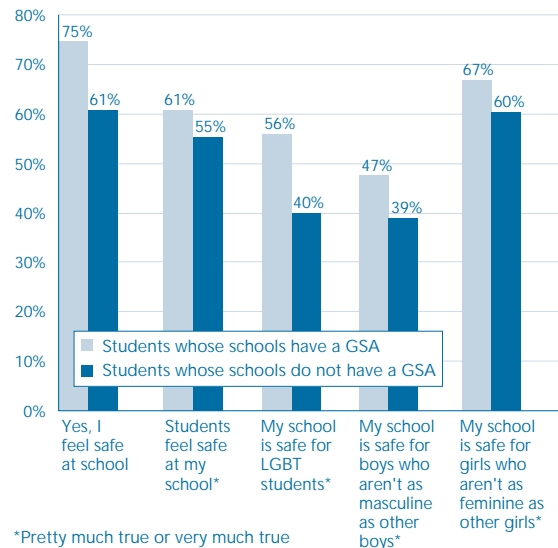
*fig 27* Students whose schools have a GSA or similar club have stronger support and connections
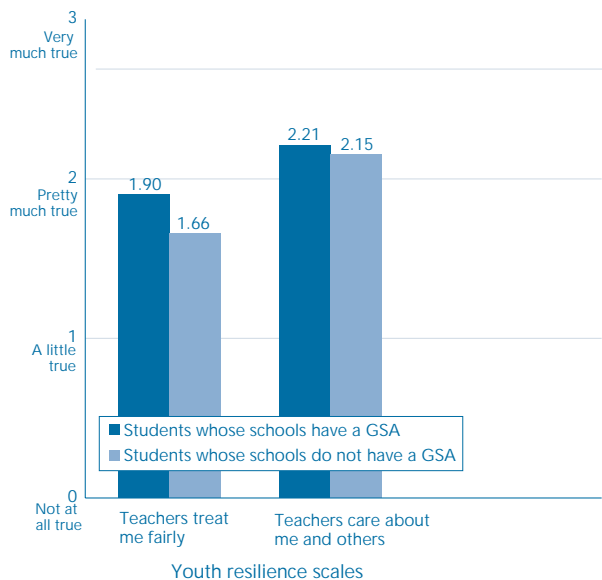
*fig 28* Students who are GSA members have stronger support and connections
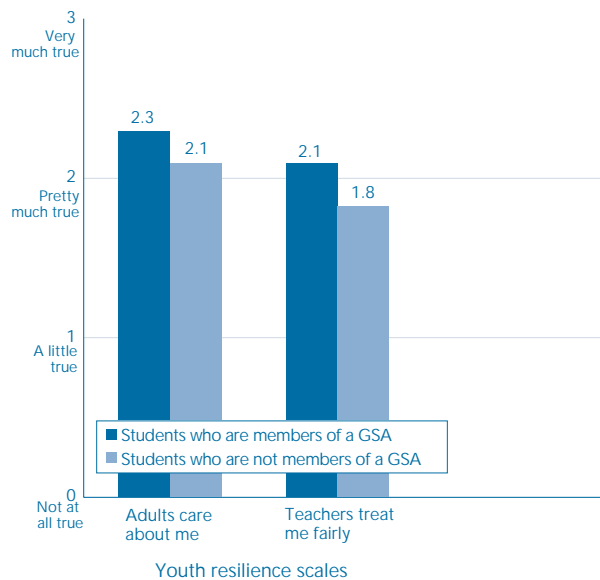
## Step 4: Ensure that students know where to go for information and support related to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Students who know of an adult or peer at school whom they can approach with questions about sexual orientation or gender identity felt safer at school, reported safer school climates in general, and were less likely to be harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. For example, 69 percent of students who know where to go for information said their school is safe for girls who are less feminine than other girls, compared to 53 percent of those who do not know where to go for information. See Figure 29. Students who know where to go at school for information about sexual orientation and gender identity were also more likely to feel they have a voice and make positive contributions at school. They were more likely to have an adult outside of school or home who cares about them and wants them to succeed, more likely to report that teachers treat them fairly, and more likely to report that teachers care about students. See Figure 30 for how student awareness of where to go for information relates to student scores on common multiple-question scales of youth resilience.

*fig 29* Feelings of safety are stronger among students who know where to go at school for information and support related to sexual orientation and gender identity
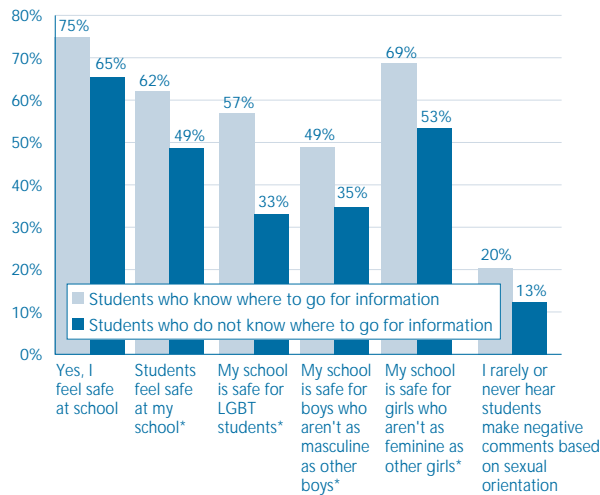


*Pretty much true or very much true

*fig 30* Students have stronger support and connections when they know where to go at school for information and support related to sexual orientation and gender identity



Youth resilience scales

## Step 5: Introduce curriculum that includes LGBT people and information about sexual orientation and gender identity.

The PSH also sheds light on the value of curriculum changes in enhancing school safety. School climate is improved, students feel safer, students hear fewer slurs and less name calling, and harassment is less frequent when students report that they have learned about LGBT issues at school. For example, 67 percent of students who have learned about LGBT issues at school said their school is safe for LGBT students, compared to 40 percent of students who have not learned about LGBT issues at school. See Figures 31 and 32. Students who have learned about LGBT issues at school were also more likely to feel they have a voice at school and make positive contributions to school. They were more likely to have an adult outside of school or home who cares about them and wants them to succeed, more likely to report that teachers treat them fairly, and more likely to report that teachers care about students. See Figure 33 for how LGBT-inclusive curriculum relates to student scores on common multiple-question scales of youth resilience.

