

OUT[®] FOR SAFE SCHOOLS 20 23



A TOOLKIT FOR LGBTQ+ AFFIRMING EDUCATORS



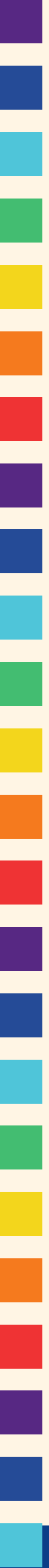
Prepared by:
Los Angeles LGBT Center

Prepared for:
OUT for Safe Schools[®]

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WHAT IS OUT FOR SAFE SCHOOLS®?

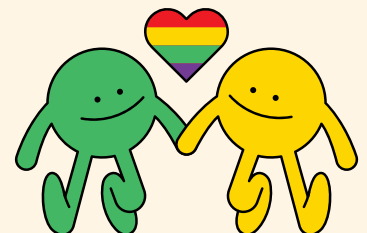
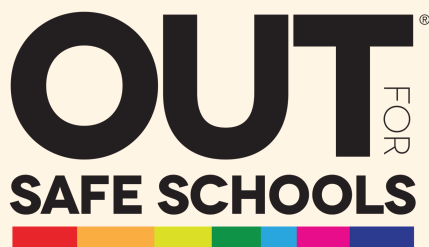


OUT for Safe Schools® is a national movement aimed at supporting LGBTQ+ students by equipping school districts, administrators, and staff to create schools that are safe, welcoming, and affirming to all students. **OUT for Safe Schools®** grew out of a collaboration between the **Los Angeles Unified School District** and the **Los Angeles LGBT Center** and has since expanded to dozens of school districts and educational agencies throughout the country.

In light of the catastrophic wave of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation being proposed throughout the United States—much of it aimed at schools and students—**OUT for Safe Schools®** has created the following toolkit to support educators in advocating for their LGBTQ+ students. Building on over a decade of working directly with school districts, we've developed the following talking points, best practices, and list of resources to help you understand the issue, as well as how to best support students and families in your district. We've also included a summary of the types of legislation that are targeting our community.

We are not in this fight for LGBTQ+ students alone.

OUT for Safe Schools® welcomes your feedback, suggestions, and insights as to how we can all work together to fight those trying to take away our rights and freedoms.



WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

In 2023, 570+ pieces of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation were introduced in 47 states, with 25+ states having already passed such legislation as of this toolkit's publication. While many of these laws are being challenged in courts, the impact on students is immediately felt, through decreased access to affirming education, athletics, and gender-affirming care, and through the negative societal messaging targeting LGBTQ+ students, teachers, and families. Here are some statistics:

EFFECT ON STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

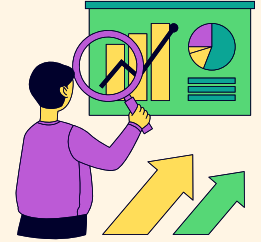
- A [2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention details **69% of LGBTQ+ youth reported feeling persistently sad and hopeless.**
- Because of mistreatment and stigmatization, **LGBTQ+ students are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide than their peers** (Johns et al., 2019; Johns et al., 2020).
- A [2020 Journal of Adolescent Health](#) study finds that **trans students are 2 to 2.5 times more likely to experience depression** and seriously consider or attempt suicide.
- The Trevor Project's [2023 National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People](#) reports **trans students attempt suicide less when their pronouns are respected**, when they are able to change the gender marker on their legal documents, and **when they have gender-affirming spaces.**

IMPACT OF AFFIRMING SPACES

- [GLSEN's 2021 National School Climate Survey](#) reports **students in schools that host clubs that address LGBTQ+ issues are less likely to feel unsafe and miss school** than LGBTQ+ students without these affirming clubs.
- GLSEN also finds **LGBTQ+ students with supportive staff members have greater educational aspirations and are less likely to feel unsafe** regarding their sexual orientation, gender expression, or gender identity.
- [Advocates for Youth](#) concludes that students in **school districts with LGBTQ+ inclusive policies had lower rates of victimization** based upon their sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

TYPES OF ANTI-LGBTQ+ BILLS

The anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments you might hear in an educational setting are part of a larger wave of backlash to progress on LGBTQ+ rights. Below, we've identified the main types of laws that have come with this backlash.



