# Egale

# Still In Every Class In Every School

## Final report on the second climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools

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**In partnership with Egale Canada**

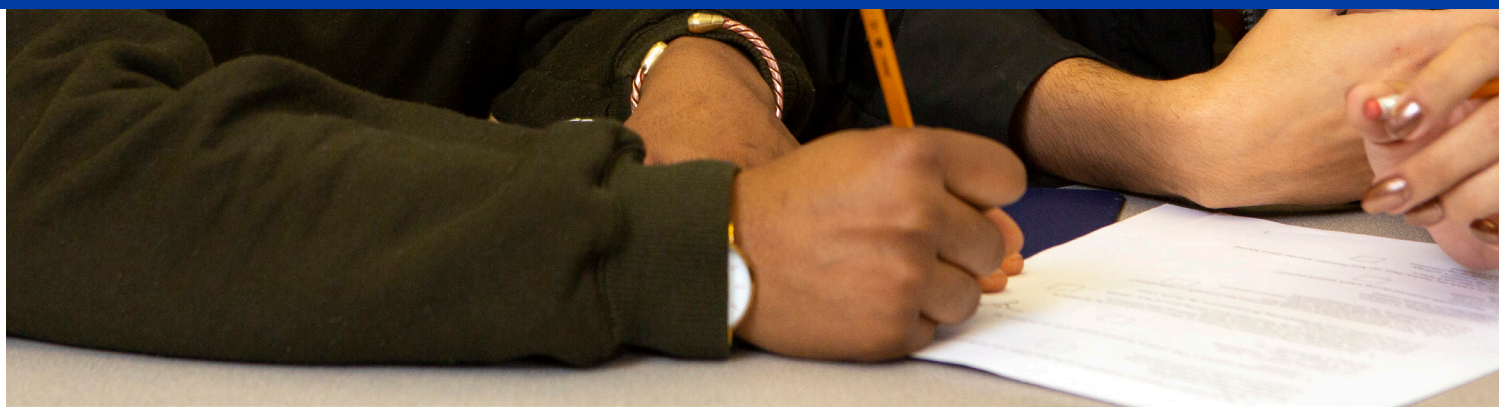# Acknowledgements

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## Egale Canada

Egale is Canada's leading organization for 2SLGBTQI people and issues. We improve and save lives through research, education, awareness, and by advocating for human rights and equality in Canada and around the world. Our work helps create societies and systems that reflect the universal truth that all persons are equal and none is other.

## Cite As

Peter, T., Campbell, C.P., & Taylor, C. (2021). *Still in every class in every school: Final report on the second climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools.* Toronto, ON: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust.

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# Preface

When Tracey Peter and I reported on the results of the First National Climate Survey ten years ago, it was with heavy hearts and also in great hope that our study would provide the evidence that school system officials had been saying they needed in order to develop policy. Our survey in partnership with Egale Canada had found crushing levels of homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic (HBTP) harassment and 2SLGBTQ students feeling unsafe across the country. The main glimmer of hope that we were able to offer from our findings was that 58% of our 3700 participants were distressed by this, which seemed to us to be a sign of solidarity in the student body that just might be activated if adults were to provide meaningful support.

The next ten years provided all kinds of reason for hope that progress might be made. The Climate Survey report received a great response from school systems, provincial and territorial ministries/departments of education, school districts, and especially teacher organizations across the country who invited us to present our results. School system stakeholders began working to develop policy that focused explicitly on HBTP harassment. Students, both 2SLGBTQ and cisgender heterosexual (CH), often led the way past policy efforts by convincing school officials to permit GSAs and 2SLGBTQ themed events and activities in schools.

Our experience of doing the Climate Survey inspired the Every Teacher Project, where we surveyed thousands of K–12 teachers across the country and learned that there was even greater solidarity among teachers in 2015 than we had found among students in 2010. We were inspired in that project by the overwhelming support of teacher organizations who actively recruited their membership to take the survey, recognizing that students were suffering while politically wary school officials delayed and demurred and that it was time to take matters into their own hands. The project found that the vast majority of teachers supported 2SLGBTQ-inclusive education and believed it was their job, but few were actually practicing it. As with the student survey, teacher organizations across the country invited us to present our results and then, recognizing that passive support needed an extra push to translate into action, they worked with us to develop an action plan for professional development complete with workshops and a recommendations toolkit that could be implemented nationwide. Now there was solid reason for our initial optimism.

In the last decade many school districts developed policy and some provinces enacted legislation that went beyond punishing bullies to support professional development and GSAs but most have balked at supporting inclusive curriculum and teaching practices, requiring schools to act on harassment but little else. Yet our own research and that of a great many others had long established that failing to acknowledge the existence of 2SLGBTQ people in schools reinforces hostile attitudes and behaviours with the message that queer matters are still not fit for polite discussion. All too often the message of anti-harassment policies in such contexts boiled down to, as I wrote many years ago, "Don't be mean to the fag."

As I write this, we have another project underway to address 2SLGBTQ supports for teacher education. The RISE project seeks to address the relative inaction on 2SLGBTQ-inclusive classroom teaching by developing guidelines and resources for queering teacher education help Faculties of Education across Canada to prepare entire cohorts of new teachers, year after year, who know how to do this work.  An extensive website housing this work is in development under the direction of Dr. Kristopher Wells at Grant MacEwan University.

An important part of this website is space for a nationwide focus on "Indigiqueering" teacher education, led by Dr. Alex Wilson at University of Saskatchewan, where she offers courses in land-based teacher education. This space is key to the website not only because it is our duty to contribute to reconciliation, but because Indigenous understandings of gender and sexuality as non-binary and as connected to every other aspect of our lives offer a path to transforming heteronormative, gender-normative cultures in schools and beyond.

One of the main lessons we have learned in our research is that we should set our sights higher than inclusive education. We therefore work toward and hope for a truly expansive education that recognizes the damaging effects of binary fictions about sexuality and gender and celebrates the rich diversity of our communities.  To create schools that are welcoming and equitable places for 2SLGBTQ youth (a goal that most stakeholders but admittedly not all can perhaps agree on in 2021), it is necessary to learn about how the gender binary is an inaccurate construct that harms people. Simply including 2SLGBTQ youth in untransformed schools where they remain subject to gender policing and ongoing spectacles of exclusive devotion to cisgender heterosexuality is not enough.

The findings of the Second Climate Survey in some ways mirror those of the First. Young people continue to suffer the impacts of harassment and

discrimination.  But we're also seeing that in schools and districts where comprehensive efforts are being made to foster supportive school climates—including anti-HBTP harassment policies, professional development that cultivates attitudes of support among educators, and 2SLGBTQ-inclusive teaching practices and extracurricular activities, such as GSAs, Pride celebrations, and gender-affirming participation in sports—2SLGBTQ students report lower levels of harassment, greater positive mental health and wellbeing, and a greater attachment to their schools.

Ultimately, then, we have many reasons to be hopeful of a less oppressive future in schools and beyond. If our findings show that the problem still exists, and that students are still suffering, that only means we are right to continue our efforts.

It has been truly rewarding to participate in the national project to detoxify school cultures in collaboration with so many people over the years, and in particular with my brilliant research partner Dr. Tracey Peter and extraordinary research program coordinator Christopher Campbell, now a doctoral candidate in Education. Tracey, Chris, Alex, Kris, and a great many other fine researchers remain committed to contributing their prodigious scholarly energies to the efforts of students, families, teachers, school officials, and community organizations such as Egale Canada to create truly anti-oppressive schools where students of all sexual and gender identities can finally feel safe and be respected.

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June 2021

# Executive Summary

## Project Background

In 2008, the First National Climate Survey on Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia in Canadian Schools was launched, and was a tremendous success. The project directly contributed to the national advancement of 2SLGBTQ rights by providing decision-makers with the methodologically rigorous statistical evidence that they needed to develop and implement 2SLGBTQ-specific policy and provincial legislation. For the first time there was a systematically produced knowledge base that provided educators, school administrators, student and parent activists, government officials, and academics across Canada with the information needed to advance issues of human rights and social justice.

Similar to the First National Climate Survey, the purpose of the Second National Climate Survey is to assess school climate (grades 8 through 12) through students' self-reported school experiences of hostility, inclusion, and support as well as to assess progress made in these key areas in the ten-plus years between the two surveys. In partnership with Egale Canada, a national organization committed to advancing equality and justice for 2SLGBTQ-identified people and their families (egale.ca), the study aims to contribute to the growing body of advocacy and scholarship both nationally and internationally on school-based experiences of school climate, which can be used to address gaps in policy, highlight student experiences in schools, reveal curriculum exclusions, and generally provide evidence-based information on the topic of 2SLGBTQ-inclusion and homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools.

## Sample and Methods

Data were collected between April 2019 and May 2020 through two methods: individual participation in an open-access online survey and in-class participation in a controlled access online survey implemented in schools. In total, the survey consisted of 57 items (note: an item can contain multiple questions or responses as well as "select all that apply" options). Included in the questionnaire were six open-ended questions where students were invited to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives. Given the breadth of topics, it was a relatively long questionnaire that took participants between 25–30 minutes to complete.

The online questionnaire was distributed in three ways: first, through directed recruitment activities via youth organizations for Canadian 2SLGBTQ youth;

second, by advertising the survey website through various social media outlets (e.g., Facebook and Instagram); and third, through Canadian School Boards/ Districts that agreed to distribute the link to the survey to their students – some of whom received encouragement and endorsement from their provincial government's Ministry of Education (e.g., Newfoundland & Labrador; and New Brunswick).

The study was approved by both the Research Ethics Boards (REBs) at the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg. Prior to survey participation, students were directed to a landing page containing the ethics consent protocol, which all respondents were required to read and accept before proceeding to the survey. The consent page informed participants of the study's purpose and ethics related issues (e.g., anonymity and confidentiality).

In total, over 4000 individuals in grade 8 or higher participated in the survey. Once data were cleaned, a total usable sample of 3558 participants was retained. Over a third (38%) of participants identified as LGBQ and 62% as straight/heterosexual. Over half of the sample (57%) identified as cisgender woman/girl, followed by cisgender man/boy (36%), and 6% as trans, non-binary, or gender non-conforming. Combining gender and sexual identities, 61% of participants identified as cisgender and/or heterosexual (CH) and 39% as 2SLGBTQ.

## Findings

Findings from the Second National Climate Survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools reveal both optimism and concern. The **good news** is that homophobic and transphobic language is somewhat in decline in the ten plus years since the First Climate Survey, with a similar trend found in regard to school-based experiences of verbal and physical harassment of 2SLGBTQ students.

**Despite these improvements**, results from the Second National Climate Survey suggest we are still a long way from eradication of school-based incidents of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. Homo-negative and homophobic language is still rampant in Canadian schools, especially in middle-school and early high school grades. More troubling is the findings that homophobic, biphobic, and/or transphobic (HBTP) language is both frequent (i.e., students hear such words and phrases at least weekly) and widespread (i.e., it is used by most students), and in the case of gendered language, is prevalent across all grades. This suggests that gender policing remains relatively persistent throughout adolescence in the form of language or behaviours that reinforce prescriptive gender norms.

Similar to the First National Climate Survey, however, there remains a lot of **untapped solidarity** among students as the majority of cisgender heterosexual (CH) participants in the current study reported that they find the homophobic discourse present at their school to be upsetting on some level. Such a finding underscores the importance of creating inclusive, supportive, and safer schools for 2SLGBTQ students as it benefits all students, even those who identify as CH.

**Consistent with our findings on HBTP language,**

- 2SLGBTQ students report more incidents of HBTP verbal, physical, and sexual harassment as well as other forms of targeted bullying (e.g., cyberbullying) than their CH peers, though many CH students were targeted as well.

- Generally, there was little difference between cisgender LGBQ girls and cisgender GBQ boys in terms of perceived reasons for verbal harassment; however, GBQ boys were substantially more likely to experience verbal harassment due to perceived gender identity than LGBQ girls.

- Cisgender GBQ boys were also more likely than cisgender LGBQ girls to report being physically bullied due to their sexual identity, perceived sexual identity and/or gender identity, and their expression of gender.

- Conversely, cisgender LGBQ girls were more likely to experience some form of personal victimization through social media than cisgender GBQ boys.

Although certainly far from a perfect correlation, these results suggest that bullying and harassment experienced by cisgender LGBQ girls gravitate more toward indirect forms of aggression (i.e., cyber-bullying and mean rumours or lies), while cisgender GBQ boys encounter more direct forms of victimization (i.e., verbal and physical harassment).

The situation is particularly challenging for students who live outside the gender binary, as trans students were the group most likely to report experiencing almost all forms of harassment and victimization, not only in connection to their gender identity and their gender expression, but also in regard to their sexual identity (or perceived sexual identity).

In addition, while most 2SLGBTQ and CH students disclosed the harassment they experienced to at least one friend, the adults in their world were most often left in the dark. For many students, their reason for not disclosing or reporting was their perception that the incident was not serious enough to disclose/report; however, a large portion of students, especially among 2SLGBTQ participants, elected not to disclose because they did not think school staff

would do anything about it, or they did not think educators would handle the situation effectively. **Even more troubling** is that far too many 2SLGBTQ students who did find the courage to disclose indicated that school staff took no action in addressing the incident(s) or took no corrective action. Not surprisingly, this resulted in very few 2SLGBTQ students who did disclose/report their experiences of HBTP bullying to school staff being satisfied with how the incident was handled by educators.

Despite some common trends, there was considerable variability, especially between school type, location, and identity groups.

**For instance:**

- 2SLGBTQ students attending Catholic schools reported more incidents of harassment, especially in relation to sexual and/or gender identity and were less likely to disclose these occurrences to school staff.

- These students also recorded lower levels of school attachment and reported less 2SLGBTQ visibility in their schools.

- Relatedly, 2SLGBTQ students attending Catholic schools were significantly more likely to indicate that they have been prevented from writing on or discussing 2SLGBTQ topics as part of their schoolwork as well as prohibited from wearing clothes that support 2SLGBTQ issues.

For far too many of these students, the message they are receiving is clear – their gender and sexual identities are not welcome nor are they institutionally accepted.

Similarly, the usage of homophobic language was found to be more frequent and prevalent in small towns, cities, and rural/remote areas than in larger cities and suburban areas, which, among other negative outcomes has resulted in 2SLGBTQ students in smaller communities feeling less safe and less attached to their school. Given this evidence that community context and size directly influence the experiences of 2SLGBTQ students, schools which fall into these geographical loci especially need to employ enhanced anti-HBTP messages to ensure that their school climates are supportive of 2SLGBTQ students and for students with 2SLGBTQ family members.

Our findings also confirm that students with at least one 2SLGBTQ parent are more attuned to the presence of HBTP language and are at an increased risk of directed harassment. These students may be a less visible group than 2SLGBTQ students, and their experiences with HBTP bullying may not be as apparent to educators; however, the outcome for these students is that they do not feel welcome in their school community, and they are more likely to skip

school. Within a whole school context, when practising 2SLGBTQ-inclusivity, it is important that educators consider students with 2SLGBTQ family members and ensure that all families are made to feel welcome, respected, and accepted.

The multifaceted nature of harassment and bullying must also be understood within an **intersectional framework**, as social marginalization occurs in multiple and often compounding ways. As intersectionality describes, the experiences of 2SLGBTQ students are inflected by multiple aspects of their identity.

**For instance:**

- Many racialized students reported being targeted due to their racialized identity as well as their sexual and/or gender identities.
- We found that 2SLGBTQ Indigenous youth were more likely to report skipping school due to feeling unsafe and most likely overall to report experiencing verbal harassment.
- 2SLGBTQ Black students were most likely to be verbally harassed about their race and to indicate that they wished they attended a different school.

Educational programming must consciously and explicitly recognize the many variations of discrimination and harassment experienced by racialized 2SLGBTQ students and how these affect their school attachment and overall wellbeing.

Our findings also verify that the disproportionate amount of harassment and bullying experienced by 2SLGBTQ students negatively impacts their personal sense of safety, school attendance, school attachment and connectedness, wellbeing, and academic achievement as well as substantially increases their emotional distress and social isolation. When it comes to safety, not all spaces at school are created equal. Washrooms, change rooms, hallways, and physical education class are considered particularly unsafe places for 2SLGBTQ students, especially among trans students and cisgender LGBQ girls. Overall, the identification of **unsafe places for 2SLGBTQ students increased** between the First and Second National Climate Surveys, which may be due to the greater attention to safety in schools compounded with the increased visibility of 2SLGBTQ students when they do come out – including at younger ages.

There was also substantial variability of perceived safety for 2SLGBTQ students depending on their identity grouping (school was perceived to be less safe for gay boys, girls who act "masculine" and those with 2SLGBTQ parents), type of school (Catholic schools were perceived to be less safe), and geographical location (small cities, towns, and remote/rural communities were perceived

to be less safe for 2SLGBTQ students than urban and suburban areas). Not surprisingly, when it comes to actual feelings of safety, 2SLGBTQ students are significantly less likely to indicate feeling safe at school than CH students – a finding that has seen little improvement between the First and Second National Climate Surveys, and in the case of trans and gender non-binary students is actually even worse.

**A new measure** was included in the current survey, which assessed the mental health and wellbeing of participants by classification into the empirically validated categories of "flourishing," "moderate mental health," and "languishing" (see Keyes, 2002). While the lower than anticipated percentage of students categorized as flourishing may be partially explained by the fact that many students completed the survey in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the disparity between CH and 2SLGBTQ participants cannot be ignored, especially in regard to the extremely low number of cisgender LGBQ girls and trans students who classified as flourishing. Our results also show that the mental health and wellbeing of 2SLGBTQ students is influenced by their school climate as the number of participants flourishing was inversely affected by the absence of staff support, the presence of discrimination and harassment, and feeling unsafe at school.

Without a doubt, the individual-based results illustrating the negative impact HBTP language and harassment has on 2SLGBTQ students are profound, especially in regard to their connectedness to school and their mental health and wellbeing; however, the impact of institutional responses cannot be overlooked. In the Second National Climate Survey, we found that the influence of a positive school climate, rooted in 2SLGBTQ-inclusive education and programming, supportive teachers and staff intervention, and leadership at the district and school-level, are all important protective factors, which is cause for great hope. Trend results show that **teacher and staff intervention to HBTP language has improved** between the First and Second National Climate Surveys as has the effectiveness of educators' responses to homophobic harassment. While these results suggest that schools are making progress, there was less optimism among 2SLGBTQ students attending Catholic schools as well as among 2SLGBTQ students who have experienced physical victimization.