*fig 31* Harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity is less common among students who have learned about LGBT issues in school



*fig 32* Feelings of safety are stronger among students who have learned about LGBT issues in school



*Pretty much true or very much true
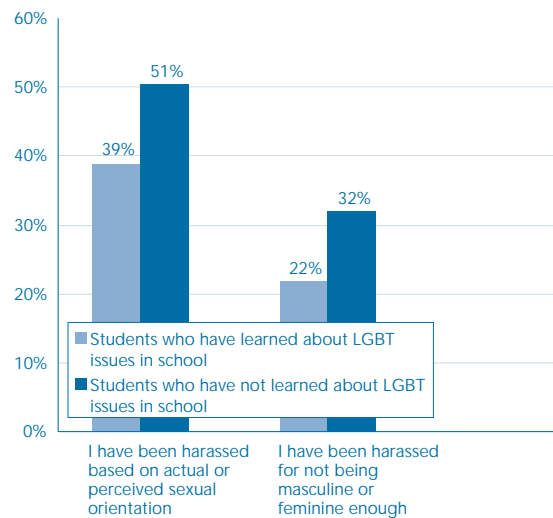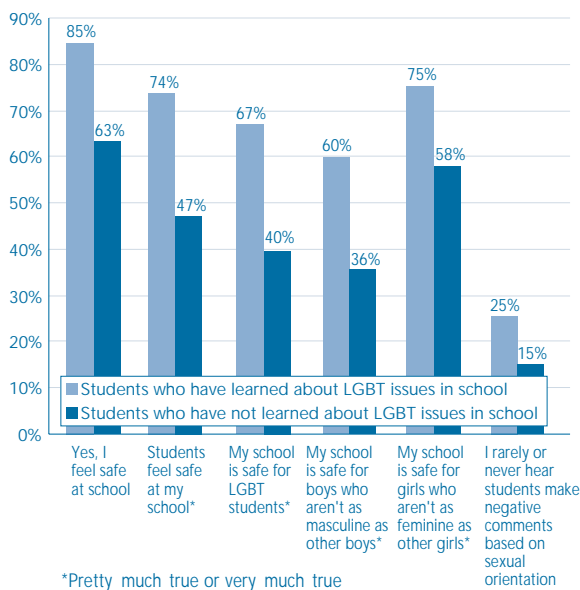
*fig 33* Students have stronger support and connections when they learn about LBGT issues at school



Youth resilience scales
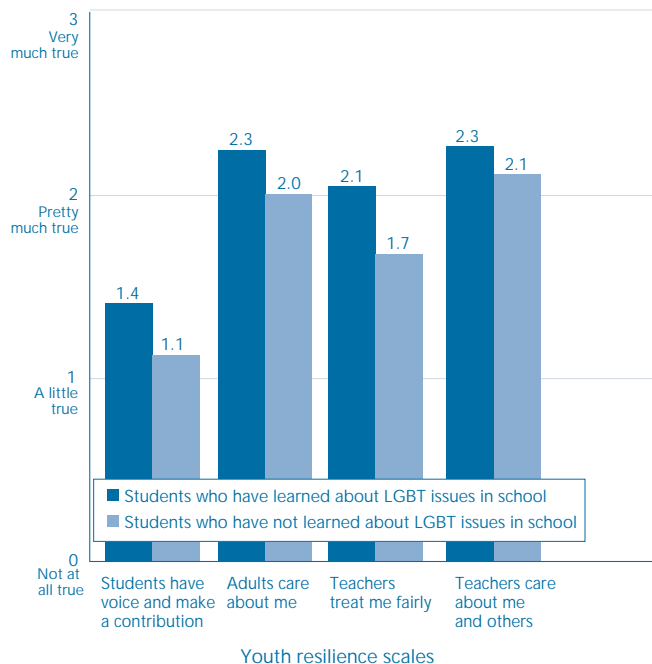
# Conclusion and Recommendations

In the largest-ever study examining harassment in school based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, data from the 2001-2002 California Healthy Kids Survey reveal that such harassment is pervasive and has severe outcomes on student health, risk behaviors, academic performance, and resilience. In a more detailed look at school climate and harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity, the 2003 Preventing School Harassment survey found that there are specific steps schools can take to improve safety, reduce harassment, and strengthen students' connections to school and community.

## STEPS Schools Can Take

- Establish and publicize a harassment policy that specifically includes sexual orientation and gender, including gender identity, appearance, and behavior.
- Train teachers and staff to intervene when they hear slurs or negative comments based on sexual orientation or gender non-conformity.
- Support the establishment of a Gay-Straight Alliance or similar student club.
- Ensure that students know where to go for information and support related to sexual orientation and gender identity.
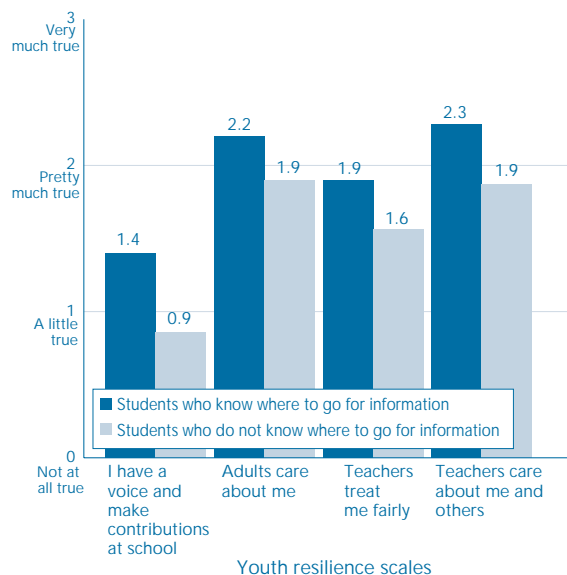- Introduce curriculum that includes LGBT people and information about sexual orientation and gender identity.

## OUTCOMES for Students and School Environment

- Fewer incidents of harassment and bullying.
- Fewer bias-related comments and less name-calling.
- Greater feelings of safety.
- Improved connections to school, community, and supportive adults.

> Almost none of the recommendations of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction's AB 537 Advisory Task Force have been fully implemented at the state level, and very few have been implemented in local school districts.

The findings of this study support a number of recommendations for state policy makers, local school officials and school administrators, parents and community members, and students.

## Recommendations for state policy makers

Four years after the enactment of the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act, efforts to implement the law are fragmented and inconsistent. Almost none of the recommendations of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction's AB 537 Advisory Task Force have been fully implemented at the state level, and very few have been implemented in local school districts.

State policy makers should:

1. Review the State Superintendent of Public Instruction's AB 537 Advisory Task Force Report and implement its recommendations.

2. Designate and train specific Department of Education staff to provide technical assistance to school districts and to coordinate department efforts to implement the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act.