Gender Affirming Care Bans

Criminalization of parents/healthcare professionals who support their trans children. Bans surgeries, hormones, and even relevant mental health services

Drag Show Bans

Bans performances on public property or anywhere minors can see, calling it "adult cabaret" or not suitable for youth

Anti-LGBTQ Curriculum

Bans education about LGBTQ+ health and history/figures, aka "Don't Say Gay" laws

Anti-Trans Restrooms

Forces students to use the restroom of their sex assigned at birth

Anti-Trans Athletics

Forces students to join the sports team and use the locker room according to sex assigned at birth

Forced Outing in Schools

Requires staff to alert parents/caregivers if they know a student is trans; also allows outing staff

WHAT DO I DO OR SAY AS AN EDUCATOR?



SUPPORT AND AFFIRM...

- **Emphasize respect for all students and create a safe learning space with positive classroom decor.** If your school policies state you cannot display visible allyship for LGBTQ+ students such as flags, then decorate your classroom with messages like "All Are Welcome In This Classroom" and "Be Yourself".
- **Address anti-LGBTQ+ remarks both collectively and individually.** If the language was directed at a student, then directly speak to them at a time you feel appropriate. For more information, refer to "Speak Up at School" by Learning for Justice in Resource List below.
- **If you can, foster a safe space for LGBTQ+ students that can serve as an environment for them beyond the school's walls.** This could look like holding clubs, meetings, and supportive events off of school time and off campus, like at a coffee shop, community space, or even virtually.

TEACH...

- **You can introduce sexual identity and gender identity diversity in the classroom by incorporating historical figures who are LGBTQ+ without focusing on their identity.** This exercise will normalize these figures in the classroom while still following any administrative policies. Encourage students to go to the library and seek education outside of the classroom.
- **Support trans and non-binary folks by reaffirming that gender identity is how someone self-identifies in their mind and is a valid existence.** There is confusion that if a student is taught that trans and non-binary people exist, this will cause them to transition. This is not true—it will create conversation and an opportunity for education and acceptance.
- **Encourage students to use their locker or backpack as a way to hold space, celebrate their unique identities, and be safe!** If flags and other distinctly LGBTQ+ elements are banned, then decorations could consist of motivational stickers with phrases such as, "You are enough," or posters that express their interests, i.e. their favorite singer.

PROVIDE RESOURCES...

- **Don't perpetuate myths—be knowledgeable about the trans community, including gender affirming health and mental health care.** People will often repeat misinformation or misconceptions about transgender healthcare when talking about school policies. It's important to know the facts when a student or parent reaches out for guidance. If you don't know, you can always tell them you're willing to do the research first.
- **Mental health care radically lowers rates of depression, suicidal thoughts, and suicidal attempts among all youth.** Mental healthcare stigma places a burden on the individual that needs help. If there's not capacity for the administration to safely step in, then encourage the student to seek help without judgement.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE RESOURCES?



American Civil Liberties Union - a nonprofit organization defending and preserving individual rights.

CenterLink LGBT Community Center Directory - a directory of LGBTQ+ centers across the United States.

Gender Spectrum - a national organization committed to the health and well-being of gender-diverse children and teens.

GLSEN's 2021 National School Climate Survey - an extensive report focused on the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in our nation's schools by GLSEN.

GSA Network - an organization that assists students and teachers with starting LGBTQ+ alliances.

Human Rights Campaign's Welcoming Schools - a comprehensive bias-based bullying prevention program by the Human Rights Campaign.

Imi.guide - a free guide built for and with LGBTQ+ teens to help youth explore identity and support their mental health.