Another encouraging finding is that 2SLGBTQ students who perceive their school community to be "very supportive" of 2SLTGBQ people, compared to those students who indicated their school was "unsupportive," were more likely to be flourishing in their mental health and wellbeing, to report greater school attachment, and to feel safer at school. They were also less likely to feel excluded or left out, to skip school, and to be the target of mean rumours or

lies. These findings clearly show that schools can cultivate these encouraging outcomes for 2SLGBTQ students by seeking to create positive and supportive school environments, in addition to guarding against known risk factors such as HBTP harassment.

As one of the staple interventions for 2SLGBTQ-inclusive education, we also found that **2SLGBTQ-focused policy** in schools acts as a protective factor for many 2SLGBTQ students (i.e., they are more likely to be flourishing in their mental health and wellbeing; to experience greater school attachment, educator support, and effective intervention(s); and to experience less HBTP harassment). Despite these encouraging results, findings need to be interpreted with caution since the majority of students did not know one way or another if such a policy or policies existed in their school – a trend that has not changed since the First National Climate Survey. Nevertheless, 2SLGBTQ students who believe their schools have formal policies or procedures for reporting incidents of homophobia or transphobia were more likely to confirm that their teachers practiced 2SLGBTQ-inclusive curricular practices, such as challenging homophobia and transphobia, using inclusive language, and including 2SLGBTQ individuals when discussing human rights.

One of the major success stories in our comparisons with the First National Climate Survey has been the **impressive increase of Gay-Straight Alliances or Gender and Sexuality Alliances** (GSAs) or similar school-based clubs. Not surprisingly, we found that students who believe their schools have formal anti–HBTP harassment policies were more likely to report that there was a GSA at their school. However, in addition to formal policies, we also found that 2SLGBTQ students who indicated that their school administrators are supportive of 2SLGBTQ initiatives were substantially more likely to have a GSA in their school.

**Another new item** to the Second National Climate Survey was asking students what they wanted their teachers to know about supporting 2SLGBTQ people, with the option of providing both closed-ended and open-ended qualitative responses. The input from 2SLGBTQ students is inspiring, constructive, reasonable, and obtainable.

**Specifically, students are asking their teachers to:**

- Understand why silence around 2SLGBTQ topics is harmful.
- Stop making assumptions about their gender and/or sexual identities.
- Properly refer to them in terms of pronoun options.
- Include 2SLGBTQ people in classroom examples.

- Appreciate the importance of teacher support.
- Acknowledge the barriers that many of them face.

The list goes on, but what they all have in common is that 2SLGBTQ students need educators to **explicitly and visibly support**, respect, include, and validate them – all of which is really no different from what every student in every school wants and is entitled to expect.

As our findings show, the undeniable outcome of a hostile school climate results in detrimental effects for many 2SLGBTQ students. There are two particularly noteworthy findings, however, that warrant further discussion: **trans students** and **middle schools**.

In many ways, there were marked improvements between the First and Second National Climate Surveys for cisgender LGBQ students; yet, these advances have not necessarily translated into a safer and more inclusive school environment for trans students, and in many instances the situation is significantly worse. There are many good reasons to categorize gender identity within the umbrella of 2SLGBTQ (i.e., there is strength in numbers); however, while related, sexuality and gender represent separate identities, and as such, often translate into different experiences. It is vital that educators appreciate and consider many of the unique challenges trans students face in school climates (as well as society as a whole). These include: access to safe and respectful washroom and change room spaces; chosen names and pronouns used with respect, consistency, and dignity; encouragement to participate in school-based activities (including sports); and explicit support for students' gender expression, such as clothing, regardless of conformity to cisnormative expectations. These are all important because, as our study shows, being prevented, discouraged, or flat-out denied the right to live according to one's gender identity or expression impacts the level of school attachment, wellbeing, and overall sense of social connectedness to their school community.

The higher frequency and widespread use of HBTP language and the identification of unsafe spaces among middle-school aged students are also causes for concern. Results from the current study found that middle-school and early high-school aged 2SLGBTQ students were more likely not to be "out" to anyone at school. There seems to be good reason to conceal their gender and/or sexual identities as 2SLGBTQ students who were "out" to at least one person at their school reported greater incidents of HBTP verbal and physical harassment and discrimination. They were also more likely to indicate being excluded by their peers, and have mean rumours or lies spread about them. These students were also less likely to see visible signs that their school is a positive, safe, and welcoming place for 2SLGBTQ people. In our sample, 10%

of cisgender LGBQ students and/or 8% of trans students were in grade 8, and 24% of 2SLGBTQ students were in grade 9. This translates to almost 500 2SLGBTQ students in our sample, and while adolescence across all ages can be a tumultuous time, it can be particularly so for young people who are becoming aware of their 2SLGBTQ identities in middle school and early high school. Educators need to recognize that this is an extremely formative period in which visibility, inclusiveness, respect, community, and support are essential ingredients to the wellbeing of 2SLGBTQ students.

## Recommendations

Recommendations are organized by the role individuals and systems have in the advancement of 2SLGBTQ issues in Canadian schools. Across all recommendation groupings, the following should be governing principles:

### Governing Principles

▶ **Include 2SLGBTQ students,** families/households, and parents/guardians in all policies, programs, and strategies.

▶ Pay attention to supporting the **safety and wellbeing** of trans students and do not assume that their needs are adequately addressed by attention to sexual diversity. Sexual diversity and gender diversity should be considered through aligned, distinct interventions throughout recommendations.

▶ Recognize the **impact of compounding oppressions**—such as heterosexism, cissexism, racism, classism, or ableism—experienced by multiply marginalized students and recognize the fluidity of privilege and marginalization. Approach recommendations with an intersectional understanding that multiple, interconnected forms of oppression need to be addressed within 2SLGBTQ inclusion efforts in schools.

▶ Meaningfully **include**, **consult**, and **engage** individuals and organizations with established expertise in intersectionality and 2SLGBTQ-inclusive education.

## Ministries of Education

▶ **Legislate the inclusion** of anti-HBTP harassment and discrimination measures in safe school policies, including steps for the effective implementation of such policies as well as requirements that school districts provide an annual inventory of 2SLGBTQ-inclusive efforts and annual evidence of meaningful implementation.

▶ Require all schools to include **respectful representations** of 2SLGBTQ people, and provide curricular guidelines and resources for mainstreaming 2SLGBTQ-inclusive teaching as well as transparent mechanisms for annual progress report guidelines in order to hold school districts/boards and individual schools accountable for such implementation.

▶ **Legislate mandatory** 2SLGBTQ-inclusive sexual health and family life education.

## School Districts and School Boards

▶ **Adopt anti-2SLGBTQ discrimination and harassment policies** that explicitly include and define sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression and that provide clear language prohibiting discrimination and harassment on these grounds.

▶ Ensure that schools promptly and effectively **respond** to 2SLGBTQ harassment and discrimination and implement **clear reporting systems**.

▶ Implement policies and practices to ensure all students, especially 2SLGBQ students and trans students, have access to **inclusive facilities** (e.g., gender neutral washrooms, single-user change rooms, signage on multi-user spaces).

▶ **Provide resource support** in order to assist schools in the implementation of 2SLGBTQ-inclusive curricula.

▶ Actively promote the integration of 2SLGBTQ diversity **within regular professional development opportunities**.

## School Administrators

▶ **Provide professional development** and training opportunities designed to improve intervention strategies and build skills to enhance the number of supportive educators on 2SLGBTQ issues—including interventions that are grounded in **intersectional and anti-oppressive frameworks** to meaningfully address the experiences of multiple marginalizations faced by many 2SLGBTQ students and explicitly connect with other equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives.

▶ Make explicit **anti-discriminatory school-based policies and practices** that protect and support 2SLGBTQ students (e.g., school dances and events, and dress codes), and ensure that teachers know how to implement them and respond effectively to incidents of HBTP harassment.

▶ **Provide student-centred interventions** for those who experience harassment and discrimination to ensure that students' needs and safety are addressed.

▶ **Issue proclamations of support** for 2SLGBTQ people and visible indicators of 2SLGBTQ inclusion that welcome and affirm 2SLGBTQ people.

▶ **Support student groups and clubs**, such as GSAs or similar 2SLGBTQ-inclusive student-led clubs, by providing material resources and staff supports; in schools where students have not come forward to start such clubs, **take initiative** by working with teachers to offer support for students to establish them.

▶ Take steps to **recruit and retain 2SLGBTQ educators and school staff**, including 2SLGBTQ BIPOC educators and school staff. These staffing efforts may be supported within schools through professional development on 2SLGBTQ inclusive schools, developing strategies on

creating safer and affirming workplaces, and examining the barriers 2SLGBTQ educators or staff face.

▶ **Create teacher-based support groups** where they can collectively collaborate on how to address HBTP language, discrimination, and harassment in addition to ill treatment of other marginalized and stigmatized groups.

▶ Ensure that washrooms and change rooms are **accessible and inclusive** regardless of gender identity or gender expression.

▶ Provide 2SLGBTQ-inclusive **sexual health** and family life education.

## Teachers, Educators, and Other School Staff

▶ Educate students on all **anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies** protecting 2SLGBTQ students and students with 2SLGBTQ families, and **communicate clear support** for 2SLGBTQ students and encourage them to talk to you about any harassment or discrimination they experience.

▶ Ensure that there is **2SLGBTQ visibility** in classrooms (e.g., positive or affirming space stickers, posters, 2SLGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, etc.).

▶ Provide students access to accurate information regarding 2SLGBTQ individuals through **inclusive curricula and resources**, and work to ensure representation and inclusion of 2SLGBTQ people from a multitude of marginalized identities (e.g., racialized, SES, ability, etc.).

▶ Ensure 2SLGBTQ curricular content is a **regular feature** of classroom teaching (e.g., regularly use gender neutral pronouns, include same-sex relationships in examples, etc.). Ensure curricula across content areas **meaningfully includes and reflects** a wide range of 2SLGBTQ identities, experiences, and perspectives at the intersection of topics and identities.

▶ **Demonstrate allyship** through your actions by doing any or all of the following, especially teachers who identify as CH:

→ **Educate yourself** by deepening your understanding of 2SLGBTQ-related issues, including basic terms and concepts, as it will go a long way in supporting 2SLGBTQ students and students with 2SLGBTQ family members.

→ **Actively and visibly enact your allyship** as you may not always know which members of your school community are 2SLGBTQ or have 2SLGBTQ loved ones.

→ **Engage in active listening** with 2SLGBTQ students and recognize that they are the experts of their own experiences; a good ally understands that they have a vital, active role to play but do not have all the answers, that they are "in, but out."

→ **Get involved** in school initiatives that promote 2SLGBTQ issues.

## Students

▶ **Be kind,** and reflect on the words of Amelia Earhart: "No kind action ever stops with itself. One kind action leads to another. Good example is followed. A single act of kindness throws out roots in all directions, and the roots spring up and make new trees. The greatest work that kindness does to others is that it makes them kind themselves."

▶ To CH students, work to **practice allyship** for 2SLGBTQ classmates by learning about 2SLGBTQ-related issues, be open and clear about your support for your 2SLGBTQ peers, **get involved** by joining GSAs and participating in school-wide events, and **be vocal** in opposing HBTP harassment by standing up for harassed students and in showing your support for 2SLGBTQ people.

▶ To 2SLGBTQ students especially, **be proud of who you are**. In the words of Chris Colfer, "There's nothing wrong with you. There's a lot wrong with the world you live in." Know that there are people in this world that

honour, respect, value, and love you. We will keep working to make it better. Whether or not you feel safe to be out in your school and with your classmates, remember:

→ **Your safety is important**, and your life is yours to live. Don't feel pressured to come out until you are ready. Stand in your own space, and get to know yourself and your 2SLGBTQ community.

→ Find people who love and support you for who you are. **These people exist**.

→ 2SLGBTQ communities are **resilient** and bring such **joy** and **beauty** to the world – and **there's a place for you** in that community and this (just) world.

→ There is help available if you need it:

★ **Kids Help Phone**
https://kidshelpphone.ca/
1-800-668-6868

★ **Trans Lifeline**
https://translifeline.org/
1-877-330-6366

★ **Youthspace.ca**
http://www.youthspace.ca
778-783-0177

# Introduction

Similar to the First National Climate Survey in 2008-2009 (Taylor & Peter, 2011a), the purpose of the Second National Climate Survey is twofold. First, to assess school climate through students' self-reported school experiences of hostility, inclusion, and support. Second, to follow-up on the information collected during the First Climate Survey to develop a picture of school climate ten plus years later in regard to the status of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia, inclusion efforts, and supports in Canadian schools.

In partnership with Egale Canada, a national organization committed to advancing equality and justice for 2SLGBTQ-identified people and their families (www.egale.ca), this report aims to contribute to the growing body of advocacy and scholarship both nationally and internationally on school-based experiences of school climate, which can be used to address gaps in policy, highlight student experiences in schools, reveal curriculum exclusions, and generally provide evidence-based information on the topic of 2SLGBTQ-inclusion and homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools.

The study was supported by Egale Canada, with partial funding provided by the Dean's Office discretionary research fund, Faculty of Arts, at the University of Manitoba.

This report was written on Treaty 1 land – the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene Peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. We recognize their continuing connection to land, water, and community, and as the cultural authority of Indigenous peoples in these territories, especially the elders both past and present. We acknowledge and respect the traditional custodians on whose ancestral lands we remain humble guests.

We also want to acknowledge that participants for this survey live and attend schools throughout the traditional Indigenous territories and lands of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples across the country, including those from unceded lands and those in treaty territories.

We would like to extend thanks and acknowledge the efforts of schools, districts, education departments, community organizations, and all the educators and service providers who helped to spread the word about this survey to help recruit participants.

We also wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to all who participated in the survey. Thank you for providing your perspectives for this study.

## Study Background

It is not an exaggeration to say that the First National Climate Survey made a big impact on the Canadian education landscape. Specifically, it directly contributed to the national advancement of 2SLGBTQ rights by providing decision-makers with the methodologically rigorous statistical evidence that they needed to develop and implement 2SLGBTQ-specific policy and provincial legislation. For the first time there was a systematically produced knowledge base that provided educators, school administrators, student and parent activists, government officials, and academics across Canada with the information needed to advance issues of human rights and social justice. During the First National Climate Survey, Dr. Catherine Taylor spent countless hours building relationships with school system stakeholders to recruit participants; for several years following the launch of the final report, criss-crossed the country giving numerous presentations and provided endless consultation advocating for the necessity of 2SLGBTQ-inclusive education in order to create safe school climates that are respectful of 2SLGBTQ students, staff, and their families.

Due, in part, to the success of the First National Climate Survey, marking its tenth anniversary, we decided it was time to launch a Second National Climate Survey. In the decade since the first survey, there has been an enormous increase in both advocacy and scholarship devoted to the topic of 2SLGBTQ students and schools. A significant portion has highlighted the many positive improvements over the past several years, especially in regard to the growth of Gay-Straight Alliances/Gender Sexuality Alliances (GSAs), policies that focus on 2SLGBTQ-specific bullying, and various protective factors that promote resilience and provide 2SLGBTQ students with an increased opportunity to thrive. At the same time, numerous studies continue to illustrate the high degree of systemic discrimination and hostile school climates that many 2SLGBTQ youth unremittingly experience, with an increased recognition of additional barriers by specific populations of 2SLGBTQ youth – namely racialized and/or trans youth. Further, it is worth noting that the experiences of 2SLGBTQ youth are not monolithic and those with multiply marginalized identities face compounding effects of oppression in schools that require concerted attention and further work be done to understand and address the needs of multiply marginalized 2SLGBTQ youth.

Given the efforts made within education systems and by educators to support 2SLGBTQ students, we were interested to assess whether or not the gains made

over the last decade translated into safer and more respectful school climates for students, or whether the numerous barriers and risk factors were still as prevalent as they were in the First National Climate Survey. Such is the impetus for this project.

## Project Team

Tracey Peter, Ph.D., University of Manitoba (Professor of Sociology and Academic Director of the Centre for Social Science Research and Policy) is the Principal Investigator for the study, with Catherine Taylor, Ph.D. (Senior Scholar, University of Winnipeg and Director of the RISE Research Program on 2SLGBTQ-Expansive Education) and Christopher Campbell (Ph.D. candidate in Education, University of Manitoba and Coordinator of the RISE Program) as Co-Investigators. Chloe McDonald (University of Manitoba) also worked on the project as a research assistant.

Egale Canada's mission is to improve the lives of 2SLGBTQI people in Canada and to enhance the global response to 2SLGBTQI issues. Egale envisions Canada, and ultimately a world, without homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and all other forms of oppression so that every person can achieve their full potential, free from hatred and bias. Staff contributors to the research, outreach and review of this project include Dylan Bruxer, Lee Cameron, Jordan D'Souza, and Imogen Tam.

## Working Definitions

Knowledge is embedded in language, and language reflects a world that is constantly in flux and is never definitive. Put another way, language organizes people's personal experiences within a larger social context of power relations that structure our perceptions of our own experiences, even when they feel unique. Language, then, is a powerful tool of oppressive discourses about gender, sexuality, race, and other aspects of individual identity because it classifies and orders experiences by signifying what is "normal" (e.g., cisgender, heterosexuality) and, conversely, what is considered "abnormal" (e.g., trans, LGBQ)—but language can also be a used as a strategy of social change, a form of resistance, and as an affirmation of identity.

The acronyms and language used to describe 2SLGBTQ people and communities is continually evolving, which reflects the developing understandings and complex nature of 2SLGBTQ identities and people. The terms and acronyms we use are provisional, as we understand different people may use them in different ways to identify or describe their experiences, and we include a brief glossary here to help clarify our use; we acknowledge that these

terms are constantly evolving and are likely to change over time as new terms or conventions will certainly emerge to give language to gender and sexual identities.

In addition to identity terms, we also include definitions of several terms regarding systems of oppression, privilege, and marginalization. We include them to name these systems of oppression and to help clarify how they have been operationalized as frameworks for analytical comparisons for this report.

We primarily developed this glossary using the *Every Teacher Project* final report (Taylor et al., 2015) and Egale Canada's 2SLGBTQI *Glossary of Terms* (Egale Human Rights Trust, 2020a); other sources are cited where applicable.