3. Continue current efforts to evaluate the school safety planning process and update school safety planning materials and training to reflect current law, including the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act.

4. Mandate training for school staff and students on bias-related harassment, including training that specifically addresses harassment and discrimination based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender, including gender identity, appearance, and behavior. Include this training as part of the credentialing

and professional development process for teachers, counselors, and administrators. Provide technical assistance and training resources to school districts.

5. Monitor schools' compliance with the requirement that they notify students and parents or guardians annually of nondiscrimination policies, complaint procedures, and California state law concerning harassment and other forms of discrimination.

6. Include school compliance with the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act in the coordinated compliance review process, including an examination of school policies on harassment and discrimination, procedures for student complaints, and training of students and staff.

7. Update the Uniform Complaint Procedures regulations to reflect the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000 and clarify the need to protect the confidentiality of student complainants.

8. Update all publications on school safety, bullying, tolerance, bias-motivated behavior, or hate violence to specifically address bias-related harassment and discrimination, and specifically address harassment and discrimination based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender, including gender identity, appearance, and behavior.

9. Integrate representations of LGBT people and discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity into existing curriculum frameworks.

10. Expand the inquiry of the California Healthy Kids Survey into bias-related harassment as a health risk.

   ■ Provide funding to the California Department of Education for a yearly analysis of CHKS data on bias-related harassment and associated health risks.

   ■ Evaluate the definition of "bullying," which currently focuses on individual students of unequal strength and therefore is not inclusive of the full spectrum of harassment, including harassment that involves groups targeting individuals.

   ■ Add demographic questions asking students their sexual orientation and gender identity.

   ■ Add questions that measure school climate in terms of bias harassment, including name-calling and slurs, feelings of safety, and staff intervention in harassment.

## Recommendations for local school officials and administrators

California's law prohibiting discrimination and harassment based on actual and perceived sexual orientation and gender, including gender identity, appearance, and behavior has yet to improve the safety of many students because implementation and enforcement of the law is inconsistent across the state. Local school officials and administrators must confront the serious health and safety outcomes of bias-motivated harassment and take steps to make change in their schools.

Local school officials and administrators should:

1. Mandate training for staff, faculty, and students on bias-motivated harassment, including training that specifically addresses harassment and discrimination based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender, including gender identity, appearance, and behavior.

2. Clearly and regularly publicize district policies related to bias-motivated harassment, with specific reference to sexual orientation and gender, including gender identity, appearance, and behavior.

   ■ Include a serious discussion about such harassment in student handbooks, including information making it clear how students can file a complaint.

   ■ Post policies in clear language throughout all schools.

   ■ Reinforce the policy in school assemblies or other media, especially when incidents of bias harassment or violence occur.

3. Identify and eliminate barriers to the formation of Gay-Straight Alliances and other student anti-bias clubs, and support their formation on every campus.

   ■ Place no restrictions on GSAs that would not be placed on any other student club.

   ■ Support GSAs' activities to reduce harassment on campus.

   ■ Re-evaluate any policies that may have the unintentional effect of discouraging student participation in a GSA (for instance, a parental permission policy or a policy requiring the disclosure of the names of students interested in participating to school administrators).

4. Train professional counselors and/or peer counselors on each campus to provide students with information and support

related to sexual orientation and gender identity, and to address the multiple health risks associated with bias-related harassment. Publicize the availability of these counseling resources to students.

5. Take consistent disciplinary action to stop all forms of bias-related harassment and make sure that students are aware that it is not tolerated or condoned.

   ▪ Treat every form of bias-related harassment as preventable, unacceptable, and deserving of a clear response.

   ▪ Focus problem solving on eliminating bias-related harassment, rather than on avoiding the problem by, for instance, changing the harassed student's schedule or referring him or her to independent study.

6. Take steps to measure bias-related harassment in their school districts, such as adding an optional module to the CHKS on bias-related harassment, including age-appropriate demographic questions asking students their sexual orientation and gender identity.

7. Integrate representations of LGBT people and discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity into existing curricula.

## Recommendations for teachers and school site staff

Teachers and school site staff who have the most contact with students are uniquely situated to help create a positive and safe school climate and help students achieve their full potential.

Teachers and staff should:

1. Intervene when they hear bias-related comments and slurs. Use each comment as an opportunity to provide education and reaffirm school policy.

2. Request training on preventing harassment and discrimination, and ask to help publicize school policies on harassment.

3. Set the climate in their classrooms early and as often as necessary, letting students know that bias-related harassment and slurs are not acceptable.

4. Treat all forms of bias-related harassment and slurs as serious and preventable.

5. Find out about community resources and information related to sexual orientation and gender identity.

6. Integrate representations of LGBT people and discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity into existing curricula.

## Recommendations for parents, guardians, and community members

Parents, guardians, and other members of the school community have a role to play in ensuring that school environments are safe places for all students to learn.

Parents, guardians, and community members should:

1. Ask their children what happens at school when bias-related name-calling, harassment, and bullying occur. Ask their children if they know what to do if they are harassed.

2. Talk to their children about sexual orientation and gender identity, name calling, and discrimination.

3. Speak out in support of specific steps school districts and schools can take: publicizing and enforcing anti-harassment policies, supporting GSAs, providing resources to students, training teachers and other staff, measuring bias-related harassment in their local school district, and including LGBT people and information about sexual orientation and gender identity in the curriculum.

## Recommendations for students

If students feel safe and empowered, they have the ability to make their schools safer.

Students can:

1. Speak out when they hear slurs or negative comments like "that's so gay."

2. Start a Gay-Straight Alliance to help fight harassment and discrimination at school, or join the club if one already exists.

3. Find out if the school harassment policy mentions harassment based on actual and perceived sexual orientation and gender, including gender identity, appearance, and behavior and advocate for changing the policy if it doesn't.

4. Find out how to make a complaint when harassment occurs.

5. Speak out in support of specific steps school districts and schools can take: publicizing and enforcing anti-harassment policies, supporting GSAs, providing resources to students, training teachers and other staff, measuring bias-related harassment in their local school district, and including LGBT people and information about sexual orientation and gender identity in the curriculum.