Lambda Legal - an American civil rights organization that focuses on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities, as well as people living with HIV and AIDS.

Los Angeles LGBT Center - a provider of programs and services for LGBTQ+ people, including health, social services, housing, and leadership and advocacy.

OUT for Safe Schools® - a national campaign that encourages school staff to publicly identify as LGBTQ+ allies by wearing the OUT for Safe Schools® badge.


Parents' Guide to School Board Advocacy - a resource on making changes in your school district.

PFLAG - an organization uniting parents, families, and allies with LGBTQ+ people.

Power-Mapping by the Center for Nonprofit Management - a helpful tool used to build strategy and assess progress while driving change for our communities.

Speak Up at School by Learning for Justice - a guidebook offering tools and strategies to prepare you to speak up against prejudice and stereotypes at school.


Trevor Project: 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Student Mental Health - research related to LGBTQ+ youth mental health and suicide prevention.



ADVOCACY

STRATEGIES REFRAMING THE NARRATIVE

HUMANIZE THE LGBTQ+ EXPERIENCE



Emphasize the value of embracing differences and learning from one another by sharing stories of LGBTQ+ individuals' achievements and contributions in history. When you highlight positive LGBTQ+ role models such as Harvey Milk and Marsha P. Johnson, it inspires students to continue learning more about these figures.

FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH

Create safe spaces where all students can recharge and seek support and encourage breaks for refreshing. This could look like a midday “brain break” and incorporating lessons that teach students self-awareness, social awareness, and empathy. Make sure to also directly address bullying, discrimination, and harassment of all kinds.



SHOWCASE FAMILY ACCEPTANCE

Explain how family support positively impacts the well-being and success of LGBTQ+ students. Remember to respect cultural backgrounds and religious beliefs while fostering and understanding that support for LGBTQ+ students is not at odds with these values. Provide resources, websites, and books that families can refer to for accurate and supportive information around LGBTQ+ issues.



ADVOCACY STRATEGIES



ADDRESSING MISINFORMATION

You may not be able to change every individual's mind, but countering false narratives with objective and high-quality facts clarifies the issues for folks who have not yet formed opinions. Acknowledge the extremist and hateful voices these bills are elevating, centering, and prioritizing and how they aim to hurt LGBTQ+ students. Creating a space for conversation can be a way to reach parents and guardians. For materials being deemed offensive, highlight affirming and positive passages and question rationale for the ban. Try to focus on facts and not false narratives.

ENGAGING WITH DECISION MAKERS

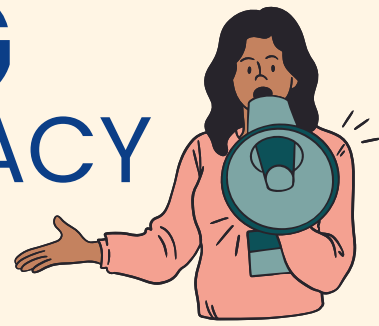
Always keep the focus on students. Share data about the harm to students. Talk about the cost savings for engaging in supportive and preventive care. Remind decision makers that failing to comply with LGBTQ+ inclusive laws could run afoul of federal and state government and may result in penalties for their district.

BUILDING A NETWORK

Seek out other allies you can lean on, such as LGBTQ+ Centers, community members, or other individuals who care about inclusivity. Build or join a diverse coalition that encompasses as many parts of the community as possible. Remember, your network may be found online. Tap into resources—this type of work is being done nationally by organizations and individuals just like you.



BUILDING AN ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN



☑ Define your problem.

The problems we are facing as LGBTQ+ folks and allies can seem vast. You must narrow your focus to achieve a successful campaign.

- **Example:** You live in a state with unclear standards on LGBTQ+ inclusive instructional materials. Your local school district is banning "inappropriate" materials, including LGBTQ+ inclusive and anti-racist materials. How can you address this?

☑ Set a goal.