## *Identity Terms*

**2SLGBTQ**
An acronym for Two Spirit (2S), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans (LGBT), Queer, and Questioning. (Note: we have not included intersex/"I" in this acronym because none of the survey participants identified as such and we do not want to misrepresent participants or intersex experiences in this report.) The acronym also encompasses anyone who identifies as a sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, sex characteristics (SOGIESC) minority. Many individuals identify as "queer" or another identity (e.g., gender queer or pansexual), often to signify their opposition to what is regarded as an apartheid-like system of sexual and gender categories that oppress anyone outside the mainstream (Peter & Taylor, 2017). In this report, Two Spirit is listed first in order to acknowledge and recognize that Indigenous peoples are the first peoples on Turtle Island (Canada), and we are grateful to have the opportunity to build relationships, live, work, and go to school on this land.

**Agender**
A term used to describe a person who identifies as either having no gender or a neutral gender identity (Egale Human Rights Trust, 2020a).

**Asexual**
A term used to describe a person who does not experience sexual attraction, or who has little or no interest in sexual activity (Egale Human Rights Trust, 2020a).

**BIPOC**
Black, Indigenous, and people of colour

**Bisexual**
A term used to describe a person who experiences attraction (physical and/or romantic) to both people of their own gender and people of a gender different from their own. (See also "pansexual"; for the purposes of this report, we have included pansexual identities together with bisexual identities for analysis.)

**CH**
Cisgender and/or heterosexual

**Cisgender**
A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with conventional social expectations for the sex assigned to them at birth (e.g., a cisgender man is someone who identifies as a man and who was assigned male sex at birth).

**Gay**
A term used to describe a person who experiences attraction to people of the same gender as themselves. Gay may be used by individuals of a diversity of genders. Often, gay is used to refer specifically to men/boys who are attracted (physically and/or emotionally) to other men/boys.

**Gender Expression**
The way a person publicly shows their gender identity in social contexts through clothing, speech, body language, wearing of make-up and/or accessories, and other forms of displaying masculinity or femininity (Taylor & Peter, 2011a). Gender expression is often culturally specific and may change over time in relation to social norms.

**Gender Identity**
A person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender. This could include an internal sense of being a boy/man, girl/woman, androgynous, neither, or some other gender. A person's gender may or may not correspond with social expectations associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Since gender identity is internal, it is not necessarily visible to others (Taylor et al., 2015). In this report, gender identity refers to cisgender boys and girls, transgender identities, Two Spirit people, and other gender non-binary identities although we recognize and appreciate that gender identity is far more nuanced than these categories.

**Gender Non-Binary**
A term used to describe a person who identifies their gender as not falling within the gender binary, or as being located within the gender spectrum that is not exclusively man or woman.

### Heterosexual/Straight

Conventionally, heterosexuality assumed the sex/gender binary to be accurate and referred to an individual's exclusive attraction to the "opposite" sex. Examples of a heterosexual orientation are a cisgender man's attraction to a cisgender woman and vice versa. Some transgender, gender non-binary, and intersex people may also identify as heterosexual (Taylor et al., 2015).

### Indigenous

On Turtle Island (Canada), Indigenous refers to people who identify as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis. Indigenous is used instead of "Aboriginal," which is the term often used by government and institutions in Canada, for three reasons. First, Indigenous is internationally recognized within the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Second, and more importantly, "Aboriginal," like "Indian," is considered an external colonized creation, and has been denounced by various Indigenous groups as being inappropriate. Third, Indigenous comes from the Latin word "indigena," which means "sprung from the land." As such, using Indigenous rather than "Aboriginal" not only recognizes territory acknowledgements and land claims, but it recognizes and affirms Indigenous peoples' connection to land.

### Intersex

A term used to describe a person whose chromosomal, hormonal, or anatomical sex characteristics fall outside of the conventional binary classifications of male or female (Egale Human Rights Trust, 2020a). While we were unable to include intersex persons in our analysis due to lack of participants, and we do not want to inaccurately represent intersex persons or experience, we affirm the importance of intersex inclusion in education and research for 2SLGBTQI people.

### Lesbian

A term used to describe a woman who experiences attraction to other women.

### Pansexual

A term used to describe a person who experiences attraction (physical and/or romantic) to both people of their own gender and people of multiple other genders different from their own. (In this report, we have grouped pansexual identities together with bisexual for the purposes of analysis.)

### Queer

A term used to describe a person whose sexual orientation or gender identity challenges conventional norms regarding (hetero)sexual orientation or binary conceptions of gender. While once a pejorative term, queer has been reclaimed among 2SLGBTQ people to signify resistance to conventional social, cultural,

and political norms of presumed heterosexuality, cisgender identity, and gender binaries.

**Questioning**
A term used to describe a person who is in the process of understanding their own sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Sexual Orientation/Identity**
Sexual orientation classifies a person's potential for emotional, intellectual, spiritual, intimate, romantic, and/or sexual interest in other people, often based on their gender; also known as attraction, this may form the basis for aspects of one's identity (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, etc.) and/or behaviour.

**They/Them/Their**
The pronouns "they," "them," and "their" are used as singular gender-inclusive pronouns (e.g., "The teacher taught their class") to incorporate the evolution of language that seeks to expand the gender binary, particularly as it is constructed linguistically. They/them/their pronouns are used as singular personal pronouns by many people, often by people with non-binary or genderqueer identities.

**Transgender or Trans**
A term used to describe a person who does not identify either fully or in part with the gender conventionally associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. Trans is often used as an umbrella term to represent a wide range of gender identities and expressions including non-binary and gender non-conforming (Taylor et al., 2015), which is how it is used in the current report.

**Two Spirit (2S)**
An English-language, pan-Indigenous term that is used to represent the various words in different Indigenous languages to affirm the interrelatedness of multiple aspects of identity, including gender, sexuality, community, culture, and spirituality (Fiola, 2020; Wilson, 2008). Prior to the imposition of the sex/gender binary by European colonizers, many Indigenous cultures recognized Two Spirit people as respected members of their communities and valued their status and unique abilities (e.g., as visionaries, healers, medicine people) to understand and move between perspectives. Some Indigenous people identify as Two Spirit rather than, or in addition to, identifying as LGBTQ. 2S is listed first in the acronym to acknowledge and recognize that Indigenous peoples are the first peoples of Turtle Island (or Canada) where this research was conducted. In the survey, participants could identity 2S as both their sexual orientation and gender identity, and in all cases 2S respondents selected both. In the report, where we provide analyses based on gender identity, we

include 2S respondents within the category of 2S, trans, and gender non-binary participants; where we report on sexual orientation, we include 2S participants within the category of sexual minoritized/2SLGBTQ participants.

**Woman/girl and man/boy**
In this report, we use woman/girl and man/boy as an adjective to describe participants, rather than female or male. There has been scholarly debate over whether to use "female/male" or "woman/man" (or, in the case of this report, "girl/boy" since students are almost exclusively under the 18) distinctions when referring to binary genders. Female/male has historically often been preferred because they can be used both as nouns and adjectives (as an adjective, it modifies a noun); for example, it is grammatically correct to write "female student," whereas it is conventionally considered grammatically incorrect to write "woman student" or "girl student." However, as linguists have pointed out, historically "female" has been used for describing sex classifications of animals, including humans, whereas only a human can be a "woman/girl" (Lakoff, 1975). In recognition of the social character of gender, we follow the convention, which many contend is the solution, in turning "woman/girl" into an adjective (e.g., girl student), which is the approach taken in this report.

## Terms for Systems of Privilege and Marginalization

**Biphobia**
Fear and/or hatred of bisexuality, often exhibited by name-calling, bullying, exclusion, prejudice, discrimination or acts of violence; anyone who is or is assumed to be bisexual or experiences attraction to multiple genders can be the target of biphobia. The hostility experienced by bisexual people has often been reduced to their same-sex attractions, with their heterosexual attractions regarded as a protective factor. However, research has shown that bisexual people are subject to levels of hostility similar to (but in some ways different from) those directed at gay and lesbian people.

**Cisnormativity/Gender normativity**
A cultural and societal bias, often unconscious, that privileges cisgender identities and gender norms, and ignores or underrepresents trans identities and/or gender diversity by assuming that all people are cisgender and will express their gender in a way that aligns with conventional norms within the gender binary. Cisnormativity is very evident in most schools and is regulated through transphobic practices.

**Heteronormativity**

A cultural and societal bias, often unconscious, that privileges heterosexuality and ignores or underrepresents diversity in attraction and behaviour by assuming all people are heterosexual.

**Heterosexism**

Prejudice and discrimination in favour of heterosexuality. This includes the presumption of heterosexuality as the superior and more desirable form of attraction.

**Homonegativity**

A negative attitude towards LGB people and relationships. Homonegativity is often distinguished from homophobia as being attitudinal rather than emotional in nature. In the context of this report, homonegativity is used to characterize language such as "That's so gay" that is insulting to LGB people and contributes to a hostile climate, whether such effects are intended or not.

**Homophobia**

Hostile feelings and actions directed towards LGB people, such as contempt, fear, or hatred. Often exhibited by name-calling, bullying, exclusion, prejudice, discrimination or acts of violence, homophobia can target anyone who is, or is perceived as being, 2SLGBTQ. Although it was once attributed to natural revulsion against perverse sexuality, homophobia can often be explained by an individual's attachment to a community that strongly stigmatizes LGB identity. Canadian and American polls show that homophobia is rather quickly diminishing in the general population. In the context of this report, the term refers to actions that aggressively target individuals by harassment or exclusion.

**HBTP**

Homophobic, biphobic, and/or transphobic

**Intersectionality**

The concept of the interacting effects of the various aspects of an individual's identity and social positioning—such as race, class, gender, dis/ability and sexual orientation (developed by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, 1991). Historically, much research has been conducted by comparing the experiences of differently situated people within a single category (e.g., comparing men and women within the category sex), which glosses over important differences (e.g., women of colour versus White women). More recently, efforts have been made to understand the complexity of real life, where multiple categories intersect in our lives (e.g., women of colour may experience sexism very differently from the way White women do). Where possible in this report, we provide analyses

utilizing an intersectional framework to better understand how school climate affects 2SLGBTQ students with intersectional identities.

## Racialization / Race

Race and racial categorizations were historically used as strategies of oppression and colonial domination that attempted to categorize people based on "natural" or "biological" divisions of humans based on physical features or cultural contexts, such as skin colour, geography, or beliefs. These problematic notions of race have no scientific legitimacy and manufactured differences between people, leading to notions of racial superiority, White supremacy, and domination (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2005). However, notions of race are not "real" (in the sense of being biologically or scientifically sound) but are, rather, socially constructed through attitudes, behaviours, institutional systems, power, and socialization—and notions of race have very real social effects through marginalization and the reification of inequality. Racialization is a term used to describe these social processes and refers to the ongoing social construction, reproduction, and reinforcement of race-based oppression and marginalization. In this report, we use phrases such as "racialized students" or "racialized identities" in recognition of the real effects of race for the lived experiences of people, but also to highlight the socially constructed nature of race.

## Transnegativity

A negative attitude towards trans people and gender expression that falls outside the male-masculine/female-feminine conventions. Transnegativity is often distinguished from transphobia as being attitudinal rather than emotional in nature. In the context of this report, transnegativity is used to characterize language that is insulting to trans people and contributes to a hostile climate, whether such effects are intended or not.

## Transphobia

Fear and/or hatred of any transgression of perceived gender norms, often exhibited by name-calling, bullying, exclusion, prejudice, discrimination or acts of violence. Anyone who is, or is perceived to be, trans and/or gender diverse can be the target of transphobia. Homophobia and transphobia are strongly connected, as is seen when people are punished for departing from conventional expectations for their assigned sex (e.g., the "masculine" girl, the stay-at-home dad) by being stigmatized as "homosexual" through derogatory name-calling. In the context of this report, transphobia refers to actions that aggressively target individuals by harassment or exclusion.

# Methodology

Similar to the First National Climate Survey, data were collected through two methods: individual participation in an open-access online survey and in-class participation in a controlled access online survey implemented in schools. This report discusses the results of our analysis of the combined (aggregate) data collected through both methods.

Generally, online methodologies are particularly suitable for research with youth since the Internet is a frequent communication tool among this population (McInroy, 2016). More specifically, online surveys have been particularly helpful among 2SLGBTQ youth because they are often a socially stigmatized/marginalized group, yet they are digitally active and able to access online supports, education, and resources safely (McDermott et al., 2008; Riggle et al., 2005; Willis, 2011). In addition, young people participating via online surveys may be more likely to answer questions truthfully, especially in the case of socially or emotionally sensitive questions (Bartell & Spyridakis, 2012). Finally, online surveys are often more representative (e.g., geographic diversity) than non-online questionnaires (Mustanski, 2011).

## Survey Instrument

The self-report survey was programmed using Qualtrics survey software. Data was also deposited through Qualtrics (with all primary and backup data stored on Canadian-based servers) with Egale Canada hosting the link to the questionnaire on their website. A large portion of the survey instrument replicated items from the First National Climate Survey in order to conduct valid and reliable trend comparisons (e.g., homophobic and transphobic language, interventions, safety, school effectiveness and support, hostility, inclusion, policies/procedures, and GSA clubs); however, the following new questions were included:

- a more comprehensive assessment of religious affiliation (in particular Christian, Jewish, and Islam denominations);
- participation in school and/or community activities;
- academic achievement, aspirations, and efficacy;
- parental support;
- availability of single-user or all-persons' washroom;
- positive mental health; and

- what students want their teachers to know about supporting 2SLGBTQ people.

In total, the survey consisted of 57-items (note: an item can contain multiple questions or statements as well as select all that apply options). Included in the questionnaire were six open-ended questions where students were invited to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives. Given the breadth of topics, it was a relatively long questionnaire that took participants between 25–30 minutes to complete.

Before the official launch, the survey was pre-tested in February 2019 using university students from a first-year introductory sociology course. A total of 50 students completed the pre-test, although none were included in the final sample as it was a part of a course exercise.

## Sampling

The online questionnaire was distributed to students in grade 8 or higher (i.e., up to two years of completing high school) in three ways between April 2019 and May 2020: first, through directed recruitment activities via youth organizations for Canadian 2SLGBTQ youth; second, by advertising the survey website through various social media outlets (e.g., Facebook and Instagram); and third, through Canadian School Boards/Districts who agreed to distribute the link to the survey to their students – many of whom received encouragement and endorsement from their provincial government's Ministry of Education (e.g., Newfoundland & Labrador; and New Brunswick).

As with the First National Climate Survey, it was important to include CH students as they are often subject to significant homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic (HBTP) harassment and discrimination themselves, as well as being contributors to school climates for 2SLGBTQ youth, having 2SLGBTQ parents or family members, and having their own attitudes and experiences of 2SLGBTQ inclusion in schools. While participation in the online survey through youth organizations were based on snowball and purposive sampling, reaching out to school boards across Canada enabled us to reach a representative range of students' by systematically sampling large regions in both urban and rural areas (e.g., primarily Newfoundland & Labrador and New Brunswick, but also areas of British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario).

## Ethics Protocol

The study was approved by both the Research Ethics Boards (REBs) at the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg. Prior to survey participation, students were directed to a landing page containing the ethics

consent protocol, which all respondents were required to read and accept before proceeding to the survey. The consent page informs participants of the study's purpose and ethics related issues (e.g., anonymity and confidentiality). Specifically, the design of the survey was completely anonymous, meaning no record of participant names, email addresses, or IP addresses were obtained. Confidentiality was assured by only reporting on aggregate quantitative data (thereby avoiding the possibility that one could be identified by a constellation of responses) and with all potentially identifying information removed from qualitative narratives.

Since the vast majority of students were under 18, there were additional ethical considerations. Despite the different sampling methodologies, all involved a waiver of active parental consent. For students who participated in the survey through their school, we obtained 'passive parental consent,' which assumes that a parent has consented unless some action is taken otherwise. Project team members worked with Ministries of Education or individual school districts in order to fulfill specific ethical requirements and to ensure that the administration of the survey satisfied their respective requirements for conducting research on minors. For youth who learned about the survey through social media or through community-based organizations, we received ethics approval for these students to be considered competent to provide their own consent to participate in the survey. Our rationale for seeking such consent is that 2SLGBTQ youth as a whole are unique among identities protected by the *Canadian Charter or Rights and Freedoms* in that their parent/guardian usually does not share their identity and, as previous research shows, in some cases be actively hostile to disclosures of 2SLGBTQ identities (Acosta, 2020; Antonio & Moleiro, 2015; Fish et al., 2020; Newcomb et al., 2019; Veale et al., 2017). This means that requiring these youth to provide proof of parental/guardian consent would, in many cases, amount to asking them to put themselves potentially in harm's way in order to participate. Further, these youth already act as mature minors in their understanding and awareness of their own sexuality and gender identities. These youth have the standing of "mature minor" according to Tri-Council policy and would not require parental consent (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2019).

## Participants

In total, over 4000 individuals participated in the survey. Once data were cleaned, a total usable sample of 3558 participants was retained.[1] A brief description of the final sample follows:

- Nearly two-thirds (62%) of participants identified as straight/heterosexual. Participants could select multiple sexual identities, which include: 16% bisexual; 10% lesbian; 8% queer; 8% questioning/unsure; 7% pansexual; 5% gay; <1% Two Spirit; and <1% another sexual identity (e.g., asexual). In total, 14% of participants selected more than one sexual identity. See FIGURE 1.