# Appendix 1: Methodology and questions for future research

## Methodology: The California Healthy Kids Survey

The California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) is designed by WestEd under contract from the California Department of Education (CDE) and administered by school districts. The CHKS core module and school and community asset scales are now required to be administered every other year by all school districts accepting certain federal education funds. The 2001-2002 data analyzed for this study included 7th, 9th, and 11th grade students. 237,544 students answered the question about harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. The CHKS includes questions about substance use, violence, health risks, student resilience, and academic performance. Questions about specific types of bias-related harassment were added to the survey starting with the 2001-2002 school year in response to the passage of AB 1785, which added hate-motivated crimes to the list of crimes school districts must report to the state.

For districts that administer the survey, the state requires that each district conduct a representative survey of 7th, 9th, and 11th grade students. In districts with less than 900 students per grade, which is the case in 85 percent of the school districts in the state, all students in those grades are surveyed. The CHKS is designed to be representative of all students in each district, but not necessarily all students in the state. However comparisons between the CHKS and the California Student Survey, which is designed to be representative of all students in the state, show very few differences in student attitudes and risk behaviors.[1] See Appendix 3 for the text of CHKS questions on harassment and bullying. For more information on the CHKS, see www.wested.org/hks.

All CHKS data described in the *Safe Place to Learn* report are statistically significant. In this report we discuss "outcomes" or "consequences" of harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. We acknowledge that we are unable to test direct cause and effect with our data. However, it is far more likely that the risk factors we examine are consequences of harassment than precursors to harassment.

## Methodology: The Preventing School Harassment survey

The 2003 Preventing School Harassment survey (PSH) was conducted by the California Safe Schools Coalition in partnership with Gay-Straight Alliance Network. It was administered both on paper and online with a convenience sample of 634 middle and high school students from across California. Surveys were mailed to community organizations, student and youth groups, individuals, and to more than 325 Gay-Straight Alliance clubs in the state. Gay-Straight Alliance Network also promoted the survey online and in its email newsletter. Distribution and promotion of the survey targeted LGBT students but all middle school and high school students in California were welcome to take the survey. 46 percent of the PSH survey respondents identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or transgender. The demographics of the PSH survey are approximately representative of statewide student populations for African-American, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native students. Hispanic/Latino students, male students, and heterosexual/straight students are under-represented in the survey, and White/Caucasian students, female students, and LGBT students are over-represented.

The 6-page survey asked about the students' perceptions of safety at their schools and their experiences with bullying or harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender non-conformity, and other reasons (such as harassment based on race or religion). See Appendix 4 for the text of the survey with frequencies. All PSH data described in the *Safe Place to Learn* report are statistically significant.

## Questions for future research

Researchers can help make schools safer places to learn by adding to the pool of knowledge about bias-motivated harassment, outcomes for students, and effective prevention measures. Additional research questions include:

- What other factors can reduce bias-motivated harassment?
- Which programs designed to reduce bias-related harassment are most successful?
- What other factors can improve resiliency among students who experience harassment?

The key to the success of future research is improving existing tools for data gathering, notably the CHKS. Researchers should also develop partnerships with local school districts and community organizations in order to measure bias-related harassment, its effects, and ways of reducing it.

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[1] Hanson, T.L., Austin, G. 2003. *Student Health Risks, Resilience, and Academic Performance in California: Year 2 Report, Longitudinal Analyses.* Los Alamitos, CA: WestEd.

# Appendix 2: Other research on harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity

## LGBT youth, risk, and the school environment

Research indicates that LGBT adolescents are at higher risk than their heterosexual peers for some of the most compromising challenges that adolescents face today: substance use and abuse[1], depression and anxiety[2], violence and victimization[3], and suicide[4]. Several of those problems pertain directly to education and schooling, such as poor academic performance, negative school attitudes[5], or victimization at school.[6] In addition, recent research has begun to link the negative mental health and risk behaviors of LGBT youth to challenges that they face in school, including harassment and discrimination. These challenges impede not only the students' academic performance, but also their general emotional and social development.

The school is one of the most important contexts for child and adolescent development. Next to the family (and faith for some youth), education plays a critical role in the lives of children and adolescents. The school environment is important not only in the development of academic and occupational skills, but also the personal and social skills that shape the first 20 years of life.

However, bullying and harassment on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity are pervasive in contemporary schools. Survey laws that are restrictive or too broadly interpreted have hampered school-based research into harassment on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity and non-conformity. Research has also been limited by the difficulty of introducing specific questions related to the subject into the standard, population-based surveys that are widely used to measure student health, such as the Center for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Survey and its state and local versions.

Despite these limitations, several studies have examined harassment in school based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. This research tells a story consistent with our findings: harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation is pervasive and has serious consequences. Several population-based studies of adolescent health risk

that included questions about sexual orientation, same-sex behavior, or harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation were collected in a 1999 report by the Safe Schools Coalition of Washington. The report included local and state versions of the federal Youth Risk Behavior Survey in Vermont, Seattle, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin; the Adolescent Health Survey conducted by the University of Minnesota; the Voice of Connecticut Youth survey; and the National American Indian Adolescent Health Survey. Students in these studies who were harassed based on sexual orientation were 4 times more likely to have been threatened or injured with a weapon in the last 12 months, 2-3 times as likely to have missed a day of school out of fear for their safety, 2 times as likely to have used inhalants, and 1.5 times as likely to have seriously considered suicide[7]. Almost no research has examined the problem of harassment based on gender identity or non-conformity.

Every two years, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) conducts the National School Climate Survey, which examines LGBT students' experiences of harassment using a nationwide convenience sample built through community outreach. In 2003, 84 percent of the LGBT students who responded reported being harassed based on sexual orientation during the last school year. These harassed students had lower grades and were less likely to intend to go to college than students who were not harassed.[8]

In late 2002, the National Mental Health Association conducted a random telephone survey inquiring into the issue of harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. NMHA found that among its 760 adolescent respondents, 78 percent reported that students in their school who are gay or thought to be gay are teased or bullied. 93 percent reported that they hear words like "fag," "homo," "dyke," "queer," or "gay" at school or in their neighborhood; 51 percent reported hearing such language every day.[9]

While many efforts have been made to document the stories of students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, the most sustained and systematic efforts to gather qualitative data may be a five-year effort by the Safe Schools Coalition of Washington, "They Don't Even Know

[1] Garofalo R., Wolf R.C., Kessel S., Palfrey J., DuRant R.H, The association between health risk behaviors and sexual orientation among a school-based sample of adolescents. Pediatrics. 1998; 101:895-902; and
Russell S.T., Joyner K. 2001. Adolescent Sexual Orientation and Suicide Risk: Evidence from a National Study. American Journal of Public Health.

[2] Russell and Joyner, 2001.

