

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT: DISRUPTING ANTI-BLACKNESS AND HOMOPHOBIA IN SCHOOLS



[Image description: Black person smiling in a blurred background, with a partially visible heart in rainbow colors in the foreground.]

Welcome to *Equity Digest*! This newsletter is for education stakeholders (e.g. community members, caregivers) who have an interest in supporting educational equity in their school communities. What is educational equity? Educational equity can be defined as beliefs, actions, and policies that enable all students to have access to and participate in quality learning environments and experience successful outcomes. Each *Equity Digest* explains the concepts and findings of the latest academic research surrounding a particular equity-focused topic. The intent of this periodical is to relay equity concepts and supporting research, “digesting” key findings so you can draw informed conclusions. The *Digest* also offers ways that you can advance equitable practices in your school community. Enjoy!

This *Equity Digest* is a call to action for school community stakeholders to collaborate with educators to increase language, policies, and practices that center the lived experiences of students who hold the intersectional identities of being both Black and a member of the LGBTQ community. How can school community stakeholders encourage educators to create space where Black LGBTQ students can feel seen, heard, valued, affirmed, and empowered (Skelton, 2020)? How can schooling communities work to welcome students to be their authentic and full self, and combat the ways in which anti-Blackness and homophobia persist within our communities and our schools? To learn more, we will use this

Equity Digest to define intersectionality, explain how anti-Blackness and homophobia show up in schools, and provide concrete next steps for creating [caring and affirming schooling environments](#) for students who identify as Black and queer.

Get Informed

Protecting the Rights of Black Queer Youth Increases Equity and Inclusivity for All



[Image description: Masculine-presenting Person of Color holding a Pride flag, with the word “resist” written across it.]

To be inclusive to all students in schooling environments, educators must center the lived experiences of Black queer youth (Parker, 2021). Doing so is complex as educators need to recognize the multiple marginalized identities that their Black queer students possess. Recognizing and addressing the multiple oppressed identities an individual holds has been defined by Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw as **intersectionality** (Crenshaw, 1991). Originally, Crenshaw (1991) used intersectionality to discuss the intersections of race and gender, and how these identities interact in order to shape the experience of an individual, specifically Black women’s employment experiences. We are asking educators to consider students’ intersectionality of being Black and queer¹. Examining the experiences of Black queer youth is important as their experiences and their unique challenges within schooling environments is often overlooked. Thereby, even the most well-intentioned educators allow inequities to persist. We see these inequities at higher rates for Black and queer students as they are criticized on a larger scale than individuals holding dominant identities or singular marginalized identities (Brockenbrough, 2015). By supporting

¹Queer is an umbrella term that covers all sexual and gender identities other than straight and cisgender. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people may all identify with the word queer, as does this newsletter’s author. For more about the history of this term, and different perspectives on its usage, see <https://www.glaad.org/reference/lgbtq>

educators in centering Black queer students’ lives in equity-focused work, you can aid in establishing urgency in the disruption and dismantling of anti-Black and homophobic language, policies, and practices that persist in educational institutions. By doing so, we will see more equitable schooling and learning environments that are safe and inclusive for all

Why You Should Care

Schools are Harmful and Inflict Trauma onto Students who Identify as Black and Queer

While we want our schools to be safe and inclusive for all students, it is also important to note that the number of Black children who commit suicide has been on the rise (Al-Mateen & Rogers, 2018, as cited in Parker, 2021). Additionally, while those who identify as Black have higher risks of poor mental health than their white counterparts, **those who identify as both Black and queer** have higher and more intensified susceptibility to poor mental health, post-traumatic stress disorder, and chronic depression (Parker, 2021). You as community stakeholders can work with teachers and educators to ensure schooling environments are places of safety and inclusive for all students, but particularly students who identify as Black and queer. However, to do so we must first be able to define, recognize, and name anti-Blackness and homophobia that infects our schools, language, policies, and practices.

Anti-Blackness in Schools

Anti-Blackness in schools can be defined as the overall treatment of Black students as if they are intellectually inferior, inherently criminal, and less human in comparison to the white dominant standards of thinking, being, feeling, and existing (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Parker, 2021). This anti-Blackness is represented in data that shows the negative impact on Black students in schools. For example, Black students

are suspended at higher rates than their white counterparts, identified and referred for special education, and withheld from access to highly qualified teaching, honors courses, and gifted and talented programming (Ford & Whiting, 2007; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2012; Peske & Haycock, 2006; Skiba, et al., 2002; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2018). Educators are often not able to recognize, let alone directly address anti-Blackness. This is because institutional abuse and spirit murdering have become normal within the language, policies, and practices of schools (Henry & Warren 2016; Love, 2016, as cited in Parker, 2021).