**FIGURE 1: SEXUAL IDENTITIES**



Questioning 8%
Another Identity 1%
Queer 8%
Heterosexual 62%
Pansexual 7%
Lesbian 10%
Gay 5%
Bisexual 16%

**Sexual Identity**
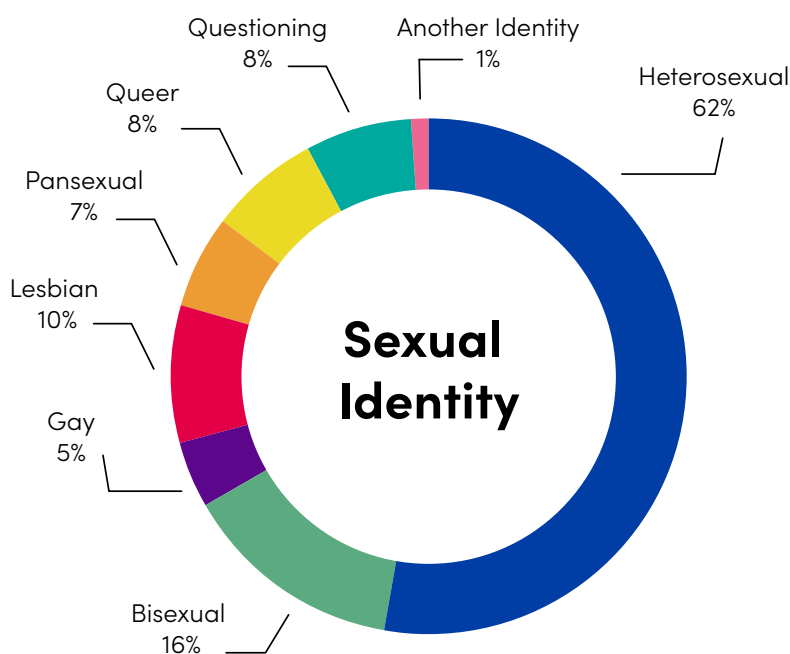
- Over half of the sample (57%) identify as woman/girl, followed by man/boy (36%), and gender non-binary (6%). Participants could select multiple gender identities, which also included: trans (4%); transmasculine (3%); genderfluid (2%); genderqueer (2%); agender; Two Spirit (<1%); questioning (<1%); or transfeminine (<1%). Overall, 7% of participants selected more than one gender identity.

  ▶ Combining gender and sexual identities, 61% of participants identify as CH, while 39% identify as 2SLGBTQ.

  ▶ Of the transgender, Two Spirit, and gender non-binary students, 91% identify with a sexual minority identity, 3% as heterosexual only, 2%

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1 Students were omitted from the final sample for the following reasons: they did not complete at least two-thirds of the survey; they identified living outside of Canada; they were over the age of 20 years old. Individuals were also removed if, through a series of validity checks, it was deemed that they randomly selected responses, did not take the survey seriously, or provided several 'illogical' responses.

as heterosexual plus at least one additional sexual minority identity, and 4% as unsure or questioning their sexual identity.

- Participants responded from almost all provinces and territories across Canada (with the exception of Yukon). See FIGURE 2.

- The average age was 15.9 years (standard deviation of 1.5 years) with a median age of 16 years.

- There was comparable representation across grades: 16% grade 8; 25% grade 9; 22% grade 10; 17% grade 11; 17% grade 12; and 3% already graduated from high school or currently attending a CEGEP (Participants no longer attending high school were instructed to interpret questions by referring to their last year of school).

- Over three-quarters (78%) identified as White, followed by 8% Indigenous, 8% Asian, 2% Black, and 3% another racialized identity including those who identified multiple racialized identities.

- Current and past students from a total of 210 school districts are represented in the final sample.

- One in five (19%) participants completed the survey in French.

## FIGURE 2: PROVINCIAL AND TERRITORIAL SAMPLE SIZES



Yukon
N=<5
<1%

Northwest Territory
N=<5
<1%

Nunavut
N=<5
<1%

Newfoundland & Labrador
N=1181
33%

British Columbia
N=282
8%

Alberta
N=134
4%

Manitoba
N=359
10%

Saskatchewan
N=17
<1%

Ontario
N=463
13%

Québec
N=194
6%

PEI
N=<5
<1%

Nova Scotia
N=109
3%

New Brunswick
N=813
23%
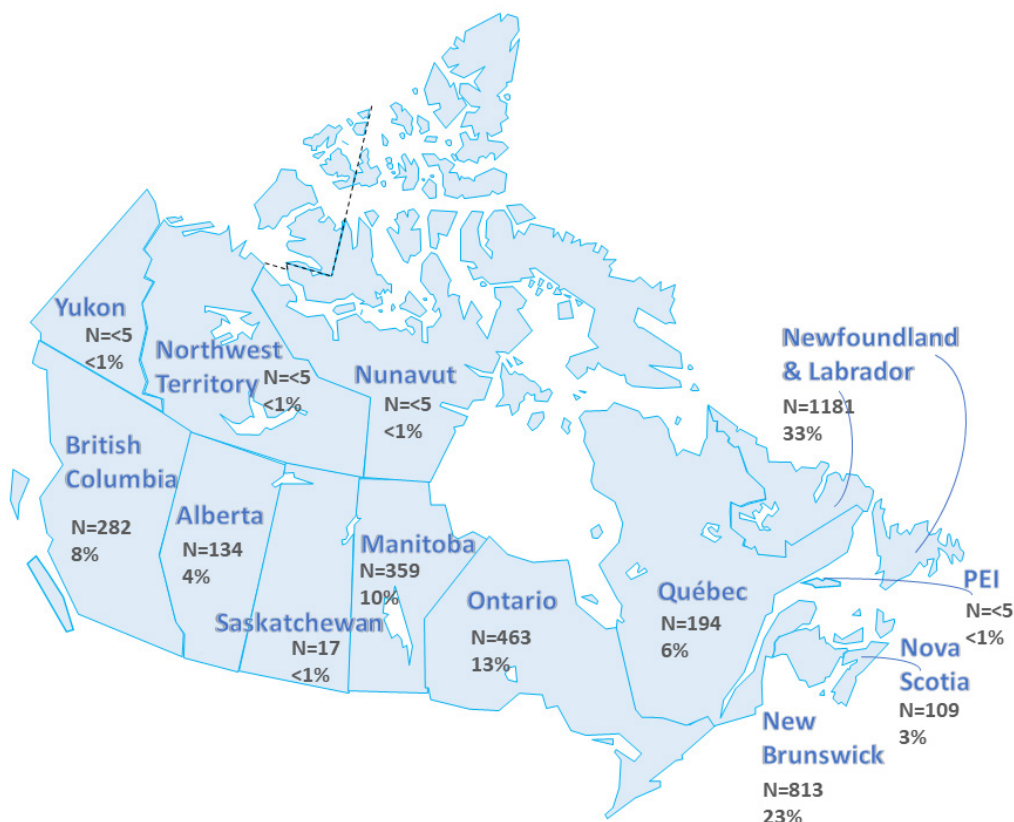
# Analysis

In order to empirically assess the closed- and open-ended nature of the survey instrument, both quantitative and qualitative analyses are included in this report.

## *Quantitative Analysis*

Statistical analyses were used in order to determine where there were substantive differences within groups across outcome measures. In particular, univariate frequency distributions and bivariate cross-tabulations were programmed using SPSS. Where possible, we have included these between-group comparisons in the relevant sections throughout the report.

For reasons of accessibility to a broad readership, descriptive statistics are presented using whole numbers with no statistical tests of significance; however, all differences reported are statistically significant to p<.05.

## *Qualitative Content*

Throughout this report, we include a number of student narratives and comments from the survey. Central to post-positivist arguments is that all knowledge is partial and individual narratives are critical in order to provide context, especially as a juxtaposition to closed-ended/quantitative questions. As Dorothy Smith (1975, p. 95) writes, "In learning to speak our experiences and situation, we insist upon the right to begin where we are, to stand as subjects of our sentences, and to hear one another as the authoritative speakers of our experience." Such praxis of giving voice typically favours qualitative methods due to its transformative promise, and is central to queer, feminist, critical race, and other methodologies employed for research with marginalized groups.

In order to retain the authenticity of the student narratives, minimal editing was done for spelling or grammar, although some statements were edited for length and/or to remove any potentially identifying information; we have not edited student narratives for content and some quotations include derogatory language or accounts of HBTP harassment. Following each quotation, we indicate whether the student identified as 2SLGTBQ or CH to help provide some context for the quotation. With these narratives, we attempt to amplify the voices of 2SLGBTQ participants, provide context for the statistical analyses, and further elaborate experiences in schools.

# Findings

## Categories for Analysis

Results are organized first by student experiences, followed by an analysis of the impact of such experiences, and then by institutional responses. Across all sections, comparisons were made based on groupings of students across the following key demographic characteristics:

- **First Climate Survey (2008/2009) and Second Climate Survey (2019/2020):** Comparing results from the 2008/2009 findings with those from 2019/2020 provides a snapshot of school climates for 2SLGBTQ students and topics. Generally, 2SLGBTQ students are experiencing similarly negative school climates than they were 10 years ago, although there have been improvements, which suggests that efforts to support 2SLGBTQ students are helping to improve school climates but that more work is needed.

- **2SLGBTQ students and CH students:** Often with comparisons between trans students, cisgender LGBQ girls, cisgender GBQ boys, CH girls, and CH boys. These comparisons show the differences for student experiences and how students perceive their school climate depending on their sexual orientations and gender identities.

- **Trans and LGBQ/sexual minority:** Often with comparisons of cisgender GBQ boys and girls: Comparing trans (including non-binary and gender non-conforming) student experiences with those of cisgender LGBQ students helps to identify different aspects of school climate with regards to sexuality and gender.

- **Grade comparisons:** Our sample comprised students primarily from grades 8 through 12, with a small number of recent graduates or CEGEP students. We include relevant grade comparisons where relevant, noting that generally earlier grades reported less safe, supportive environments at school and among peers.

- **Regions/provinces, and rural/remote communities and urban/suburban centres:** While we were limited by the number of responses, we include comparisons between regions/provinces and urban/rural contexts where possible. In general, students in urban/suburban areas reported more supportive school climates.

- **Catholic school contexts:** Religious contexts are an important factor for understanding school climates for 2SLGBTQ students. We have reported on Catholic schools as there were not enough responses from other

religiously based schools to conduct comparisons between groups, though it is worth noting that Catholic schools do not necessarily represent what happens in all religious schools. Findings suggest that students do experience more negative school climates in Catholic schools, but there is evidence that Catholic schools have begun introducing supports for 2SLGBTQ students, such as GSAs, that are mediating these negative climates. Still, the climate in Catholic schools is not as supportive of 2SLGBTQ students as in non-Catholic schools.

- **Racialized student experiences:** While we were limited by the number of responses in our ability to conduct analyses based on students' race/ethnicity and racialized experiences in schools, we sought to include these wherever possible (see Limitations section for note about the limitations of the research in this regard). Where we were able to present findings, we found that there are significant differences between racialized groups, especially between White, Indigenous, and Black 2SLGBTQ students. Further research needs to be done to better understand and work to support racialized 2SLGBTQ students.

Where possible and when we had sufficient numbers of participants to conduct these analyses in a meaningful way, we have included these comparisons in the relevant sections. Further, it is worth nothing that our ability to operationalize intersectionality through the data analysis was limited by the sample and our survey instrument, and also by the nature of statistical analyses, which we discuss in more detail in the Limitations sections toward the end of the report.

# School Climate

## Homophobic, Transphobic, and Sexist Comments

> *A lot of students, cis male mostly, say derogatory slurs about LGBT daily and it makes me and my LGBT friends feel not safe.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *It doesent matter to me at all when someone is harrased. Gay jokes are common and dont bother anyone, theres very few lgbtq kids here.* (CH)

Note: In the following sections describing homophobic, transphobic, and sexist comments, we include explicit terms that are derogatory to 2SLGBTQ people in order to accurately reflect the survey questions that included these terms and to clearly depict the hostile and harmful language that students face in schools every day.

## Homophobic Comments

Homo-negative comments such as "that's so gay" are employed as an insult for anything considered to be "stupid" (Taylor & Peter, 2011b), and therefore tend to be used ubiquitously among youth. Unlike the more gender-neutral expression of "that's so gay," homophobic remarks such as "fag" or "faggot" are often used as a form of gender regulation in order to maintain hegemonic masculine identities; as such, this kind of discourse is most commonly employed among boys/men and their peers and used as an insult, taunt, or threat (Pascoe, 2003). The remark "no homo" is shorthand for "I'm not a homosexual," and is often regarded as a gendered one, mostly used by boys/men to convey cultural norms about masculinity (Pascoe & Diefendorf, 2019). For example, the disclaimer "no homo" may be used when boys/men are expressing affection for other boys/men (i.e., "I love you, bro #nohomo"). For this reason, Bridges & Pascoe (2014) consider the term "no homo" to be an expression of "hybrid masculinity" that allows boys/men to express affection while ensuring they distance themselves from undesirable homosexual affiliation.

*Personally i think for me and much of the youth of the lgbt community, saying "that's so gay" and things similar in nature are not derogatory or negative when said by and lgbtq person themselves. It's seen more like being reclaimed as something that we say as a joke to try to normalize being queer since we are queer ourselves. But I've heard it far more from boys who are cisgender and identify as heterosexual than actual queers at school.* (2SLGBTQ)

*I hear so, so many times "that's so gay" or "F*ggot" from people I call my friends and though I continually tell them that it's not ok they say it was a joke.* (2SLGBTQ)

*People saying That is so gay or watch out that person is LGBT makes me uncomfortable.* (2SLGBTQ)

The Second Climate survey included a series of questions on homo-negative language and homophobic name-calling. Respondents were asked how often they heard homo-negative expressions such as "that's so gay" ("c'est tellement gai") or homophobic remarks like "faggot" ("pédé ou tapette") or "no homo" ("pas gai"). Results show that homo-negative comments are prevalent in school environments. For instance, nearly two-thirds (64%) of all participants reported hearing expressions such as "that's so gay" "daily" (i.e., frequently) or "weekly" (i.e., sometimes) in school. In addition, over half (54%) indicated hearing homophobic remarks such as "no homo" either "daily" (33%) or "weekly" (21%), while nearly half (48%) reported hearing remarks such as "faggot" either "daily" (27%) or "weekly" (21%). See FIGURE 3.

## FIGURE 3: FREQUENCY OF HOMOPHOBIC COMMENTS (ALL STUDENTS)
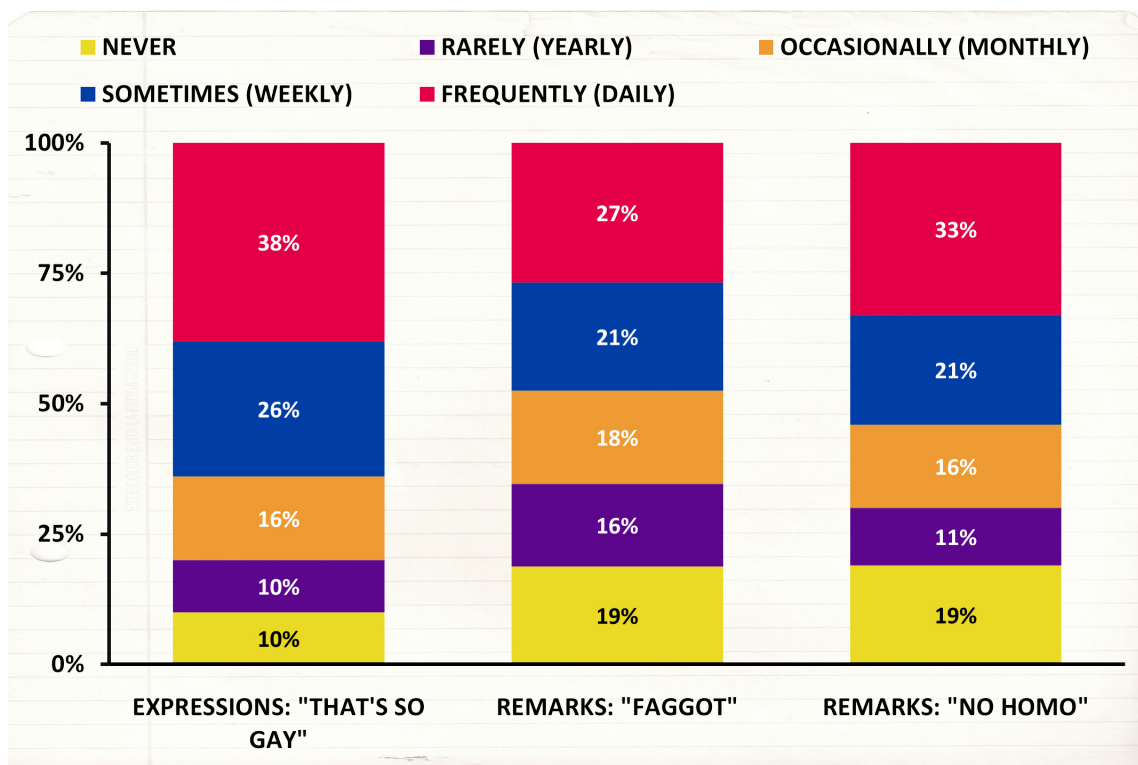


Overall, there were marginal differences between 2SLGBTQ and CH students. For instance, 63% of CH students reported hearing the expressions "that's so gay" or "you're so gay" at least weekly, which was only slightly higher among 2SLGBTQ students (66%), although 2SLGBTQ students were less likely to report "never" hearing these expressions (7%) than CH students (11%). Students who identified as CH (51%) were more likely to indicate hearing homophobic remarks like "faggot" at least weekly at school, which was lower than LGBQ students (41%), and trans/gender non-binary participants (40%). Consistent with masculine gender discourses, CH boys were more likely to report hearing "no homo" (58%) than CH girls (50%) on at least a weekly basis; however, trans students indicate hearing it the most (71%).

*My school is very safe to everyone. The only time gay or words similar are used is in joking ways and never said to a person of that stature. And the phrase "No Homo" is not an offensive thing that straight people say to gay people it is a joking phrase not directed at anyone.* (CH)

*I generally surround myself with others who identify as queer and so it's become normalized to take away the meaning from derogatory sayings used against gay (umbrella term) people. Because of this I feel safer around my school and in my community. If this wasn't the case though I would feel more uncomfortable with the same derogatory sayings and would feel less welcomed and safe.* (2SLGBTQ)

The frequency of homo-negative and homophobic language is the most prevalent among students in middle-school, and continues to decrease as students reach graduation. For instance, 72% of grade 8 students reported hearing "that's so gay" at least weekly at school, which decreased to 56% among grade 12 students and 41% among students who have already graduated from high school or are in CEGEP (FIGURE 4). However, although frequency steadily declines as grade level increases, it is notable that over half of Grade 12 students hear such language every week, which means that most 2SLGBTQ students continue to hear negative comments that concern their sexual and gender identities throughout their school years.