[3] Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey and DuRant, 1998;
DuRant R.H., Krowchuck D.P., Sinal S.H. Victimization, use of violence, and drug use at school among male adolescents who engage in same-sex sexual behavior. Journal of Pediatrics, 1998:138:113-118; and
Russell S.T., Franz B.T., Driscoll A.K. 2001. Adolescent Sexual Orientation and Violence: Understanding Victimization and Violence Perpetration. The American Journal of Public Health.

[4] Russell and Joyner, 2001;
Hammelman, T.L. 1993. Gay and Lesbian Youth: Contributing Factors to Serious Attempts or Considerations of Suicide. Journal of Gay and Lesbian Psychotherapy. 2:77-89;
Rotheram-Borus, M.J., Hunter J., Rosario M. 1994. Suicidal Behavior and Gay-Related Stress among Gay and Bisexual Male Adolescents. Unpublished manuscript, Columbia

University; and
Russell, S. T. (2003). Sexual minority youth and suicide risk. American Behavioral Scientist. 46, 1241-1257.

[5] Russell S.T., Seif H., Truong N.L. 2001. School Outcomes of Sexual Minority Youth in the United States: Evidence from a National Study. Journal of Adolescence.

[6] Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey and Durant, 1998;
Human Rights Watch. 2001. Hatred in the hallways: Violence and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students in U.S. schools. New York: Human Rights Watch.  www.hrw.org

[7] Reis and Saewyc, "83,000 youth: Selected findings from eight population-based studies." Safe Schools Coalition of Washington, 1999.

[8] GLSEN, "The 2001 National School Climate Survey," 2003. www.glsen.org

[9] International Communications Research, "What Does Gay Mean? Teen Survey," NMHA, 2002. www.nmha.org

[10] Reis. "They Don't Even Know Me: A Report on the Five-Year Anti-Violence Research Project of the Safe Schools Coalition of Washington," Safe Schools Coalition of Washington, 1999. www.safeschoolscoalition.org

Me,"[10] and a report released in 2001 by Human Rights Watch, "Hatred in the Hallways."[11] Individual stories from both sources confirm our quantitative data pointing to significant harms.

## California research regarding harassment

Despite an absence until now of statewide population-based data regarding harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation in California, many local communities have chosen to look at this question, often led by advocates for safe schools.

GSA Network's student-led research effort surveyed more than 1,300 students in the 2002-2003 school year. Students in three high schools (Fremont High School in Sunnyvale, Brentwood High School in Los Angeles, and Lakewood High School in Long Beach) participated in the survey project. The Fremont survey (n=940) was the most widely distributed of the three. It revealed that 47 percent of students heard anti-LGBT slurs directed at specific students, teachers, or staff at least once a week; 71 percent of students heard generalized anti-LGBT language at least once a day; and 81 percent of students reported that teachers never or only sometimes intervene when they hear anti-LGBT slurs. The Lakewood student survey (n=179) found that 91 percent of students heard anti-LGBT slurs directed at specific students, teachers, or staff at least once a week, and the Brentwood student survey (n=200) found that 75 percent of students heard anti-LGBT language at school at least once a day.[12]

A survey by Fremont Unified School District demonstrates how local school districts can begin to track bias-related harassment themselves and how community groups, in this case, the Committee to Assure Respect in Schools, can play a critical role in jumpstarting that process. FUSD's "Safe School Survey" (student n=8,021, teacher n= 322) found that 69 percent of high school students, 67 percent of junior high school students, and 61 percent of teachers reported hearing slurs based on sexual orientation at school. 18 percent of high school students and 23 percent of junior high school students reported being personally harassed on the basis of sexual orientation in the last 30 days.[13]

Another study, the Understanding the Social Environment (USE) Survey, developed by the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center's Safe Haven Project, is notable particularly because it asked about harassment based on gender non-conformity. The survey was administered as a pilot survey by Los Angeles Unified School District in 2001, and its sample of 154 students at one high school was designed as a representative sample of the school's student population. Students who participated in the pilot survey indicated that sexual orientation was the second most likely trigger for bias-related harassment in school, after race/ethnicity. The survey

also found that "male effeminacy" or "female masculinity" ranked third as a basis for student harassment. Moreover, victims of anti-LGBTQ harassment were the only group not to seek help from school authorities.[14]

The California Safe Schools Coalition and GSA Network conducted a survey in 2002 about implementation of the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act and found that 44% of students didn't know how to file a complaint if they were verbally harassed. Youth from 76% of the 41 schools in the survey said their school was doing nothing that they knew of to protect LGBT students from harassment and violence.[15]

Preliminary results from a qualitative study of LGBT youth in California support this report's findings regarding health outcomes of school-based harassment. The Family Acceptance Project at the César E. Chávez Institute, San Francisco State University includes a statewide qualitative study of white and Latino LGB and queer youth and their families. All the youth studied (regardless of geographic area, socioeconomic background, ethnic group, and degrees of gender conformity) have reported some negative school experiences related to their sexual orientation, ranging from teasing and harassment to assault. The study's preliminary data suggest that victimization associated with a youth's sexual and gender identity can be more traumatic and longer lasting than was previously thought and can restrict development and negatively impact psychological and physical health. Nearly all parents interviewed, even those with higher levels of education and access to resources, are unaware that state law protects students against discrimination and harassment in school based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and have limited awareness or understanding of how to advocate for their children in school.

## Research on changing the school climate

Very few studies document the steps associated with a more positive school climate in terms of reducing harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. A recent study based on the 1995 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey documented that LGB youth who attend schools with gay-sensitive HIV instruction score lower on multiple indicators of health risk.[16] A second study, also based in Massachusetts, included data from over 1,700 students and 33 schools. Controlling for factors such as socioeconomic status, geography, race, and school size, it found that schools that took specific steps to implement Massachusetts' Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Students showed statistically significant improvements in school climate for LGBT students. This study highlights policies, trainings, and the presence of GSAs as three significant factors in changing school climate.[17]

[11] Human Rights Watch, 2001.

[12] GSA Network, "Make It Real" survey findings, 2003. www.gsanetwork.org

[13] Fremont Unified School District, results for "Safe School Survey," 2001. Unpublished.

[14] Los Angeles Unified School District Program Evaluation and Research Branch, results for "Understanding the Social Environment" survey, 2001. Unpublished.

[15] California Safe Schools Coalition and GSA Network, "AB 537 Implementation Survey" findings, 2002. Unpublished.

[16] Blake, S.M., Ledsky, R., Lehman, T., Goodenow, C., Sawyer, R., & Hack, T. (2001). Preventing sexual risk behaviors among gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents: the benefits of gay-sensitive HIV instruction in schools. American Journal of Public Health. 91, 940-946.