Setting an achievable goal helps us tackle the onslaught of attacks on education. Is there a statewide or districtwide law that could be clarified to prevent rollback of LGBTQ+ inclusive policies?

- **Example:** Codify requirements for instructional materials into law at the state or district level.

☑ Identify your target, allies, and opposition.

Who are the people with the most decision-making power? Can they be moved? Who are the allies who share your values? How much power does the opposition actually have? Who is in the moveable middle? These are all questions to consider when deciding who to target with your advocacy. You may want to use a power analysis to map out the players in this fight (see resource list above).

Remember: you are not in this alone! Identify parents' and caregivers' groups, organizations, and other community groups who are potential allies.

- **Example:** If the school board split is a narrow margin, targeting the school district makes sense as an example. If the local school board is more conservative than the state legislature, go above them and aim for statewide legislation! This is an opportunity to build power with allies in school districts with more progressive policies and score a big win.

BUILDING AN ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN CONT.



☑ Determine appropriate tactics.

Who you target will determine which tactics work best for your campaign.

- Campaigns aimed at state legislatures often include phone banks, letter-writing campaigns, public comments, and lobby visits.
- Campaigns aimed at school boards often involve public comments, social media, and letter-writing.
- **Example:** Testimonial at a state board of education hearing from teachers, students, parents, and caregivers

Here is a list of some of the common tactics used to move decision-makers:

media	in person	remote
op-eds	lobby visits	phone banks
letters to editor	testimony/ public comment	letter-writing parties
press conferences	marches/ rallies	petitions
social media	social gatherings	automated emails

☑ Storytelling

Every person impacted by anti-LGBTQ+ policies has a powerful story to share. Stories shed light and help people care. They demonstrate the positive impacts of LGBTQ+ inclusive policies and the destructive nature of anti-LGBTQ+ ones.

Exercise: Think about one person in your life whom you care about, whether it is a student, a parent, a colleague, or yourself.

1. Spend one minute writing or talking out loud about them: What are they like? What brings them joy? What do they value? What do you love about them? Now think about the world you want to for them: What policies have a harmful effect on them? What policies would make this world safer and more liberating for them?
2. Combine these into a statement and you have a story you can use for letters, calls to public officials, public comments, and even heart-to-heart conversations with people who may not see things your way. The most powerful arguments are our lived experiences!

Lastly, remember: advocacy takes time! Just as today's anti-LGBTQ+ extremist movement didn't happen overnight, our work for positive change will take commitment. Every action we take to build power, pass LGBTQ+ inclusive laws, and block the rollback of our progress is a step toward a better future for our youth.



SOME EXAMPLES OF AFFIRMING LAWS FOR ALL



California:

- **FAIR Education Act (2011)** - Amends the California Education Code to include the Fair, Accurate, Inclusive and Respectful reference to contributions by people with disabilities and members of the LGBTQ+ community in history and social studies curriculum.
- **California Healthy Youth Act (2016)** - Requires that students receive comprehensive sexual health education at least twice—(at least) once in middle school and (at least) once in high school. It includes new language about adolescent relationship abuse and sex trafficking and reinforces a focus on healthy attitudes, healthy behaviors, and healthy relationships. It also strengthens previous requirements that instruction and materials be appropriate for students of all sexual orientations and genders and ensures that sexual health education does not promote outdated gender norms. The law also updated the existing HIV prevention education mandate to reflect the developments made in our understanding of and ability to treat and prevent HIV over the last 20 years.

Colorado

- **Inclusion Of American Minorities In Teaching Civil Government (2019)** - Mandates funding instruction in public schools of history and civil government of the United States and Colorado, including but not limited to the history, culture, and social contributions of American Indians, Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals within these minority groups; the intersectionality of significant social and cultural features within these communities; and the contributions and persecution of religious minorities.