**FIGURE 4: FREQUENCY HEARING AT LEAST WEEKLY HOMO-NEGATIVE AND HOMOPHOBIC REMARKS BY GRADE**
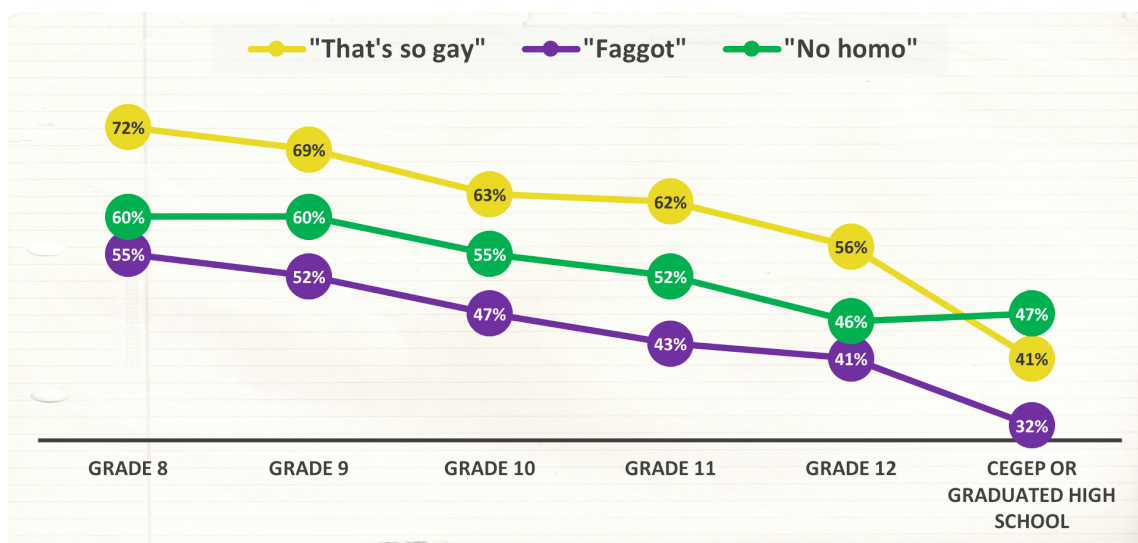


## Transphobic and Sexist Comments

*It is difficult to express non-conforming gender, because there is a lot of judgment.* (CH)

*The most frequent way that I am made to feel unsafe or invalidated is through my peers assuming I am "transtrending" and/ or am not a true trans person.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Gay lesbian and bisexual are a sexuality but a transgender is someone who suffers from a mental illness. Its realizing it and I won't lie to make this person happy. At the end of the day if your born a guy your a guy. Same for a girl… Sorry if its hurts you but its realizing it. To help them not say yes your a girl even if you have a penis. In this school they say the truth and the truth is hard to swallow.* (CH)

Negative gender-related or transphobic comments are as common in school culture as homo-negative and homophobic comments. For instance, "don't be such a girl" is used to accuse boys of displaying feminine qualities, such as showing emotions; conversely, terms like "she-man" are employed

to censure girls if they exhibit stereotypical masculine traits, such as being muscular and/or physical in sports. As shown in FIGURE 5, almost half (45%) of all participants report hearing negative remarks about girls "daily," while only one in ten indicates that they "never" hear such comments. The policing of heteronormative masculinities is also firmly upheld as a quarter (26%) of respondents' report hearing negative remarks about boys "daily," while another 22% hear such comments "weekly" at their school.

**FIGURE 5: FREQUENCY OF TRANSPHOBIC AND SEXIST COMMENTS (ALL STUDENTS)**
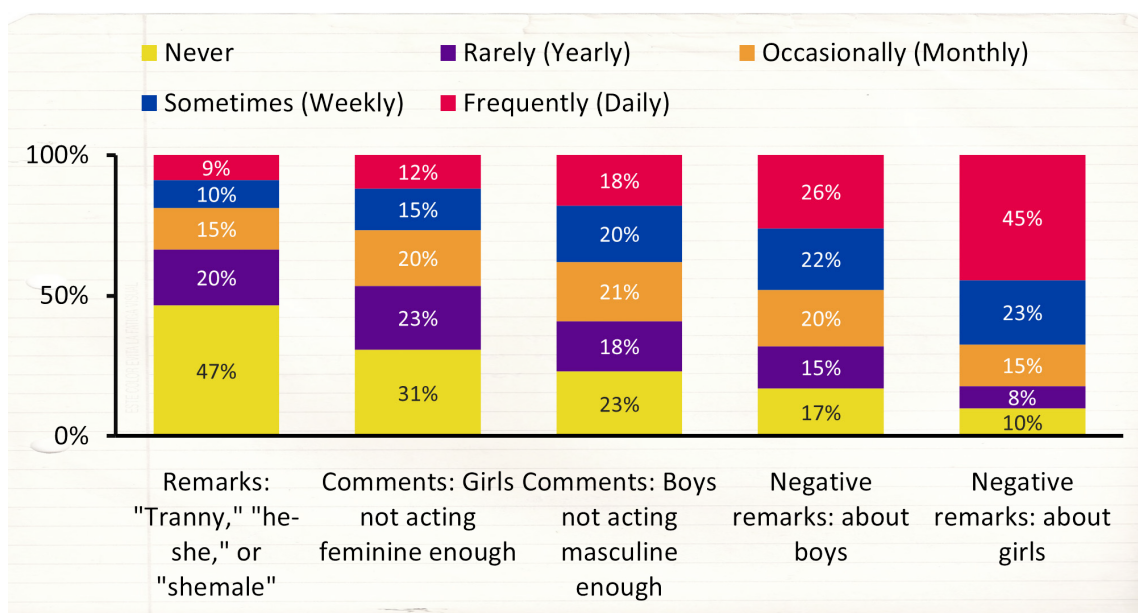


There were some gender differences among 2SLGBTQ and CH students' reports of how pervasive transphobic and sexist comments are in school environments. The greatest variation was in regard to the statement reflecting general negative remarks to girls, in which 78% of both trans/gender non-binary and cisgender LGBQ girls report hearing these comments at least weekly at their school. Even the majority of cisgender GBQ boys (58%) and CH girls (68%) and boys (56%) indicate hearing general remarks that are negative to girls at least weekly at school. These findings highlight a tendency within school-based peer groups to enforce the gender binary and particularly to regulate girls' gender regarding perceived feminine expression. Cisgender LGBQ girls and trans/gender non-binary students may be more frequently targeted by these comments and therefore would likely be more attuned to them.

Not surprisingly, trans participants were the most likely to report hearing transphobic language, such as "tranny," "he-she," or "shemale," at least weekly at school (29%), although the high frequency of hearing this language among CH boys (24%) warrants further consideration. See FIGURE 6.
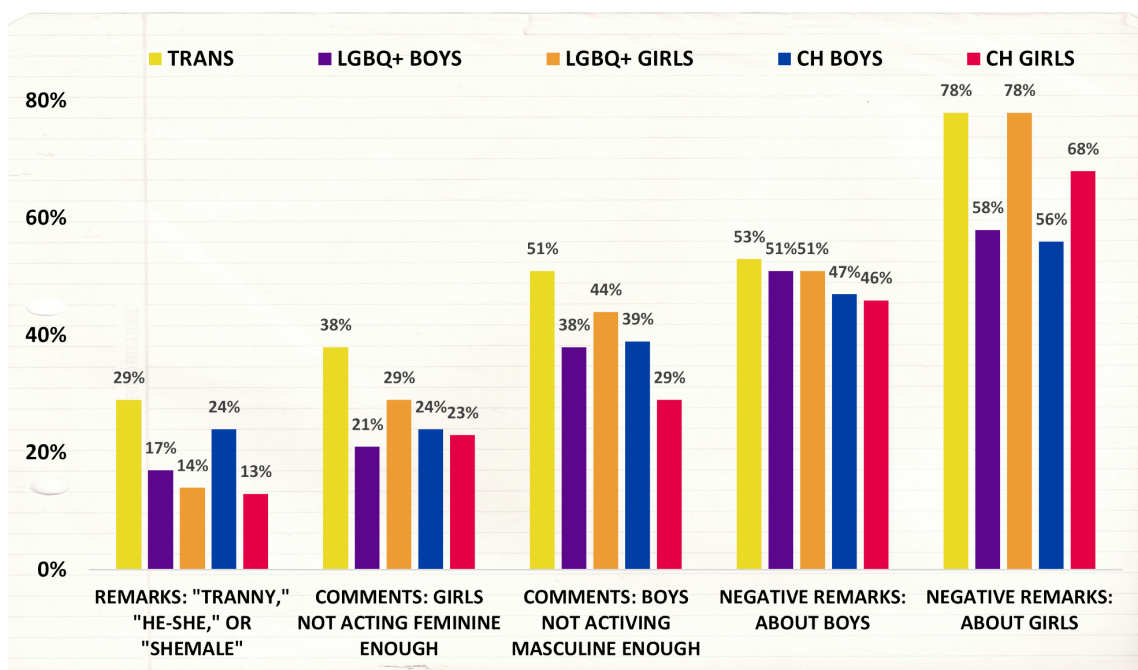
## Prevalence of Homophobic, Transphobic, and Inappropriate Gendered Language

In addition to determining the frequency that participants indicate hearing homophobic, transphobic, and inappropriate gendered remarks, we asked respondents to quantify the number of students who use this language. Results suggest that such language is frequent and pervasive among the student body. For instance, nearly two out of five (39%) respondents report that "most" students at their school use the expression "no homo," a third (33%) indicate that "most" use homo-negative language such as "that's so gay", and over a quarter (27%) state that "most" students use homophobic language. Almost half (47%) of participants report that "most" students make general remarks that are negative to girls.

> *I feel generally safe around grade 11–12's, but extremely unsafe around the younger 8-10th graders who tend to be far more ignorant and openly homophobic, racist, etc. (Even though many do not understand the true extent of their words and only use them because it is deemed "cool")* (2SLGBTQ)

Unlike the frequency of directly hostile homophobic/transphobic language and inappropriate gendered remarks, the pervasiveness of its usage across grades is more dependent on what language is being used. For instance, according to 2SLGBTQ participants, homo-negative language such as "that's so gay" steadily decreases as one advances from Grade 8 (44%) onwards to Grade 12 (25%).

The term "no homo" spikes in Grade 9 (57%), and then follows the same steady decline as expressions like "that's so gay." The higher frequency of 2SLGBTQ negative language reported in earlier years, such as the number of negative comments about girls in grade 8 and the spike of "no homo" language in grade 9, may be related to the advent of romantic attraction and the beginning of dating culture; this may assert itself among youth as a compulsion to attempt to regulate gender and sexuality through negative comments to assert their identity.

Unlike language related to sexual identity, gendered language remained relatively constant across all grade levels. For example, the omnipresence of negative remarks about girls remains the same among Grade 8 2SLGBTQ participants (58%) as it does for those in grade 11 (58%) and grade 12 (59%). This suggests that gender policing remains relatively persistent throughout adolescence. See FIGURE 7.

**FIGURE 7: PREVALENCE OF INAPPROPRIATE LANGUAGE BY GRADE (2SLGBTQ)**



Legend: "THAT'S SO GAY" — "NO HOMO" — NEGATIVE REMARKS: ABOUT GIRLS

| | GRADE 8 | GRADE 9 | GRADE 10 | GRADE 11 | GRADE 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| "THAT'S SO GAY" | 45% | 37% | 33% | 28% | 25% |
| "NO HOMO" | 45% | 57% | 47% | 40% | 36% |
| NEGATIVE REMARKS: ABOUT GIRLS | 58% | 49% | 51% | 58% | 59% |
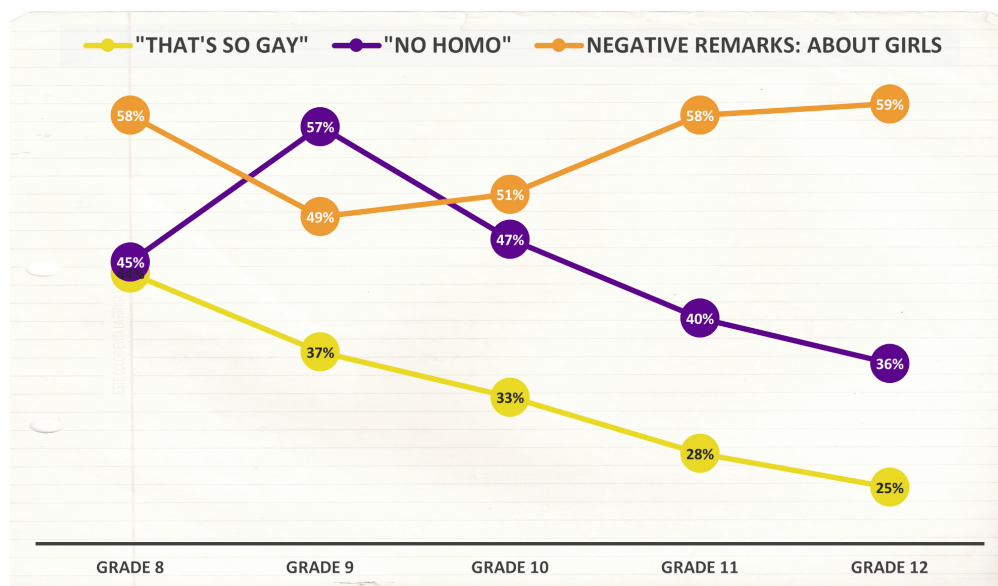
## Additional Between-Group Differences

Participants with one or more 2SLGBTQ parents were more likely than other students to report hearing "no homo" at least weekly at their school (72% versus 55%). They also indicate that "most" students at their schools use the term "no homo" (54%), compared to respondents with CH parents (38%). Similarly, students with one or more 2SLGBTQ parents were more likely to report hearing transphobic comments at least weekly at their school (32%) than respondents with CH parents (18%). Finally, they are also more attuned to hearing comments about boys not acting masculine enough (53% at least weekly versus 38%) as well as girls not acting feminine enough (41% versus 26%) than students with parents who do not identify as 2SLGBTQ. These findings shed light on the experiences of students with 2SLGBTQ parents (Goldberg & Byard, 2020; Peter, Taylor, & Edkins, 2016). Students with 2SLGBTQ parents may be more aware of homo-negative/trans-negative and homophobic/transphobic language based on their knowledge about 2SLGBTQ people and personal familial connections. They may also be privy to conversations or comments in which negative language about sexuality arise, as other students may not know that they are speaking to a peer with 2SLGBTQ parents or may target these students with their comments.

Overall, there were little variation across racialized identities, which in many ways confirms how deeply entrenched homophobic, transphobic, and gendered language is among all students. The only notable exception was that both CH and LGBTQ Asian participants were less likely to report hearing homophobic language (37% CH and 19% LGBTQ) at least weekly at their school, compared to White (53% CH and 42% LGBTQ), Indigenous (52% CH and 47% 2SLGBTQ), and Black (55% CH and 37% LGBTQ) students as well as participants from other racialized groups (31% CH and 48% LGBTQ).

Regionally, there was considerable variation across the country in the frequency of hearing or seeing "no homo" used at school. Among 2SLGBTQ participants, those from Alberta (74%), British Columbia (72%), and Ontario (72%) reported hearing this comment at least weekly at their school, while those from New Brunswick (44%) and Québec (48%) were the least likely to hear comments in reference to "no homo" at their school on at least a weekly basis. One possible explanation for the lower prevalence of the term "no homo" in New Brunswick and Québec may be related to the high rate of French language participation in both provinces (approximately 50% of students in both provinces completed the survey in French), as there is no direct translation for this term. 2SLGBTQ participants from Nova Scotia (85%) and Newfoundland & Labrador (80%) were the most likely to report hearing the comment "that's so gay" at least weekly,

while those from Manitoba (54%) and Québec (55%) indicated the lowest. In addition to having the highest frequency, 2SLGBTQ respondents from Alberta (56%), British Columbia (50%), and Ontario (48%) were also the most likely to indicate that the term "no homo" is used by "most" students. Only slightly fewer 2SLGBTQ participants from Nova Scotia (47%) and Newfoundland & Labrador (44%) report that "most" students in their school use this term.

The usage of directly hostile homophobic language is more frequent in smaller communities (small cities, towns, and rural/remote areas) than in larger communities (larger cities and suburban areas). This difference was observed among both CH (55% smaller versus 43% larger) and 2SLGBTQ students (47% smaller versus 37% larger) who report hearing such terms at least weekly. Participants from smaller communities were also more likely to report that "most" students use these terms (31%) than students from larger communities (18%). Conversely, students from larger communities were more likely to indicate hearing the term "no homo" at least weekly at their school (61%) than those from smaller communities (51%).

Similarly, other research found that there are significantly different contexts for 2SLGBTQ students in rural schools than urban ones. For example, GLSEN's 2019 school climate survey found that 2SLGBTQ students in rural schools face more hostile school climates and are less likely to have related school resources or supports than those in suburban or urban schools (Kosciw et al., 2020). This may be the result of attitudes that perceive 2SLGBTQ identities as being "properly" situated in urban spaces, which inadvertently overlooks or devalues the presence and experiences of 2SLGBTQ people in rural areas (Marple, 2005); this attitude is often passed along to many young rural 2SLGBTQ people and results in 2SLGBTQ migrations to urban centres. However, there are 2SLGBTQ students present in all schools—including those situated in small cities, towns, and rural/remote areas. As it stands, community context, size, and character significantly affect the experiences of 2SLGBTQ youth in schools, their development, and identity formation (Hulko & Hovanes, 2018), and there is a significant need for rural and remote schools to ensure that their climates are supportive for 2SLGBTQ students (Logie et al., 2018).

## Comparison with First Climate Survey

Trend data in regard to homophobic, transphobic, and sexist comments need to be interpreted with caution as the option categories changed between the First and Second Climate Surveys. Specifically, the First Climate Survey was based on four options (never, rarely, sometimes, and frequently), while the Second Climate Survey added an additional category (occasionally). Nevertheless, the number of participants reporting "never" (the most consistent category

to compare the two time periods) hearing homo-negative expressions like "that's so gay" increased from 2% (2008/2009) to 10% (2019/2020). Similarly, the frequency of "never" hearing homophobic remarks increased from 5% to 19%, respectively.

