



A Literature Review for School Procedures Related to Transgender, Nonbinary, and Gender-Nonconforming Students

Key findings:

- Allowing transgender youth to socially transition and affirming them in their gender identity can lead to better student wellness and educational outcomes
- Having affirming policies and procedures at schools can decrease harassment of transgender youth
- Respecting names and pronouns at schools decreases depression, suicidal ideation and suicidal behavior for gender nonconforming youth
- Transgender students who report access to safe restroom facilities at schools have increased self-esteem and higher grades than those who feel unsafe in those facilities
- Supportive school staff can help reduce drop-out rates and increase educational attainment for transgender and gender nonconforming students



General Student Health and Wellness at Schools

Capous- Desyllas and Barron (2017) used a qualitative study of four families with transgender children to see how they navigate transitioning and the related social and institutional challenges. These families described how schools could be either places of challenge or places of support based on how supportive they were of trans and gender nonconforming youth. This study found that it was important for transgender youth to have support from administration at schools and that staff at schools are adequately trained to work with transgender youth.

Olson, Durwood, DeMeules and McLaughlin (2016) used a national sample of transgender, prepubescent children to look at the rates of anxiety and depression in transitioned gender nonconforming children in relation to nontransgender children of the same age. They found that when compared to nontransgender children who were the same age, socially transitioned transgender children who were supported in their gender identity had normative levels in depression and only small increases in anxiety. This suggests that allowing transgender children to socially transition can improve wellness outcomes for them.

Jones et al. (2016) used a mixed method research study to examine the experiences of 189 transgender and gender diverse Australian students between the ages of 14 and 25. They found that few students had formally changed their gender on school records and that many reported they wished to do so, but were unable to due to not feeling safe at school. Over 40% of the survey participants found that schools were applying gender segregation and that this caused feelings of discomfort and distress. They found that having gender segregated facilities silenced transgender students and classes that were not segregated by gender offered a more comfortable environment for gender nonconforming students. In addition, having uniform policies that recognize the needs of transgender and gender nonconforming students and are less gendered was important for students' safety and wellbeing.

Baldwin (2015) used a qualitative research study to examine the experiences interacting with schools of 23 parents to transgender children between the ages of 7 and 18. They found that parents' experiences with schools is dependent upon how inclusive the school is for transgender or gender nonconforming students. Implementing gender inclusive policies and practices was found to be fundamental in fostering a gender inclusive climate in schools. Parents also reported concerns about the physical and mental health and safety of their children in schools who had a more restrictive view of gender in their policies and practices. They found that transgender children in schools with discriminatory or unsupportive policies and practices reported higher rates of being bullied, harassed or excluded by peers and/or staff at school and as a result had higher levels of anxiety, depression, and aggression. These findings suggest that having affirming policies and procedures in schools can decrease levels of harassment of transgender youth and as a result decrease rates of mental illness.

Sausa (2005) used a qualitative interview study to describe the school experiences of 24 trans youth between the ages of 14 and 21 and present recommendations for school educators and administrators. Many trans youth reported problems with school facilities that were segregated based on gender- especially gym classes, locker rooms, and restrooms. Because of this, many of the youth interviewed avoided segregated spaces like gym classes and locker rooms even if this meant skipping classes or refusing to engage in extracurricular activities.



Youth also reported issues related to policies and procedures for changing name and gender when attending school, especially forms and applications not being inclusive of transgender identity and the refusal of school administrators to change names and gender designations for youth on school identification, transcripts, and degrees. Results suggest that school forms should be changed to reflect diversity in gender and that school bathrooms, classes, and locker rooms should be made inclusive for transgender youth.

Positive Impacts of Name and Pronoun Use

Russell, Pollitt, Li, and Grossman (2018) looked at the relationship between chosen name use for transgender youth and mental health, specifically depression, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behavior. They found that chosen name use was associated with lower levels of depression, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behavior and that all three measures were the lowest when chosen name was used at home, school, work, and with friends. They also found that an increase in chosen name use in one context (i.e. school), could predict a 5.37 unit decrease in depressive symptoms, a 29% decrease in suicidal ideation, and a 56% decrease in suicidal behavior. Results indicate that teachers and educational institutions can support transgender youth by referring to them by their chosen names.

Pollitt, Lovern, Russell, Li, and Grossman (2019) looked at a sample of 129 transgender and gender nonconforming youth from 3 US cities to look at the relationship between chosen name use and mental health among transgender youth. They found that for youth whose chosen name was used in schools, workplace settings, and at home had higher self-esteem, lower depressive symptoms, and less suicidal ideation. In schools specifically, they found that in educational environments where students were referred to by their chosen names, students were more likely to feel safe.

Facilities Access and Transgender Student Safety

Wernick, Kulick, and Chin (2017) investigated the relationships between transgender identity, bathroom safety, and wellbeing among high school students. They found that transgender students reported significantly lower levels of safety in facilities than either cisgender girls or boys. They also found that having safe bathroom facilities had a significant effect on increasing the self-esteem of transgender students. Transgender identity was associated with significantly lower grades but bathroom safety had a moderating effect on this, meaning that some of the discrepancies in grades can be explained by students feeling unsafe in restrooms. This study suggests that ensuring safe access to bathrooms and other school facilities for transgender students is important in ensuring educational equality and achievement for these students.

Porta et al. (2017) examined LGBTQ youths' experiences with and perspectives about restrooms using qualitative data from 25 youth aged 14-19. They found that youth associated positive restroom experiences with single stall all gender restrooms and advocated for them in their absence. Students also described negative experiences related to discrimination in multi-stall gendered restrooms- ranging from feeling uncomfortable to being unsafe. This study proposes that schools offer gender neutral single stall restrooms in easily accessible locations for students.



Impacts of Supportive Staff in Schools

McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, and Russell (2010) used a mixed method approach with both quantitative survey data and focus groups to examine transgender youths' experience of school harassment, and school strategies to reduce that harassment. This study found that many transgender youth experienced harassment in schools. They found that district efforts to educate staff to be advocates for transgender students and to publicize the availability of those advocates is important for transgender students. In addition, they found that it was important for teachers to intervene to prevent harassment of transgender youth especially when it came to bathrooms, locker rooms, and names.

Johns, Beltran, Armstrong, Jayne, and Barrios (2018) used a literature review of 21 articles focusing on Trans and gender nonconforming youth between the ages of 11 and 26 to examine the impact of various protective factors. Multiple articles they assessed found that adult advocates within school systems were important sources for youth to navigate barriers to well-being and that this in turn reduced dropout rates and improved educational and career aspirations. In addition, they found that having adult advocates could mitigate negative effects on students even if they were experiencing harassment and victimization. Having a relationship with a teacher that was supportive also reduced school absenteeism and increased feelings of safety for Trans youth.

Ullman (2016) used a quantitative study of 51 gender diverse teenagers between the ages of 14 and 18 to look at the influence of teacher positivity towards gender diversity on students' sense of connection to school environment. They found that youth who reported teacher positivity towards gender diversity had higher levels of well-being and greater academic outcomes at schools. In addition, teacher positivity increased students' feelings of connection to their school. These results suggest that having access to school staff members who are knowledgeable, supportive, and administratively supported is instrumental in creating a school environment that transgender and gender nonconforming students are connected to and feel safe and supported in.



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