[17] Szalacha, "The Sexual Diversity Climate of Massachusetts' Secondary Schools and the Success of the Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Students," Harvard University Graduate School in Education thesis, 2001.

# Appendix 3: Text of the 2003 Preventing School Harassment survey with frequencies

**California Safe Schools Coalition**
**2003 Preventing School Harassment Survey**
(Results listed as percentages.)

**Questions 1 – 15: Please read each statement carefully and mark the answer that best describes how you feel.**

| | Not at all true | A little true | Pretty much true | Very much true |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. In my school, teachers expect students to respect one another. | 2 | 14 | 41 | 43 |
| 2. In my school, teachers give all students a fair chance. | 7 | 22 | 55 | 16 |
| 3. In my school, teachers treat students as individuals, not as members of groups. | 7 | 31 | 39 | 23 |
| 4. In my school, teachers really care about the students; all the students. | 11 | 33 | 40 | 16 |
| 5. In my school, students feel safe. | 9 | 31 | 40 | 20 |
| 6. In my school, students from different races and cultures hang out together. | 7 | 31 | 34 | 28 |
| 7. In my school, there are classes where we learn about the history of different races and cultures. | 8 | 26 | 35 | 31 |
| 8. In my school, there are some classes where students get a chance to discuss their cultural background. | 18 | 35 | 31 | 15 |
| 9. My school is safe for guys who are not as "masculine" as other guys. | 16 | 36 | 32 | 15 |
| 10. My school is safe for girls who are not as "feminine" as other girls. | 9 | 25 | 44 | 22 |
| 11. My school is safe for students with lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) parents. | 11 | 28 | 38 | 23 |
| 12. My school is safe for students who are LGBT. | 15 | 32 | 36 | 17 |
| 13. My school is safe for teachers and staff who are LGBT. | 15 | 23 | 36 | 25 |
| 14. My school is safe for straight allies (friends) of LGBT people. | 5 | 21 | 43 | 30 |
| 15. I often hear positive or supportive comments about LGBT people from teachers or other staff at my school. | 33 | 34 | 22 | 12 |

16. Do you know of any students that openly identify as LGBT?  Yes – 83   No – 17
17. Do you know of any teachers or staff who openly identify as LGBT?  Yes – 49   No – 17

**Questions 18-22: Please mark the answer that best describes your school and your experience at school.**

| | Yes | No | I don't know |
|---|---|---|---|
| 18. Have you had education about LGBT issues at school? | 45 | 49 | 6 |
| 19. Have you ever learned about systems of oppression (racism, homophobia, sexism, classism)? | 77 | 17 | 6 |
| 20. Does your school have a written harassment policy that specifically includes race and ethnicity? | 61 | 7 | 32 |
| 21. Does your school have a written harassment policy that specifically includes gender? | 51 | 10 | 38 |
| 22. Does your school have a written harassment policy that specifically includes sexual orientation? | 36 | 18 | 45 |

**Questions 23 – 27: Please mark the answer that best describes how you feel.**

| | Yes | No | I don't know |
|---|---|---|---|
| 23. I feel safe at my school. | 73 | 14 | 13 |
| 24. I feel safe getting to and from school. | 84 | 10 | 6 |
| 25. The teachers in my school treat me fairly. | 79 | 14 | 7 |
| 26. I feel like I am part of my school. | 62 | 29 | 9 |
| 27. I have a friend that I can count on at my school. | 90 | 5 | 5 |

**28. If you wanted information and support from your school about sexual orientation or gender identity, would you know whom to go to?**   Yes – 72   No – 18   I don't know – 10

**28a.  If yes, please check all that apply:** Teacher – 55   Counselor – 45   Administrator or Principal – 14   School staff – 19   Coach – 6   Student leaders – 29

**29. Does your school have a Gay-Straight Alliance or similar club/group?** Yes – 81   No – 13   I don't know – 6

**29a. If yes, then are you a member of the Gay-Straight Alliance or similar club / group?**
*Yes* – 42 : Why?_____ *No* – 58: Why?_____

**30. AB 537 is the California law that protects students from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.** Do you know about AB 537? *Yes* – 38 *No* – 54 *I don't know* – 7

**30a. If yes, how did you learn about AB 537? (Please check all that apply)**
*From my school administration* – 4     *From a teacher* – 11
*From other students at school* – 10     *From a friend* – 11
*From the internet* – 7     *From GSA Network* – 23
*From my parent(s)* – 2     *From a community organization* – 7
*Other:* – 6_____

**31. How often do you hear other students make negative comments based on:**

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Race or ethnicity | 5 | 25 | 39 | 31 |
| Sex (male or female) | 7 | 24 | 37 | 31 |
| Sexual orientation | 9 | 12 | 25 | 54 |
| Gender presentation | 13 | 17 | 36 | 33 |
| Body size | 6 | 21 | 36 | 37 |
| Religion | 23 | 37 | 26 | 14 |
| Physical or mental disability | 18 | 31 | 29 | 22 |
| Other: _____ | 3 | 1 | 1 | 6 |

**32. How often do you hear teachers or other staff make negative comments based on:**

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Race or ethnicity | 62 | 30 | 6 | 1 |
| Sex (male or female) | 50 | 33 | 14 | 3 |
| Sexual orientation | 55 | 29 | 14 | 2 |
| Gender presentation | 60 | 27 | 11 | 1 |
| Body size | 62 | 26 | 9 | 2 |
| Religion | 66 | 25 | 7 | 2 |
| Physical or mental disability | 74 | 19 | 6 | 2 |
| Other: _____ | 88 | 7 | 2 | 1 |

**33. How often do you hear teachers or other staff stop others from making negative comments based on:**

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Race or ethnicity | 17 | 23 | 31 | 29 |
| Sex (male or female) | 21 | 28 | 31 | 20 |
| Sexual orientation | 24 | 33 | 26 | 18 |
| Gender presentation | 30 | 30 | 25 | 15 |
| Body size | 26 | 29 | 29 | 17 |
| Religion | 26 | 25 | 25 | 24 |
| Physical or mental disability | 25 | 23 | 23 | 29 |
| Other: _____ | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 |