Redressing anti-Blackness requires all of us working together to name and disrupt the systemic acts of violence our Black youth experience in schooling environments. When we work to address harmful and violent language, policies, and practices we directly disrupt the reinforcement of negative stereotypes that occur within our society at large, and benefit the dominant white narrative (Coles, 2016, as cited in Parker, 2021).

Homophobia in Schools

We must recognize that our schools currently operate in a way that maintains a status quo. The status quo benefits those who operate within a specific set of dominant systemic values informing what is right and wrong, good and bad, whose voices are centered and whose are erased, who benefits from the way things are and who does not (Radd & Macey, 2013. LGBTQ students directly violate notions of so-called normalcy, and because of this infringement students who identify as queer are more susceptible to bullying, harassment,

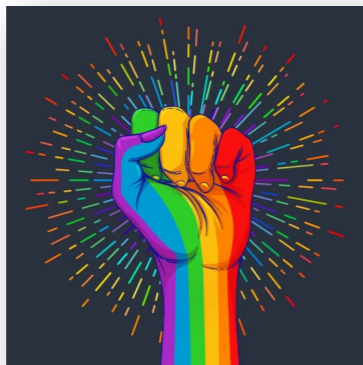


[Image description: Feminine-presenting Black person at a protest holding a sign that says, “Black queer excellence.”]

discrimination, exclusion, and victimization (Pender & Hope, 2019, as cited in Parker, 2021). This bullying, harassment, and discrimination often manifests in queer youth having a more difficult time at school which can result in missing multiple days of school, struggling with academics, and having higher dropout rates (Blackburn & McCready, 2009; Russell et al., 2020; Scannapieco et al., 2018, as cited in Parker, 2021). As we move forward, we ask you to consider the connections across anti-Blackness and Homophobia as well as how we can help to ensure teachers and educators are not participating in processes of discrimination, victimization, and erasure of those that identify as both Black and queer.

Connections Across Anti-Blackness and Homophobia

It is critical for us all to recognize that the ways schools currently operate is not only harmful, but violent for youth who identify as both Black and queer. For these students, “carrying the weight of such heavily scrutinized identities can feel unbearable” (Parker, 2021, p. 4). When this reality, this experience, this truth goes unacknowledged, especially within spaces that are supposed to be caring and affirming, the lifelong effects for Black queer youth can be destructive. It is for this reason that we should work with teachers to help create inclusive schooling environments where Black queer youth feel valued, acknowledged, and cared for.



[Image description: Graphic of a raised fist, decorated in Pride flag colors.]

Moving Forward

Consider Concrete Critical Action Steps to Increase Knowledge and Build Awareness

Often when we know more, we want to do more. Here are concrete action steps for you to assist educators in supporting their Black LGBTQ students (developed by Parker, 2021):

- **Increase Knowledge:** What is the history of racism, homophobia, and transphobia in educational institutions, specifically within your local context?
- **Create Space to Learn:** How can you help ensure professional development opportunities for school staff to address the intersections of identities and the experiences of Black LGBTQ students are welcomed and encouraged? There are a number of resources available here: <https://www.glsen.org/professionaldevelopment>
- **Representation Matters!** Encourage schools and teachers to use curriculum increases exposure to authentic diversity and positive representations of Black and LGBTQ people.
- **Get Involved!** Help start a GSA (Gender and Sexualities Alliance) and/or an ethnic/cultural club and be a part of your school community’s response plan. Help create clear guidelines for responding to anti-LGBTQ and racist behavior.

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[Image description: Two feminine-presenting People of Color smiling, each holding up a corner of a Pride flag behind them.]

Meet the Authors

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About the Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center

The mission of the Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center is to ensure equity in student access to and participation in high quality, research-based education by expanding states' and school systems' capacity to provide robust, effective opportunities to learn for all students, regardless of and responsive to race, sex, and national origin, and to reduce disparities in educational outcomes among and between groups. The Equity by Design briefs series is intended to provide vital background information and action steps to support educators and other equity advocates as they work to create positive educational environments for all children. For more information, visit <http://www.greatlakesequity.org>.

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Disclaimer

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