A similar trend was found when comparing the frequency of participants "never" hearing comments either about boys not acting masculine enough or about girls not acting feminine enough, which was observed among 2SLGBTQ and CH students. As shown in FIGURE 8. almost twice as many 2SLGBTQ participants in the current study (35%) indicated that they "never" hear comments about girls not acting feminine enough than respondents from the First Climate Survey (19%). The gap is even larger in regard to 2SLGBTQ students "never" hearing comments about boys not acting masculine enough (27% versus 12% in 2008/2009). While these results are promising, there is less optimism for transformative change when it comes to the frequency of students hearing remarks that are negative to girls or boys in general. Among 2SLGBTQ students, there was no change between the two time periods when it came to negative remarks about boys (12% in each), and there was actually a decrease in the number who reported "never" hearing negative remarks about girls between the First (11%) and Second (5%) Climate Surveys. While it is encouraging to see the increase in students "never" hearing comments about boys not acting masculine enough or girls not acting feminine enough, the little or no change in regard to general negative comments raises questions: Does the little or no change suggest that gender policing is still apparent, but manifests through other regulatory measures/language? Does it perhaps reflect a larger cultural shift in understandings about and recognition of cisheterosexist language? Further research is warranted to investigate these questions.

In both surveys, students were generally more likely to be aware of negative comments that apply to their own gender or sexuality, likely because such comments would be made about them specifically and because they would be more likely to notice general negative comments. Conversely, CH students were less likely to report hearing homophobic or transphobic comments, and cisgender boys were less likely to report hearing negative comments about girls. However, all groups of students reported hearing such comments.
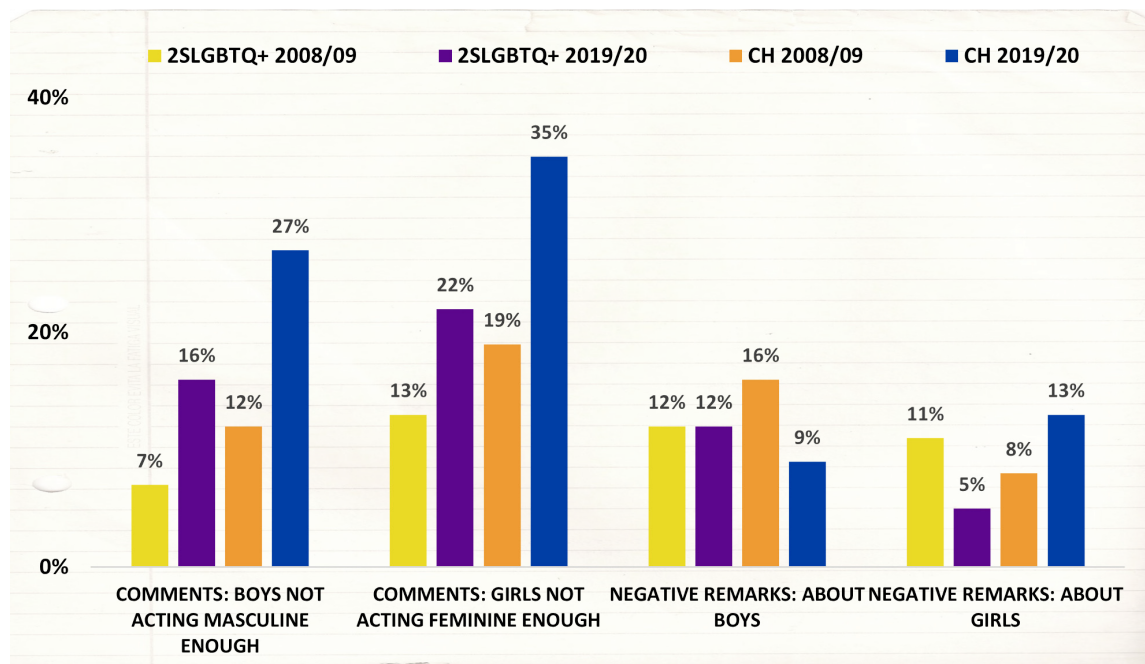
## Direct Victimization

*I watched a transgender girl completely detransition out of fear after receiving death threats that nobody did anything about.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Safety is not just physical, but also emotional. No one would've been beaten at my school for being gay or trans, but social exclusion, whispers, rumors, verbal bullying and such were prominent.* (2SLGBTQ)

*I'm a joke to everyone, I am harassed for being trans almost everyday.* (2SLGBTQ)

*I used to hang out with my girlfriend in a stair well nobody really bothers to go to. To only have pop cans be thrown at us from the floor above us over a ledge. Over time this became a bit of a common occurrence. Asides when we where outside we usually had empty cans along with colour words usually thrown our way. Neither of us were even formally out yet. Yet this random stair well was one of the only places we could just be alone and not have to worry about the bustling crowds of other students and instead just enjoy each others company.* (2SLGBTQ)

As might be expected, the First Climate Survey found that 2SLGBTQ students were more likely than CH students to be directly targeted by HBTP harassment and that these experiences contributed to negative school climates for 2SLGBTQ students. While the numbers have decreased somewhat from the First study, results from the Second Climate Survey show that there still remains a higher likelihood of 2SLGBTQ students being directly targeted for harassment,

not only on grounds of gender and sexuality, but on other identity-related grounds as well (e.g., racialized identities).

Other large-scale research supports these findings. For instance, in GLSEN's biennial climate survey in the U.S., the vast majority (86%) of LGBTQ students reported experiencing harassment or assault based on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and also on actual or perceived race/ethnicity, religion or disability. More than two-thirds of LGBTQ students (69%) were verbally harassed in the past year about their sexual orientation, 57% were verbally harassed about their gender expression and 54% about their gender, and over a third (35%) of LGBTQ students were physically harassed based on their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression (Kosciw et al., 2020). In Stonewall UK's School Report (Bradlow et al., 2017), two in five (42%) LGBT students experienced verbal abuse in schools, which was the highest among trans students (61%). Compared to the American report, incidents of physical victimization were lower among LGBTQ students (7%), with cisgender GBQ boys being three times more likely than cisgender LGBQ girls to be physically harassed (12% versus 4%) and trans students twice as likely as LGB students to experience physical bullying (13% trans versus 6% LGB). Nevertheless, the persistent trends, which are confirmed through both the parallel climate surveys in the US and the UK, are troubling, as they highlight a general hostility toward 2SLGBTQ persons and content in schools which marginalizes 2SLGBTQ students, places a target on their identities, and has detrimental impacts on their wellbeing and school connectedness.

In other research, a large-scale U.S. study compared the experiences of LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ high school students and found that LGBTQ youth reported more frequent instances of bullying, more frequent negative emotions, and less frequent positive emotions and experiences in schools, when compared with CH students (White et al., 2018). Another study more directly links the effects of bullying and harassment to psychological distress and suicidality, arguing that school staff play a key role in ameliorating the negative effects of harassment for LGBTQ students (Reisner et al., 2020).

In line with previous research, we asked participants about their experiences of verbal harassment, physical harassment and assault, sexual harassment, and other forms of directed harassment, such as cyber-bullying, rumours or lies, HBTP graffiti, and stolen or damaged property

## Verbal Harassment

2SLGBTQ participants reported higher counts of verbal harassment than CH students across all indicators (FIGURE 9). For example, 2SLGBTQ students report:

- Five times more verbal harassment about their sexual orientation (42% of 2SLGBTQ compared to 8% of CH students).
- Nearly four times more verbal harassment about their gender identity (30% of 2SLGBTQ versus 8% of CH students).
- Three times as much verbal harassment about their gender expressions of masculinity or femininity (47% of 2SLGBTQ versus 15% of CH students).
- Nearly two times more verbal harassment about their racialized identity (17% of 2SLGBTQ versus 9% of CH students.
  - ▶ Among racialized students, 39% of 2SLGBTQ participants experienced verbal harassment, compared to 25% of CH respondents.

Although 2SLGBTQ students reported experiencing far more verbal harassment it is notable here that a large number of CH students also experience verbal harassment, especially concerning gender expression but also in regard to their sexual identity and/or gender identity. This supports research which shows that such comments are sometimes used not because they are perceived as accurate by those who make them, but because tainting someone with a queer label is an effective way to insult and bully in youth culture.

### FIGURE 9: VERBAL HARASSMENT (2SLGBTQ/CH STUDENTS)



*Bar chart legend: ■ NEVER ■ ONE OR MORE TIMES*

2SLGBTQ+ STUDENTS:
- Sexual Orientation: 58% Never, 42% One or more times
- Perceived Sexual Orientation: 62% Never, 38% One or more times
- Gender Identity: 70% Never, 30% One or more times
- Perceived Gender Identity: 77% Never, 23% One or more times
- Gender Expression: 53% Never, 47% One or more times

CH STUDENTS:
- Sexual Orientation: 92% Never, 8% One or more times
- Perceived Sexual Orientation: 93% Never, 7% One or more times
- Gender Identity: 92% Never, 8% One or more times
- Perceived Gender Identity: 95% Never, 5% One or more times
- Gender Expression: 85% Never, 15% One or more times

*My committee once held a booth to inform others about LGBTQ facts and history. About ten guys came up and started saying really nasty things like "Gays should die", "If I saw two dudes kissing, I would beat them up", and "Gays are disgusting".* (2SLGBTQ)

*Its just homophobic boys sexualizing my sexuality.* (2SLGBTQ)

*I want [redacted school] to do more for LGBT people. The ignorance and homophobia/transphobia being spread around that school made my depression worse. Those hateful comments that was barely stopped by any staff forced lgbt students into a bubble and caused them to be scared to Express themselves. It was so toxic that I had to switch schools. This isn't okay.* (2SLGBTQ)

Among gender and sexual minority students, there was little difference between cisgender LGBQ girls and cisgender GBQ boys in relation to verbal harassment based on sexual identity (37%, respectively), perceived sexual identity (34% for cisgender LGBQ girls and 39% for cisgender GBQ boys), gender identity (17% for cisgender LGBQ girls and 22% for cisgender GBQ boys), and gender expression (40% for cisgender LGBQ girls and 41% for cisgender GBQ boys). Cisgender GBQ boys, however, were twice more likely than cisgender LGBQ girls to report being verbally harassed due to their perceived gender identity (22% for GBQ boys versus 11% for LGBQ girls). Trans students reported the most frequent incidents of verbal harassment across all the categories. See FIGURE 10. This finding is consistent with other studies which show that while 2SLGBTQ students are more likely than CH students to be targeted by verbal harassment, trans students are most likely to report experiencing verbal harassment in school when it comes not only to gender but to sexuality as well (Bradlow et al., 2017; Kosciw et al., 2020).

## FIGURE 10: VERBAL HARASSMENT: TRANS/LGBQ GIRLS & BOYS
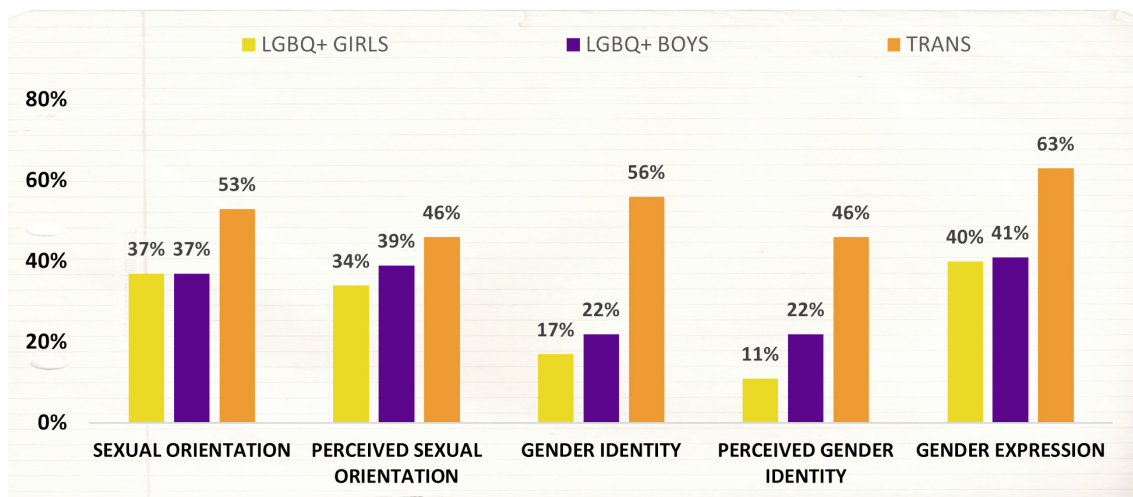
2SLGBTQ students were almost twice as likely as their CH peers to be verbally harassed about their racialized identity (17% versus 9%, respectively) and their religious identity (15% versus 7%, respectively). These findings suggest that the less one fits into the norms of a CH culture, the more one is likely to be harassed for a variety of reasons, some of which are unrelated to gender or sexual identity.

Students with one or more 2SLGBTQ parents also reported higher rates of verbal harassment than students without 2SLGBTQ parents (12% versus 3%). Similar results were found in comparison between students with a 2SLGBTQ sibling and those without a 2SLGBTQ sibling (10% versus 3%). Youth with 2SLGBTQ parents were also more likely to be verbally harassed about their own sexual orientation (47% versus 21% for those without 2SLGBTQ parents), their perceived sexual orientation (49% versus 19% without 2SLGBTQ parents), their gender identity (37% versus 16%), their perceived gender identity (29% versus 11%), and their expression of gender (55% versus 28%). These findings suggest that close affiliation with 2SLGBTQ persons can make a student a target for verbal harassment regardless of their own gender or sexual identity. Research suggests that 2SLGBTQ-parented families are potentially vulnerable to marginalization and stigma from the broader community and that this may carry over into school for children of 2SLGBTQ-parented families (Goldberg & Byard, 2020).

Students who attend Catholic schools (either private or publicly funded) were twice as likely to report experiencing verbal harassment based on their perceived sexual orientation (35%) as students who did not attend a Catholic school (18%). Similar differences were observed in regard to verbal harassment based on gender identity (28% for students from Catholic schools versus 15% for students not attending a Catholic school). This may suggest that the traditional Catholic Church teachings on the pathological sinfulness of homosexuality are reflected in Catholic youth culture, or perhaps that the teachings make HBTP harassment more attractive to bullies looking to hurt their victims.

Both 2SLGBTQ (88%) and CH students (72%) were more likely to have told a friend or another peer about the incident(s) of verbal harassment rather than an adult. As FIGURE 11 shows, they were far more likely "never" to have told an adult than a peer. About half of 2SLGBTQ students had told a teacher/principal/vice-principal/other school staff (47%), their parent or guardian (48%), or another adult (44%).

## FIGURE 11: PERCENT "NEVER" REPORTED OR TOLD OTHERS ABOUT INCIDENT(S) OF VERBAL HARASSMENT



2SLGBTQ+ ■ CH

| | TEACHER, PRINCIPAL, VICE-PRINCIPAL, OR OTHER SCHOOL STAFF | PARENT OR GUARDIAN | OTHER ADULT | FRIEND OR PEER |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2SLGBTQ+ | 53% | 52% | 56% | 12% |
| CH | 48% | 37% | 47% | 28% |
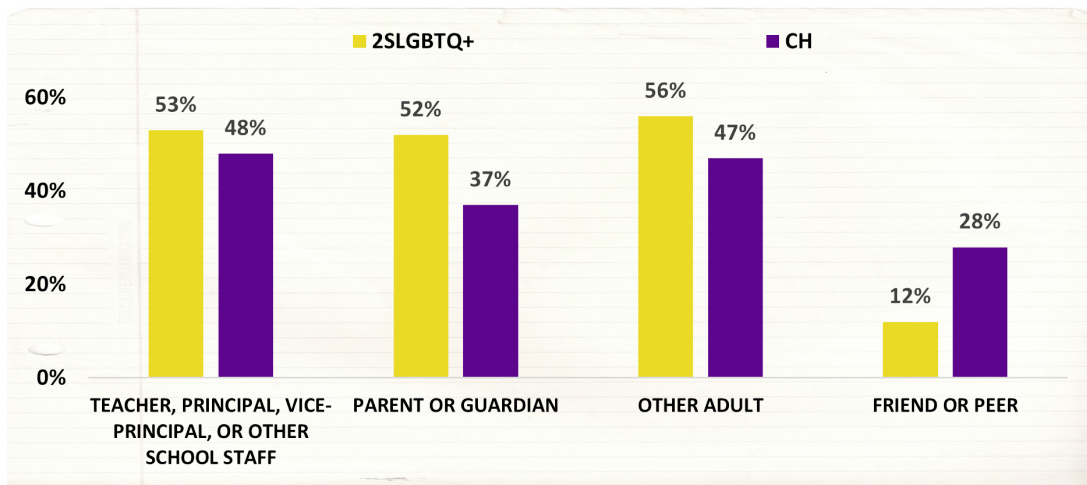
*Because of how I portray myself (a rugby player with an aggressive attitude) people tend to avoid picking on me but I'm too anxious to speak up to an authoritative figure when I witness something.* (2SLGBTQ)

The most common reason for not reporting incidents of verbal harassment among 2SLGBTQ (62%) and CH students (45%) was that they did not think the incident(s) was serious enough to report. Compared to CH students, 2SLGBTQ students were more likely not to report incident(s) of verbal harassment because they did not think school staff would do anything about it (58% for 2SLGBTQ versus 34% for CH). 2SLGBTQ students (55%) were twice as likely as CH participants (24%) not to report incidents of verbal harassment because they did not think school staff would handle the situation effectively. They were also three times more likely not to report because they were too embarrassed or ashamed (30% for 2SLGBTQ versus 9% for CH). These findings for seriousness of the harassment, effectiveness of the response, and feeling shamed, should all be considered in light of the findings that students were far less likely to confide in an adult than in a peer, which suggests a lack of confidence in adults. See FIGURE 12.