**34 - 42. During the past 12 months, how many times on school property have you...**

| | 0 times | 1 time | 2 to 3 times | 4 or more times |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 34. ...been pushed, shoved, slapped, hit, or kicked by someone who wasn't just kidding around? | 71 | 12 | 11 | 6 |
| 35. ...been threatened or injured with a weapon, such as a gun, knife, or club? | 92 | 5 | 2 | 1 |
| 36. ...been afraid of being beaten up? | 70 | 17 | 8 | 6 |
| 37. ...been in a physical fight? | 83 | 10 | 5 | 2 |
| 38. ...had mean rumors or had lies spread about you? | 41 | 24 | 17 | 17 |
| 39. ...had sexual jokes, comments, or gestures made to you? | 31 | 21 | 22 | 27 |
| 40. ...been made fun of because of your looks or the way you talk? | 43 | 19 | 16 | 22 |
| 41. ...had your property stolen or deliberately damaged, such as your car, clothing, or books? | 68 | 18 | 8 | 6 |
| 42. ...been picked on? | 45 | 18 | 15 | 21 |

**43 - 51. During the past 12 months, how many times on school property were you harassed or bullied for any of the following reasons?**

| | 0 times | 1 time | 2 to 3 times | 4 or more times |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 43. Your race, ethnicity, or national origin | 82 | 10 | 5 | 3 |
| 44. Your religion | 81 | 8 | 5 | 6 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 45. Your sex (being male or female) | 75 | 13 | 8 | 5 |
| 46. Your body size | 71 | 11 | 10 | 8 |
| 47. Because you are gay, lesbian, or bisexual or someone thought you were | 56 | 15 | 14 | 16 |
| 48. A physical or mental disability | 94 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 49. Because you weren't "masculine enough" | 86 | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| 50. Because you weren't "feminine enough" | 83 | 9 | 5 | 3 |
| 51. Because you didn't fit in | 64 | 12 | 13 | 11 |

**52 – 55: The next questions are about you and your school. Please mark how true you feel the statements below are for you.**

| | 0 times | 1 time | 2 to 3 times | 4 or more times |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 52. I have a voice in decisions that affect my school. | 32 | 38 | 21 | 9 |
| 53. I believe that I can make a valuable contribution to my school. | 20 | 34 | 25 | 21 |
| 54. I am a leader. | 20 | 29 | 24 | 28 |
| 55. It is important to me to get along with people who are different from me. | 5 | 10 | 25 | 59 |

**56 – 58. Not counting adults at home or at school, there is an adult in my life…**

| | 0 times | 1 time | 2 to 3 times | 4 or more times |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 56. …who really cares about me. | 9 | 13 | 19 | 59 |
| 57. …whom I trust. | 12 | 15 | 21 | 52 |
| 58. …who makes sure that everyone is treated fairly. | 15 | 17 | 24 | 44 |

**59 – 64. At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult…**

| | 0 times | 1 time | 2 to 3 times | 4 or more times |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 59. …who really cares about me. | 9 | 22 | 27 | 41 |
| 60. …who tells me when I do a good job. | 6 | 15 | 30 | 49 |
| 61. …who notices when I'm not there. | 10 | 19 | 26 | 45 |
| 62. …who listens to me when I have something to say. | 5 | 15 | 27 | 53 |
| 63. …who believes that I will be a success. | 6 | 14 | 27 | 54 |
| 64. …who makes sure that everyone is treated fairly and with respect. | 6 | 14 | 33 | 48 |

**The following questions are about you. Please answer them to the best of your ability.**

**65. How old are you?** *12 years old* – 1    *13 years old* – 3    *14 years old* – 11    *15 years old* – 15    *16 years old* – 22    *17 years old* – 28    *18 years old* – 18    *Other* – 2

**66. What is your sex?**              *Male* – 33    *Female* – 66    *Intersex* – 1

**67. What is your gender?**              *Male* – 32    *Female* – 65    *Transgender* – <1    *Questioning* – 1    *Write-in:* – 1____

**68. What is your sexual orientation?**    *Gay/lesbian* – 20    *Straight/heterosexual* – 45    *Bisexual* - 23    *Queer* - 3    *Questioning* – 4    *Write-in:* – 2 _____

**69. How do you describe yourself? (Please check all that apply.)**    *American Indian or Alaska Native* – 7    *Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander* – 3    *Asian* – 12    *Black or African American (non-Hispanic)* – 6    *Hispanic or Latino/Latina* – 20    *White or Caucasian (non-Hispanic)* – 66    *Other:* – 9 _____

**70. During the past 12 months, how would you describe the grades you received in school?**    *Mostly A's* – 28    *A's and B's* – 32    *Mostly B's* – 10    *B's and C's* – 17    *Mostly C's* – 4    *C's and D's* – 6    *Mostly D's* – 2    *Mostly F's* – 2

**71. What is the name of your school?** _____

**72. What city/town do you live in?** _____

**73. What is your grade level?** *7th grade* – 1    *8th grade* – 9    *9th grade/freshman* – 8    *10th grade/sophomore* – 15    *11th grade/junior* – 25    *12th grade/senior* – 240    *Other* – 18

**74. Are you currently or have you ever been on independent study?** *Yes*–16   *No*–83

**75. How did you hear about this survey? (Please check all that apply)**    *From GSA Network* – 31    *From a friend* – 12    *From my GSA or similar student group* – 28    *From my community youth group* – 7    *From a website* – 5    *From a listserve* – 1    *At a youth event* – 3    *Other:* ____

Your comments:_____

_____ **THANK YOU!**

# Appendix 4: Text of question on bias-related harassment from 2001-2002 California Healthy Kids Survey

*During the past* **12 months**, *how many times* **on school property** *were you harassed or bullied for any of the following reasons?*

(You were **bullied** if you were *repeatedly* shoved, hit, threatened, called mean names, teased in a way you didn't like, or had other unpleasant things done to you. It is **not bullying** when two students of about the same strength quarrel or fight.)

|  | 0 times | 1 time | 2 to 3 times | 4 or more times |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A76. Your race, ethnicity, or national origin | A | B | C | D |
| A77. Your religion | A | B | C | D |
| A78. Your gender (being male or female) | A | B | C | D |
| A79. Because you are gay or lesbian or someone thought you were | A | B | C | D |
| A80. A physical or mental disability | A | B | C | D |
| A81. Any other reason | A | B | C | D |

# Safe Place to Learn

## Consequences of Harassment Based on Actual or Perceived Sexual Orientation and Gender Non-Conformity and Steps for Making Schools Safer

Summary Fact Sheet from a Report by the California Safe Schools Coalition and the 4-H Center for Youth Development, University of California, Davis

This study examines school-based harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity and steps for improving school safety. It analyzes data from two sources: the broad-based 2001-2002 California Healthy Kids Survey, designed by WestEd under a contract with the California Department of Education, and the 2003 Preventing School Harassment survey, carried out by the California Safe Schools Coalition in partnership with Gay-Straight Alliance Network.

