

LGBTQ-VISIBILITY AND INTEGRATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Why Begin in Elementary School?

While many LGBTQ-inclusive school supports begin in middle or high school, it is critical for elementary schools to establish a foundation of respect and understanding for all people. In addition to gaining knowledge and developing skills, elementary students typically begin to develop an understanding of themselves and the world and people around them. As such, the social environment of classrooms and schools provides the opportunity for children to initiate and develop relationships and navigate increasingly complex peer relationships. That complexity can often lead to incidents of name-calling and use of hurtful and biased words. If left uninterrupted by educators and other adult role models, these behaviors can take root in children's hearts and minds.

Furthermore, an increasing number of students in elementary school are breaking gender stereotypes, identifying as LGBTQ, and coming from LGBTQ-headed families. [GLSEN's Playgrounds and Prejudice \(2012\)](#) report found that 1 in 8 students did not conform to "traditional" gender roles, and that these children faced more hostile learning environments than their peers. Gender nonconforming elementary students were more likely to have mean rumors or lies spread about them, and to say that they had missed school in the past month because they felt unsafe (GLSEN).

Beginning these conversations in elementary school will help young people develop empathy for a diverse group of people, and to learn about identities that might relate to their families or even themselves. It is never too early for schools to set up a foundation of understanding and respect.



BEST PRACTICES FOR INCLUSION

Administrators and District Leaders

- Attend and arrange for Professional Development for Educators that specifically focuses on LGBTQ people and families, interrupting anti-LGBTQ comments and harmful gender stereotype reinforcement, and LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum.
- Communicate a commitment to LGBTQ visibility and support to educators and families at the start of the year
- Distinguish between pushback, concerns, and questions. Be prepared to share the rationale behind your support, and your commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion and respect for all
- Read and Share [GLSEN's Respect for All Resources](#) for district and school leaders
- Support and assign educators to oversee school-wide celebrations such as Ally Week (September), LGBTQ History Month (October), No Name-Calling Week (January), and Pride Month (June)
- Establish a diversity point-person in the school who has had LGBTQ-specific training
- Read [GLSEN's National School Climate Survey](#) to consider what foundations of understanding and support you can offer proactively in elementary school, and consider conducting your own [local research](#).

Classroom Educators

- With support from your administration, share your commitment to diversity and respect, including the LGBTQ community, at Curriculum/Back to School night at the beginning of the year.
- Read LGBTQ-inclusive picture books and encourage discussions around respect and diversity.
- Ensure that any lessons on families have examples of LGBTQ-headed families, and that any communications to students' family members address "Families" rather than "Mom and Dad." Consider celebrating "Family Day" rather than Mother's and Father's days.
- Avoid using gender to separate students in lines or seating arrangements.
 - Encourage students to explore gender stereotypes through this lesson: [That's a \(Gender\) Stereotype](#), and [Ready, Set, Respect!](#)
- Teach about identity that includes gender using GLSEN's Identify Flowers.
- Learn more about gender-inclusive language with our Educator Resources and introduce gender neutral pronouns using our Pronouns Lesson.
 - Bring pronoun visibility into self-portraits and occasionally at morning meeting.
- Connect with speciality educators to share what the students are learning and for reinforcement.
 - Share [GLSEN's Changing the Game with PE Teachers and Coaches](#).
 - Share [GLSEN's Creative Expressions Exhibit](#) with art and music teachers .

Advocacy: Addressing Questions and Pushback

Inviting families into conversations and clear communication around the direction of the school is a valuable experience when introducing LGBTQ visibility. LGBTQ-integration in elementary school should be introduced by administrators or school leaders and communicated to staff members during Professional

Development before the start of a new school year, and to families at the start of the year on curriculum or Back to School night. Frontloading with the schools' responsibility to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for all students along with a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, can be a strong start to the school year and a time to address any misconceptions or apprehensions. We encourage school leaders to invite families to Host events etc.

In addition to the rationale provided at the start of this resource, the following talking points can provide clarity for anyone wondering about the benefits of LGBTQ-inclusion:

- LGBTQ-inclusion and visibility benefits all students by promoting acceptance and respect, and teaching them more about the diverse people and families in the world.
- LGBTQ-inclusion supports a student's ability to empathize, connect, and collaborate with a diverse group of peers, and encourages respect for all.
- All students deserve to feel welcome at school, including students who identify as LGBTQ and come from LGBTQ-headed families.
- Addressing LGBTQ people in discussions at school acknowledges the reality that many students come from LGBTQ-headed families, are being taught by LGBTQ-educators, and are, increasingly, identifying as LGBTQ themselves even in elementary school.

Supportive administrators can support this work address families and be open to hearing their questions, being careful to distinguish questions or concerns from negative pushback.

- Example statement from administration: We are conscious of providing age-appropriate and developmentally-appropriate lessons and activities that meet all of our students where they are when addressing LGBTQ-visibility and inclusion. Our goal is to work together as one community through this practice. **We encourage you to reach out to us or our teachers throughout the year if you have any questions or would like further information as we support our students in this important work.**

Additional Resources

- [GLSEN's Ready, Set, Respect!](#) - GLSEN's elementary toolkit has common-core aligned lessons that focus on name-calling, bullying and bias, LGBTQ-inclusive family diversity and gender roles and diversity.
- [Reading the Rainbow: LGBTQ Inclusive Literacy in the Elementary Classroom](#) - This book offers comprehensive resources, curriculum development, resource materials, and a pathway between existing literature and current LGBTQ resources.
- [Teaching Early Childhood as a Nonbinary Educator](#).
- GLSEN's Inclusive Curriculum Guide.

To connect with educators around the country who are implementing LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and working towards LGBTQ-supports in their schools, join [GLSEN's Educator Forum](#) on Facebook and sign up for our [Educator Network](#).