## FIGURE 12: REASONS FOR NOT REPORTING VERBAL HARASSMENT TO SCHOOL STAFF
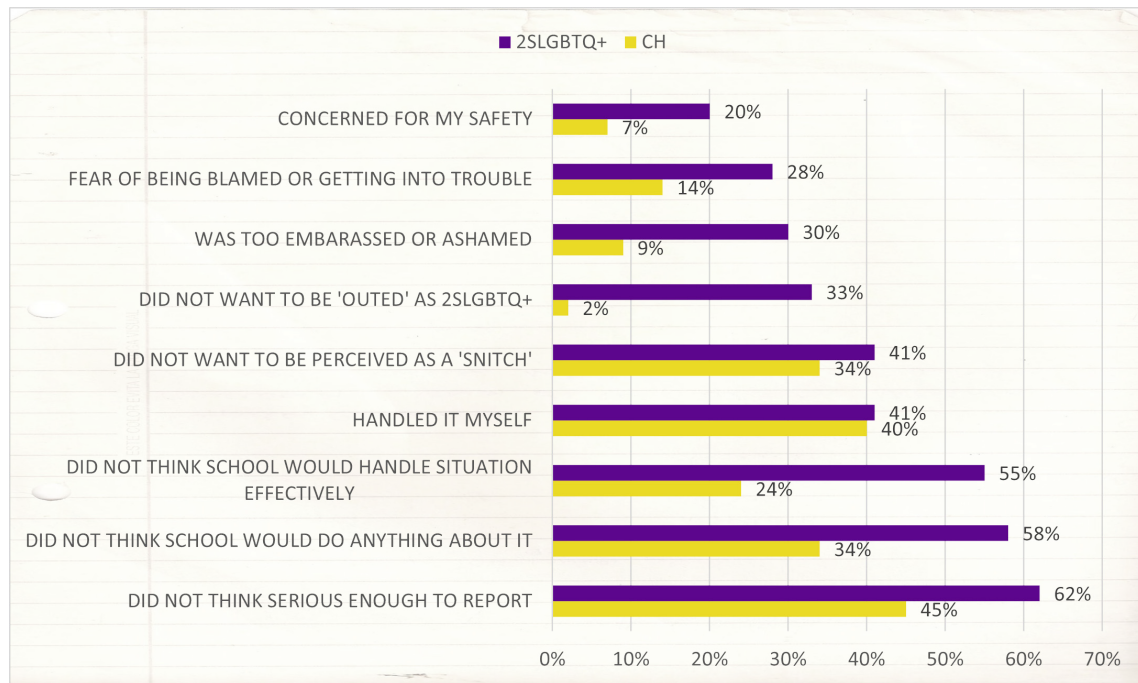


This lack of confidence in adults to respond appropriately is particularly pronounced in Catholic schools, where they are quite likely to hear teachers and counsellors advancing negative teachings about sexual and gender diversity (Callaghan, 2014). 2SLGBTQ students from Catholic schools were even more likely than those who did not attend a Catholic school to not report for the following reasons:

- Did not think school staff would do anything about it (69% versus 56%).
- Did not want to be 'outed' as being 2SLGBTQ (47% versus 31%).
- Concerned for their safety or fear of retaliation (33% versus 18%).
- Because school staff are homophobic or transphobic (35% versus 9%).
- Because school staff were part of the harassment (9% versus 4%).

Among students who reported at least one incident of verbal harassment, half (54% of 2SLGBTQ versus 50% of CH students) indicated that a teacher or staff member talked to the perpetrator (e.g., told the perpetrator to stop). 2SLGBTQ students were more likely to report that the teacher or staff member did nothing or took no action (46%) than CH students (28%). A third of both 2SLGBTQ (33%) and CH students (31%) were told to ignore the incident of verbal harassment. Similarly, 2SLGBTQ students were twice as likely as CH students to be discouraged from reporting (16% versus 8%, respectively). CH students were more likely than 2SLGBTQ participants to have a teacher or school staff: suspend the perpetrator (23% versus 20%); contact the perpetrator's parent or

guardian (21% versus 11%); or contact their own parent or guardian (13% versus 8%).

> *People call kids faggots for painting his nails and the teachers did nothing about it when i told them.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *Don't out kids to their parents. I've seen it happen and it's incredibly harmful.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *I hate how when I'm taunted and insulted and yelled at constantly it's considered as everyday regular bullying when the difference is because I'm queer and I stand up for my fellow queer students. I was given death threats and nothing was done besides giving a "slap of the hand" to my bully. It needs to be understood that the suffering of queer students in school is different to those of straight people...* (2SLGBTQ)

> *The principal outed me to my parents without warning me first, making me feel unsafe around her and not trusting her with any future problems I may have.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *I had a classmate of mine at [redacted school] say he wants to burn the gays, and if his brother was gay he threatened to kill him. I told my principal that and he didnt do anything.* (2SLGBTQ)

Finally, 2SLGBTQ students were less likely to report being satisfied (38%) with the way the intervention(s) for incident(s) of verbal harassment were handled by school staff, compared to CH students (56%). Sexual minority boys (48%) were more likely to indicate being satisfied with how the verbal harassment was handled, compared to LGBQ girls (38%) or trans students (37%).

## Physical Harassment and Assault

> *Yes, you really should be asking about disability on this form. Almost every disabled person I know has been harassed including myself and for the school board to not include that is further reducing our visibility. I was heavily physically abused in elementary school because I'm disabled and harassed by teachers in high school. I can't stress enough how important is to include us on forms like this.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *I got things like food thrown at me from the bus, while they yell tranny or fag at me.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *I got chased out of school for being gay but I had a boyfriend also got kicked by 12 girls in a parking lot.* (2SLGBTQ)

GLSEN's climate survey found that over a third of LGBTQ students (34%) were physically harassed in the past year, with approximately one-quarter (26%) being physically harassed due to their sexual orientation, more than a fifth (22%) due to their gender expression, and 22% due to their gender; while lower

numbers reported being physically assaulted, 15% reported it happened at least once in the past year, with 11% being physically assaulted due to their sexual orientation, 10% due to their gender expression, and 9% due to their gender (Kosciw et al., 2020).

2SLGBTQ students in our study were also more likely than CH students to report being physically harassed at school due to their sexual orientation, perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, perceived gender identity, and expression of gender. For example, as illustrated in FIGURE 13, 2SLGBTQ students were three times more likely to report being physically harassed due to their sexual orientation (9%), compared to CH participants (3%).

### FIGURE 13: PHYSICAL HARASSMENT (2SLGBTQ/CH STUDENTS)
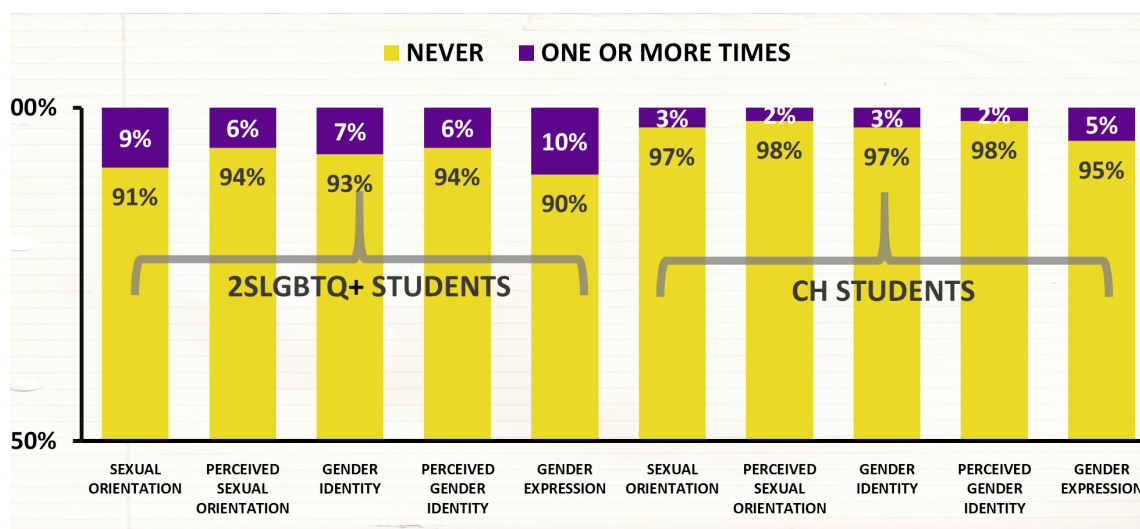


Cisgender LGBQ girls were less likely to indicate experiencing physical harassment, compared to cisgender GBQ boys, and trans students (FIGURE 14). Trans students were twice as likely (15%) to experience physical harassment due to their gender identity than cisgender GBQ boys (7%), and five times more likely than cisgender LGBQ girls (3%). Cisgender GBQ boys (10%) were more likely to experience physical harassment due to their perceived sexual orientation than cisgender LGBQ girls (3%). Physical harassment based on gender expression was more prominent among cisgender GBQ boys (16%) and trans students (16%) than cisgender LGBQ girls (6%).

As with verbal harassment, these findings regarding physical harassment suggest that gender policing is more rigidly enforced for trans students. Similar to Stonewall UK's study (Bradlow et al., 2017), trans students and cisgender GBQ boys were more likely to be physically bullied than cisgender LGBQ girls, which may reflect an association between perceived masculinity and physical harassment.

**FIGURE 14: PHYSICAL HARASSMENT: TRANS/LGBQ GIRLS & BOYS**
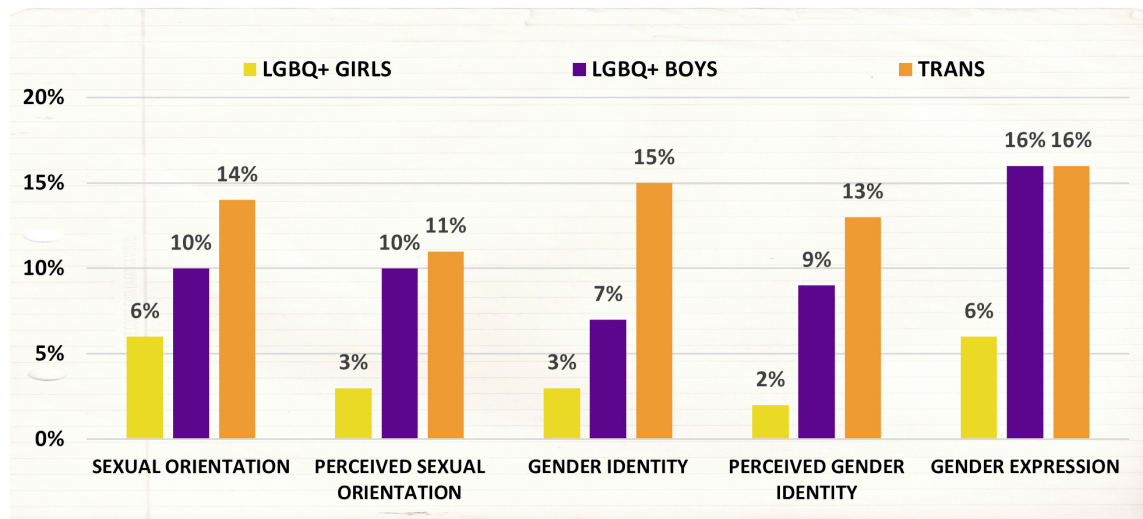


Students with a parent who is 2SLGBTQ were three times more likely to report being physically harassed due to their sexual identity or their perceived sexual identity (19%) than participants with CH parents (6%). Similar differences were found for physical victimization due to students' gender identity or perceived gender identity between participants with 2SLGBTQ parent(s) (18%) and those with CH parents (8%).

Considering the combined incidence of various forms of gender and sexuality related physical harassment, we found that 19% of 2SLGBTQ students reported being physically harassed on one or more of these grounds, compared to 7% of CH students. Similar to verbal harassment, incidents of physical harassment steadily decrease as student grade increases for both 2SLGBTQ and CH students. As illustrated in FIGURE 15, incidents of both verbal and physical harassment were highest among participants in grade 8, and the lowest among students in grade 12, which was consistent regardless of gender or sexual identity. However, despite the gradual decrease, three out of five (60%) of 2SLGBTQ students reported being verbally harassed in grade 12, compared to one out of five (20%) CH grade 12 participants.

**FIGURE 15: INCIDENTS OF VERBAL AND PHYSICAL HARASSMENT BY GRADE**



| | GRADE 8 | GRADE 9 | GRADE 10 | GRADE 11 | GRADE 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2SLGBTQ+ VERBAL | 76% | 72% | 67% | 65% | 60% |
| CH VERBAL | 34% | 30% | 29% | 23% | 20% |
| 2SLGBTQ+ PHYSICAL | 30% | 25% | 18% | 14% | 13% |
| CH PHYSICAL | 15% | 12% | 9% | 8% | 3% |

— CH VERBAL   — CH PHYSICAL   — 2SLGBTQ+ VERBAL   — 2SLGBTQ+ PHYSICAL
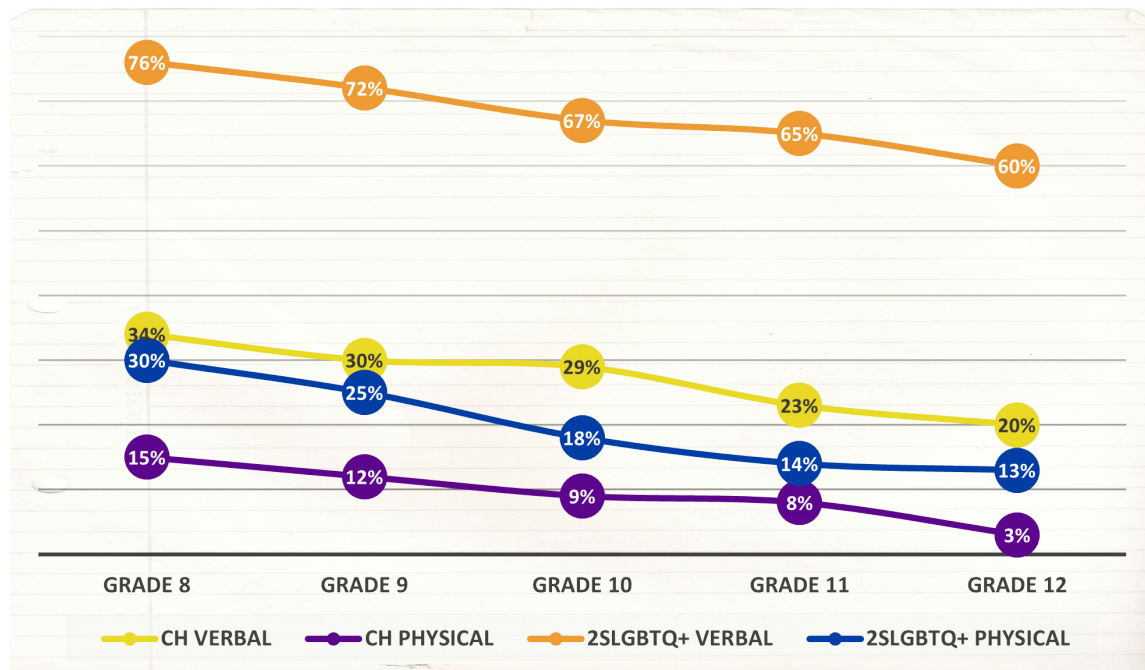
As is the case for verbal harassment, 2SLGBTQ students were less likely to report incidents of physical harassment on gender or sexuality-related grounds to another person, especially to a parent (53% versus 31%), teacher/principal/vice-principal/other school staff (51% versus 39%), or another adult (62% versus 41%), compared to CH participants (FIGURE 16). Taken together, over a third (35%) of 2SLGBTQ students never told an adult about their experiences with physical harassment, and nearly a quarter (23%) of CH students also never reported to an adult their encounter(s) with physical harassment.

**FIGURE 16: PERCENT "NEVER" REPORTED OR TOLD OTHERS ABOUT INCIDENT(S) OF PHYSICAL HARASSMENT**



2SLGBTQ+ ■ CH

| | TEACHER, PRINCIPAL, VICE-PRINCIPAL, OR OTHER SCHOOL STAFF | PARENT OR GUARDIAN | OTHER ADULT | FRIEND OR PEER |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2SLGBTQ+ | 51% | 53% | 62% | 27% |
| CH | 39% | 31% | 41% | 31% |
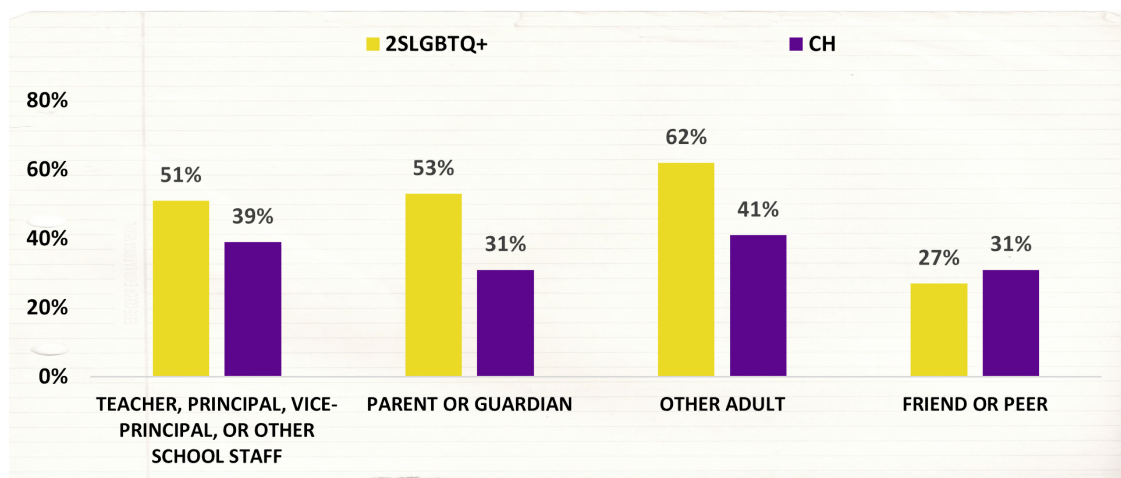
Both CH (55%) and 2SLGBTQ students (51%) did not report an incident of physical harassment because they did not think adults at their school would do anything about it. 2SLGBTQ students were twice as likely (52%) as CH participants (28%) not to report an incident of physical harassment because they did not think their school would handle the situation effectively. Other reasons for not reporting incidents of physical harassment include: not wanting to be perceived as a snitch (44% 2SLGBTQ versus 34% CH); being too embarrassed or ashamed (43% 2SLGBTQ versus 17% CH); fear of being blamed or getting into trouble (40% 2SLGBTQ versus 15% CH); and concern about personal safety (40% 2SLGBTQ). One in five (21%) 2SLGBTQ students indicated that they did not report an incident of physical harassment because they perceive school staff as homophobic or transphobic. See FIGURE 17 (note: aggregate data with fewer than 5 respondents are not reported to ensure anonymity of respondents, which is why there are some 'blank' bars for CH students in the figure below).

