

## **The School Counselor and LGBTQ Youth**

(Adopted 1995, Revised 2000, 2005, 2007, 2013, 2014, 2016)

### **American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position**

School counselors promote equal opportunity and respect for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. School counselors recognize the school experience can be significantly more difficult for students with marginalized identities. School counselors work to eliminate barriers impeding LGBTQ student development and achievement.

### **The Rationale**

Despite widespread efforts, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) students continue to face challenges that threaten their academic and social/emotional development in schools. Students report feeling unsafe in school due to their sexual orientation, perceived orientation, gender identity or gender expression and report experiencing homophobic remarks, harassment and bullying (GLSEN, 2012). LGBTQ individuals often face multiple risk factors that may place them at greater risk for suicidal behavior (CDC, 2011). School counselors realize these issues affect healthy student development and psychological well-being.

### **The School Counselor's Role**

The school counselor works with all students through the stages of identity development and understands this may be more difficult for LGBTQ youth. It is not the school counselor's role to attempt to change a student's sexual orientation or gender identity. School counselors recognize the profound harm intrinsic to therapies alleging to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity (SAMHSA, 2015) and advocate to protect LGBTQ students from this harm. School counselors provide support to LGBTQ students to promote academic achievement and social/emotional development. School counselors are committed to the affirmation of all youth regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression and work to create safe and affirming schools. School counselors:

- counsel students with feelings about their sexual orientation and gender identity as well as students' feelings about the identity of others in an accepting and nonjudgmental manner
- advocate for equitable educational and extracurricular opportunities for all students regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression
- advocate for gender-nonconforming students in regard to access of building facilities (e.g., ensuring a safe environment for restroom use and changing) and gender presentation (e.g., wearing a dress or pants for an orchestra or vocal performance)
- promote policies that effectively reduce the use of offensive language, harassment and bullying and improves climate
- address absenteeism, lowered educational aspirations and academic achievement and low psychological well-being as a result of victimization and feeling unsafe at school (GLSEN, 2012)
- provide a safe space for LGBTQ students and allies such as Gay and Straight Alliance Clubs
- promote sensitivity and acceptance of diversity among all students and staff to include LGBTQ students and diverse family systems
- advocate for the rights of families to access and participate in their student's education and school activities without discrimination (GLSEN, 2009)
- support an inclusive curriculum at all grade levels
- model language that is inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity
- advocate for adoption of school policies addressing discrimination and promoting violence-prevention programs to create a safe and supportive school environment (Robinson & Espelage, 2012)
- support students in addressing possible discrimination by staff members
- encourage staff training on inclusive practices, creating an affirming school environment, accurate information and risk factors for LGBTQ students (Russell et al. 2010)
- know the impact of family acceptance on student well-being and ability to thrive (Ryan, 2014)

- support families whose children are coming out by helping them navigate these important developmental milestones in ways that protect LGBTQ students from harm and help families stay together (Ryan, 2014)
- identify LGBTQ community resources for students and families and assess the quality and inclusiveness of these resources before referring to such resources

### Summary

School counselors promote affirmation, respect and equal opportunity for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. School counselors promote awareness of and education on issues related to LGBTQ students and encourage a safe and affirming school environment. School counselors work to eliminate barriers impeding student development and achievement and are committed to the academic, career and social/emotional development of all students.

### References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2011). Sexual identity, sex of sexual contacts, and health-risk behaviors among students in grades 9-12 — youth risk behavior surveillance, selected sites, United States, 2001-2009. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: Surveillance Summaries*, 60(7), 1-133.
- Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network. (2012). *Playgrounds and prejudice: Elementary school climate in the United States*. New York, NY: GLESEN and Harris Interactive.
- Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network. (2009). *Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Students in Our Nation's Schools*. Retrieved from <http://www.glsen.org/learn/research/national/report-harsh-realities>
- Hatzenbuehler, M. L. (2011). The social environment and suicide attempts in lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. *Pediatrics*. Published online April 18, 2011.
- Robinson, J. P., & Espelage, D. L. (2012). Bullying explains only part of LGBTQ heterosexual risk disparities: Implications for policy and practice. *Educational Researcher*, 41(8), 309-319.
- Russell, S., Koslow, J., Horn, S., & Saewyc, E. (2010). Social policy report, safe schools policy for LGTBQ students. *Sharing Child and Youth Development Knowledge*, 24(4). Retrieved from [http://srcd.org/sites/default/files/documents/spr\\_24\\_4\\_final.pdf](http://srcd.org/sites/default/files/documents/spr_24_4_final.pdf)
- Ryan, C. (2014). *A practitioner's resource guide: Helping families to support their LGBT children*. HHS Publication No. PEP14-LGBTKIDS. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2015). *Ending conversion therapy: Supporting and affirming LGBTQ youth*. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 15-4928. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

### Resources

- APA Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation. (2009). *Report of the task force on appropriate therapeutic responses to sexual orientation*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J. (2014). *The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York, NY: GLSEN.
- Movement Advancement Project. (2012). *An ally's guide to issues facing LGBT Americans*. Denver, CO: Author.