Connecticut

- **HB 6619 (2021)** - Requires the Department of Education and the State Education Resources Center to develop a model curriculum for K-8 education. The content of the curriculum will include Native American students, Asian Pacific American studies, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexual orientations and gender studies, climate change, personal financial management and financial literacy, military service and experience of American veterans, and civics and citizenship, including digital citizenship and media literacy.



SOME MORE EXAMPLES OF **AFFIRMING LAWS FOR ALL**



Illinois

- **HB 246 (2019)** - Requires that textbooks purchased by schools in Illinois must include the roles and contributions of all people protected under the Illinois Human Rights Act including LGBTQ+ persons.

Nevada

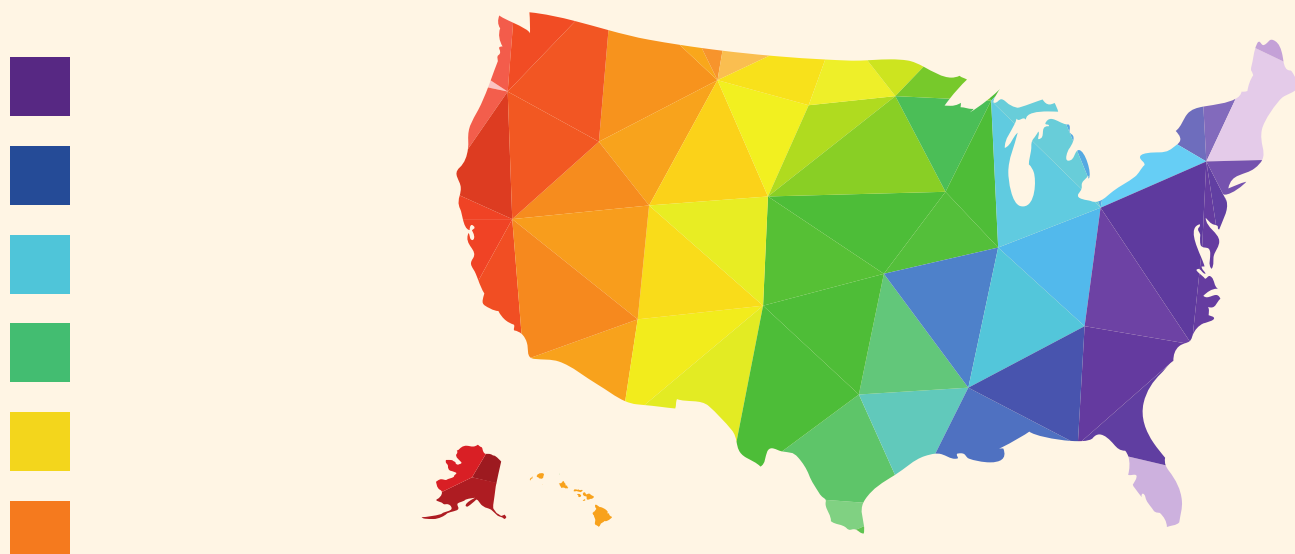
- **AB 261 (2021)** - Requires K-through-12 schools to teach the histories and contributions of frequently marginalized groups, such as immigrants, Native Americans, religious organizations, and the LGBTQ+ community.

New Jersey

- **A1335 (2019)** - Requires boards of education to include instruction and adopt instructional materials that accurately portray political, economic, and social contributions of persons with disabilities and LGBTQ+ people.

Oregon

- **HB 2023 (2019)** - Directs State Board of Education to ensure that academic content standards for certain subjects include sufficient instruction on histories, contributions and perspectives of women, Native Americans, people of African, Asian, Pacific Island, Chicano, Latino or Middle Eastern descent, people with disabilities, immigrants, refugees; and LGBT people.





LOS ANGELES LGBT CENTER

Just One Affirming Adult Positively Impacts LGBTQ+ Youth



Join a nationwide effort to support LGBTQ+ students: outforsafeschools.org

GET IN TOUCH WITH US



@outforsafeschools



outforsafeschools@lalgbtcenter.org



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