## Key findings

**Harassment and bullying based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are pervasive, according to the California Healthy Kids Survey.**
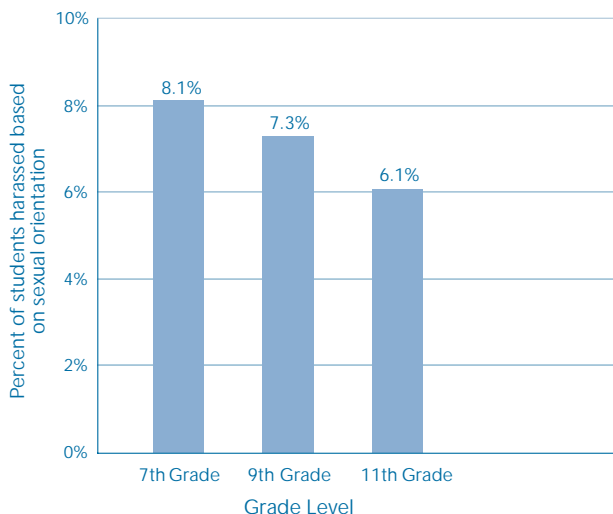
7.5 percent of California students reported being harassed on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation: that translates to **over 200,000 middle school and high school students harassed every year**.

**Harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation has dangerous consequences for students, according to data from the California Healthy Kids Survey.**
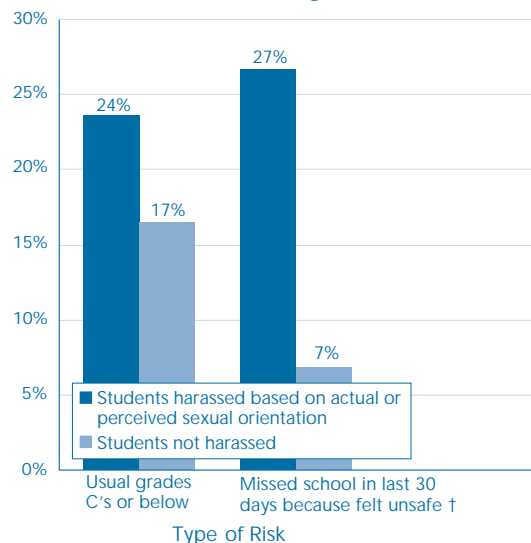
Compared to students who were not harassed:

- Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are **more than three times as likely** to carry a weapon to school, to seriously consider suicide, to make a plan for attempting suicide or to miss at least one day of school in the last 30 days because they felt unsafe.

- Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are **more than twice as likely** to report depression (feeling so sad and hopeless they stopped normal activities for two weeks), to use methamphetamines, or to use inhalants.

- Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are also more likely to have low grades (Cs or below), to be victims of violence, to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, binge drink, or use marijuana.

**Harassment based on sexual orientation is more frequent in middle school than high school**

| Grade Level | Percent of students harassed based on sexual orientation |
|---|---|
| 7th Grade | 8.1% |
| 9th Grade | 7.3% |
| 11th Grade | 6.1% |

**Students harassed based on sexual orientation are more likely to miss school and have low grades**

| Type of Risk | Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation | Students not harassed |
|---|---|---|
| Usual grades C's or below | 24% | 17% |
| Missed school in last 30 days because felt unsafe † | 27% | 7% |

†Data on missing school are not directly comparable to data on low grades

School climates are unsafe for LGBT students, students perceived to be LGBT, and gender non-conforming students, according to the Preventing School Harassment survey.

- 91 percent of students reported hearing students make negative comments based on sexual orientation. 44 percent reported hearing teachers make negative comments based on sexual orientation.

- 46 percent of students said their schools were not safe for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students.

- Two out of every three students who identified as LGBT reported being harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation.

- School climates are also unsafe for gender non-conforming students. 53 percent of students said their schools were unsafe for "guys who aren't as masculine as other guys," and 34 percent said their schools were unsafe for "girls who aren't as feminine as other girls." 27 percent of students reported being harassed for gender non-conformity.

Schools can take steps to improve safety and health for all students, according to the Preventing School Harassment (PSH) survey.

The PSH survey reveals that specific steps schools can take that are related to a more positive overall school climate, lower rates of harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity, and stronger student resilience.

- Local school officials and school administrators should establish and publicize district policies prohibiting harassment based on sexual orientation and gender, including gender identity, appearance and behavior; ensure that all school staff are trained to prevent and respond to harassment; support the formation of Gay-Straight Alliances or similar clubs; and treat all forms of harassment and discrimination as serious and preventable.

- Teachers and school staff can make schools safer by responding to slurs and negative comments, by sharing with students where to go for information about sexual orientation and gender identity, and by including LGBT people and information about sexual orientation and gender identity in the curriculum.

### STEPS Schools Can Take

- Establish and publicize a harassment policy that specifically includes sexual orientation and gender, including gender identity, appearance, and behavior.

- Train teachers and staff to intervene when they hear slurs or negative comments based on sexual orientation or gender non-conformity.

- Support the establishment of a Gay-Straight Alliance or similar student club.

- Ensure that students know where to go for information and support related to sexual orientation and gender identity.

- Introduce curriculum that includes LGBT people and information about sexual orientation and gender identity.

### OUTCOMES for Students and School Environment

- Fewer incidents of harassment and bullying.

- Fewer bias-related comments and less name-calling.

- Greater feelings of safety.

- Improved connections to school, community, and supportive adults

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The full *Safe Place to Learn* report is available at www.casafeschools.org.
For more information, contact
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## Steering Committee of the California Safe Schools Coalition

American Civil Liberties Union
of Southern California
www.aclu-sc.org

Anti-Defamation League
www.adl.org

California Teachers Association
www.cta.org

Equality California
www.eqca.org

Gay, Lesbian and Straight
Education Network
www.glsen.org

Gay-Straight Alliance Network
www.gsanetwork.org

Human Rights Watch
www.hrw.org

L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center
www.laglc.org

National Center for Lesbian Rights
www.nclrights.org

Oakland Unified School District
www.ousd.k12.ca.us

Parents, Families and Friends
of Lesbians and Gays
www.pflag.org

San Diego Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,
Transgender Community Center
www.thecentersd.org

Transgender Law Center
www.transgenderlawcenter.org

Women's Educational Media
www.womedia.org

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