**FIGURE 17: REASONS FOR NOT REPORTING PHYSICAL HARASSMENT TO SCHOOL STAFF**
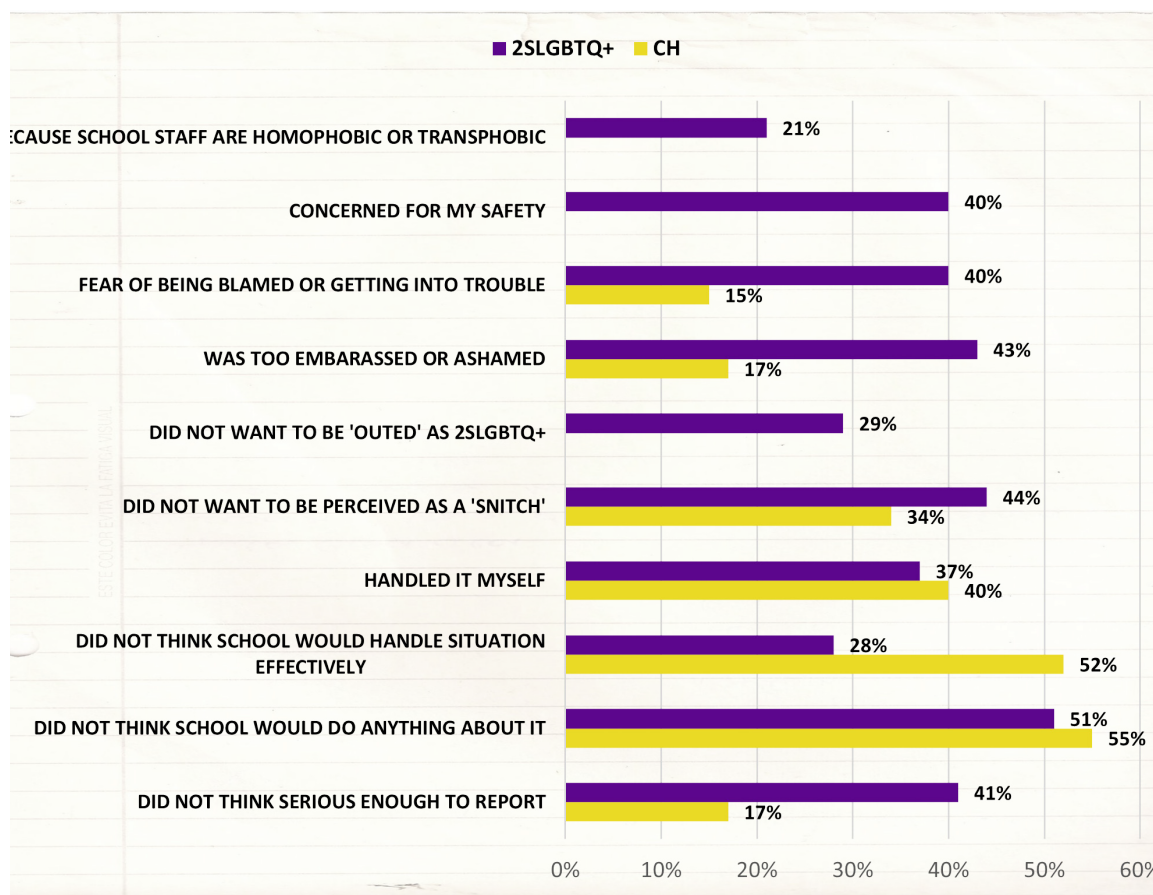


Among students who did report at least one incident of physical harassment, the most common outcome for both CH (39%) and 2SLGBTQ participants (44%) was that a teacher or other staff member talked to the perpetrator and/or told them to stop. However, 36% of 2SLGBTQ students were told by a teacher or staff

person to ignore it, while the same advice was given to 29% of CH participants. Similarly, over a third (35%) of 2SLGBTQ students and 28% of CH participants indicated that the teacher or staff member they reported to took no action. CH students (30%) were more likely than 2SLGBTQ participants (21%) to indicate that the teacher or staff person contacted the perpetrator's parent or guardian, and they were also more likely to report that the school contacted their own parent or guardian (25% versus 14% for 2SLGBTQ students). Over a quarter (28%) of 2SLGBTQ students responded that the perpetrator was disciplined (e.g., received a detention or was suspended), which was similar to CH students (24%). An equal number of 2SLGBTQ (26%) and CH participants (26%) reported that they were separated from the offending student. 2SLGBTQ students (13%) were more likely to indicate being disciplined themselves (e.g., received a detention or was suspended) than CH participants (6%). One in five (20%) of 2SLGBTQ participants and 17% of CH students were told to change their own behaviour (e.g., not to act so 'gay' or not to dress in a certain way). Finally, 2SLGBTQ participants were twice as likely to indicate that they were discouraged from reporting further to anyone (15% compared to 7% of CH students).

Over a third (38%) of 2SLGBTQ participants and almost half (48%) of CH students were satisfied with the intervention(s) when they told a teacher or school staff member about incidents of physical harassment.

## *Sexual Harassment*

*They will make fun of lesbian sex, ask questions to objectify and constantly compare it to porn.* (2SLGBTQ)

*There are groups of boys who will sexually harass or assault students that are perceived as female. They ignore it when they are told to stop and will even get physical without consent. On several occasions I have been catcalled or felt up while trying to get home. Many students fear these boys due to how they don't hesitate to become violent.* (2SLGBTQ)

*I was sexually assaulted once because of my gender identity.* (2SLGBTQ)

*I have been sexually harassed multiple times in the past few months in the areas surrounding my school, though i am not sure if this is because i am perceived as LGBTQ\* (i don't identify as LGBTQ\*)* (CH)

GLSEN's climate survey found that the majority of LGBTQ students (58%) had been sexually harassed in the past year and 13% reported that this harassment occurred often or frequently (Kosciw et al., 2020). Stonewall UK's findings show

that 3% of LGBTQ students and 6% of trans students experienced sexual assault at school (Bradlow et al., 2017). Other research shows that being targeted for sexual harassment has negative effects on mental health and contributes to depressive symptomology (Hatchel et al., 2018).

Results from the Second Canadian Climate Survey found that 2SLGBTQ participants were slightly more likely to report being sexually humiliated (e.g., pants pulled down, or received a "wedgie") (5%) than CH students (3%); however, one in five (20%) of 2SLGBTQ students, compared to one in twenty-five (4%) of CH participants, indicated that they had experienced sexual harassment at their school because they are 2SLGBTQ or are perceived to be.

Trans students were more likely to report being sexually humiliated (9%) due to their sexual or gender identity than CH boys (5%), cisgender LGBQ girls (3%), and CH girls (2%) (there were not enough cases to report data on cisgender GBQ boys). Similar results were obtained in regard to sexual harassment for trans students (25%), but cisgender LGBQ girls (18%) were almost twice as likely to report experiencing sexual harassment due to their gender or sexual identity or perceived identity than cisgender GBQ boys (10%).

## *Other Forms of Victimization*

*I'm frequently cyberbullied for being LGBTQ.* (2SLGBTQ)

*I have mostly been a target of rumours as people think that being bisexual makes you a slut.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Once someone I barely knew overheard my friend coming out to me she said "oh so and so's gay" and we nearly got into a phsyical fight about it. My friend ended up becoming scared around people, it was like everyone was staring at them, judging them. It was a horrifying expirence and no one should half to go through to this.* (2SLGBTQ)

*It seems like the school is divided in a way: the LGBTQ people, the homophobes and the allies. There are more allies but it's still a bit of a problem. I've personally been bullied more online than in person.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Students organizing a protest at my school who happened to be part of the LGBTQ community were targeted online and were the victims of slurs.* (2SLGBTQ)

Direct harassment can take other forms than verbal or physical victimization, and they too have impacts on students' feelings of social belonging, school attachment, and ability to learn. Stonewall UK's school survey found that more

than a third (37%) of LGBT students were gossipped about, 24% were ignored or isolated, 23% were subjected to intimidating looks, 19% were cyberbullied, 7% had their belongings stolen or damaged, and 4% received death threats (including 9% of trans students) (Bradlow et al., 2017). Our research investigated some of these forms of harassment.

We found that a large number of 2SLGBTQ students (45%), and to a lesser extent, CH students (12%) reported being excluded or 'left out' because they are or are perceived to be 2SLGBTQ. Similar disparities were found between 2SLGBTQ and CH students for the following:

- Victim of cyber-bullying or electronic harassment (30% versus 8%).
- Target of mean rumours or lies (46% versus 14%).
- Property stolen or damaged (13% versus 7%).
- Target of HBTP graffiti (5% versus 3%).

Trans students who participated in the survey were the most likely to have been targeted in one of these other forms of harassment at least once. This was especially the case for being excluded or left out due to their gender or sexual identity (62%, compared to 34% for cisgender GBQ boys, 38% for cisgender LGBQ girls, 11% for CH boys, and 13% CH girls). Although in smaller numbers compared to trans participants (39%), cisgender LGBQ girls (27%) were markedly more likely than cisgender GBQ boys (19%) to report being the victim of personal harassment through social media (i.e., cyber-bullying). See FIGURE 18.

**FIGURE 18: OTHER FORMS OF HARASSMENT**
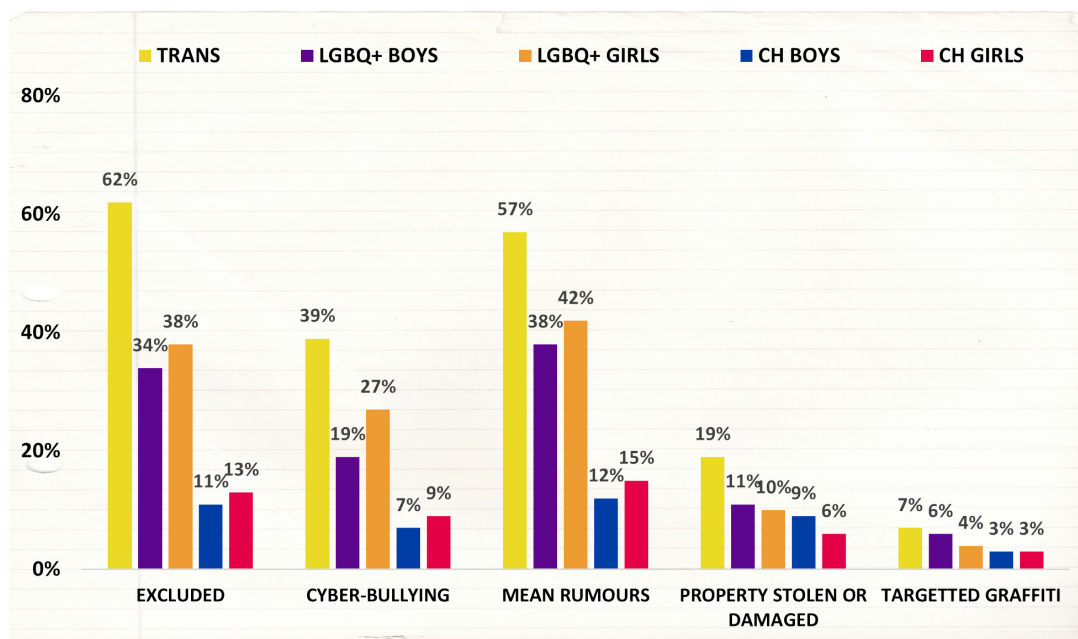
## Racialized Differences

*MY school has supports such as our two GSAs plus supportive teachers, but homophobia and transphobia, racism and sexism are still very much present in everyday life.* (2SLGBTQ)

Not surprisingly, racialized students were more likely to indicate being verbally harassed at school because of their actual or perceived racialized identity. There were differences, however, within racialized identities across gender and sexual identities. In particular, 2SLGBTQ Indigenous participants were twice as likely (35%) to experience verbal harassment based on their racialized identity than CH Indigenous students (14%). Similar differences were observed between 2SLGBTQ Black students (52%) and CH Black students (36%) as well as 2SLGBTQ Asian participants (41%) and CH Asian respondents (30%).

In addition, 2SLGBTQ Indigenous participants (64%) were more likely to experience verbal harassment due to their gender identity or their perceived gender identity, compared to White students (53%), Black respondents (52%), and Asian participants (42%). In total, over three-quarters (77%) of 2SLGBTQ Indigenous students indicated being verbally harassed in the last year at school, which is noticeably higher than it was for White (65%), Asian (62%), and Black (61%) students. See FIGURE 19.

**FIGURE 19: RACIALIZATION COMPARISONS OF 2SLGBTQ STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF VERBAL HARASSMENT**
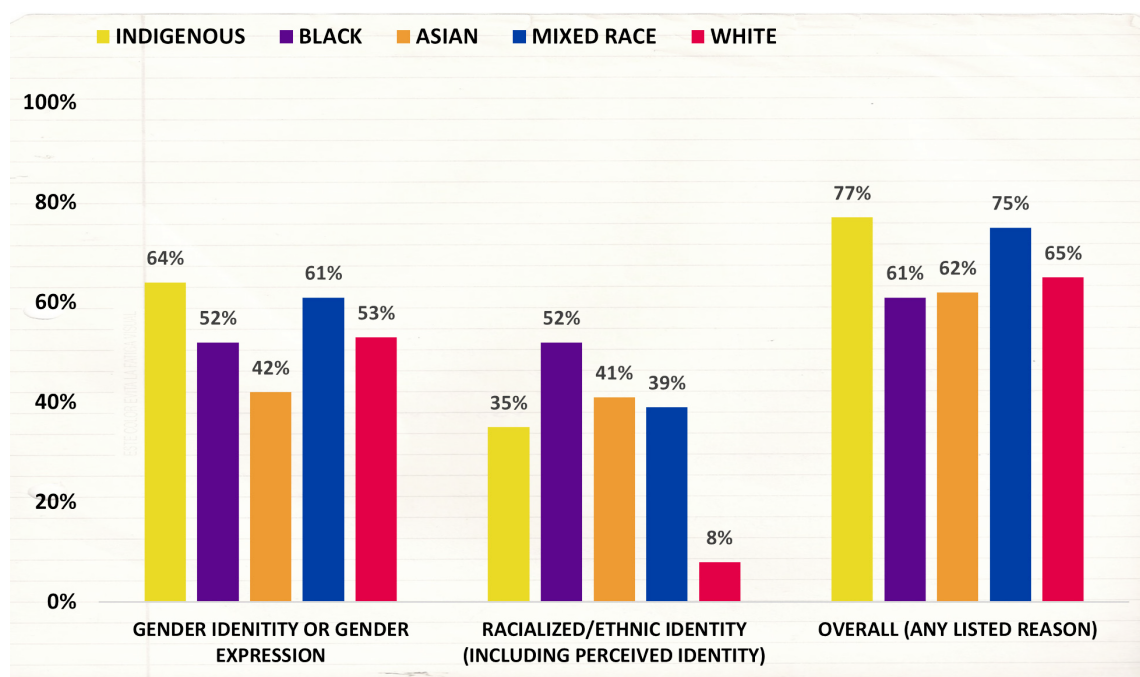
There were also significant differences among 2SLGBTQ Indigenous, Black, Asian, Mixed race, and White participants in the types of experiences of harassment and marginalization they experienced at school in the past year due to being 2SLGBTQ or perceived to be:

- Sexual harassment: Indigenous (24%), Black (22%), White (21%), Mixed race (16%), Asian (7%).

- Excluded or 'left out': Black (55%), Mixed race (50%), Indigenous (47%), White (46%), Asian (33%).

- Cyber-bullying: Indigenous (38%), Mixed race (36%), White (30%), Black (25%), Asian (18%).

- Target of rumours/lies: Indigenous (50%), White (49%), Mixed race (42%), Black (34%), Asian (32%).

The fact that racialized youth often reported higher incidents of harassment suggests that more attention needs to be paid to how educational programming is addressing 2SLGBTQ youth with racialized identities. Research shows that racialization has an impact on school experiences of harassment, marginalization, and belonging for 2SLGBTQ students. These findings are supported by other research as well. For instance, GLSEN's study found that while all LGBTQ students of colour experienced similar levels of victimization based on race/ethnicity, Black students were more likely to feel unsafe about their race/ethnicity, Indigenous LGBTQ students were generally more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to experience anti-LGBTQ victimization and discrimination, and most LGBTQ students of colour experienced victimization based on both their LGBTQ identities and their race/ethnicity (Kosciw et al., 2020). Other researchers highlight the need to attend to how interventions and educational content addresses 2SLGBTQ identities, pointing out that it is vitally important to attend to intersectional experiences of 2SLGBTQ students of colour (Coloma, 2006; Kumashiro, 2001; McCready, 2004b; Robinson, 2014) and to include educational content that addresses interlocking oppressions of racism and colonialism with homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia.

## *Regional Differences*

There was little regional variation in levels of verbal, physical, and other forms of harassment related to gender and sexual identity. Among the few noteworthy differences, however, was our finding that trans students from New Brunswick reported a much lower incidence (57%) of verbal harassment due to their gender and/or sexual identity than trans participants from Alberta (90%), British Columbia (80%), Newfoundland & Labrador (75%), Ontario (75%), Manitoba

(72%), and Québec (70%). Other provinces and territories could not be reported due to low sample sizes in those regions.

## Comparisons with First Climate Survey

Incidence of experiencing verbal harassment was lower in the Second Climate Survey than in the First Climate Survey. 2SLGBTQ students were somewhat less likely to have been harassed in regard to sexual orientation (51% in 2008/2009 versus 42% in the current survey), perceived sexual orientation (49% versus 38%), and gender expression (57% versus 47%). Among CH students, there has been a marked decrease in experiences of verbal harassment due to gender identity (17% in 2008/2009 versus 8% in 2019/2020) as well as gender expression (26% versus 15%). There was little or no difference with verbal harassment of CH students because of sexual orientation (8% in both time periods) or perceived sexual orientation (9% in 2008/2009 and 7% in 2019/2020).

Incidents of physical harassment were substantially less in 2019/2020 than in the First Climate Survey for both 2SLGBTQ and CH participants. In fact, among 2SLGBTQ students, physical harassment in the past year decreased by at least half or more across all the reasons. See FIGURE 20.

**FIGURE 20: VERBAL AND PHYSICAL HARASSMENT COMPARISONS AMONG 2SLGBTQ STUDENTS BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND CLIMATE SURVEYS**
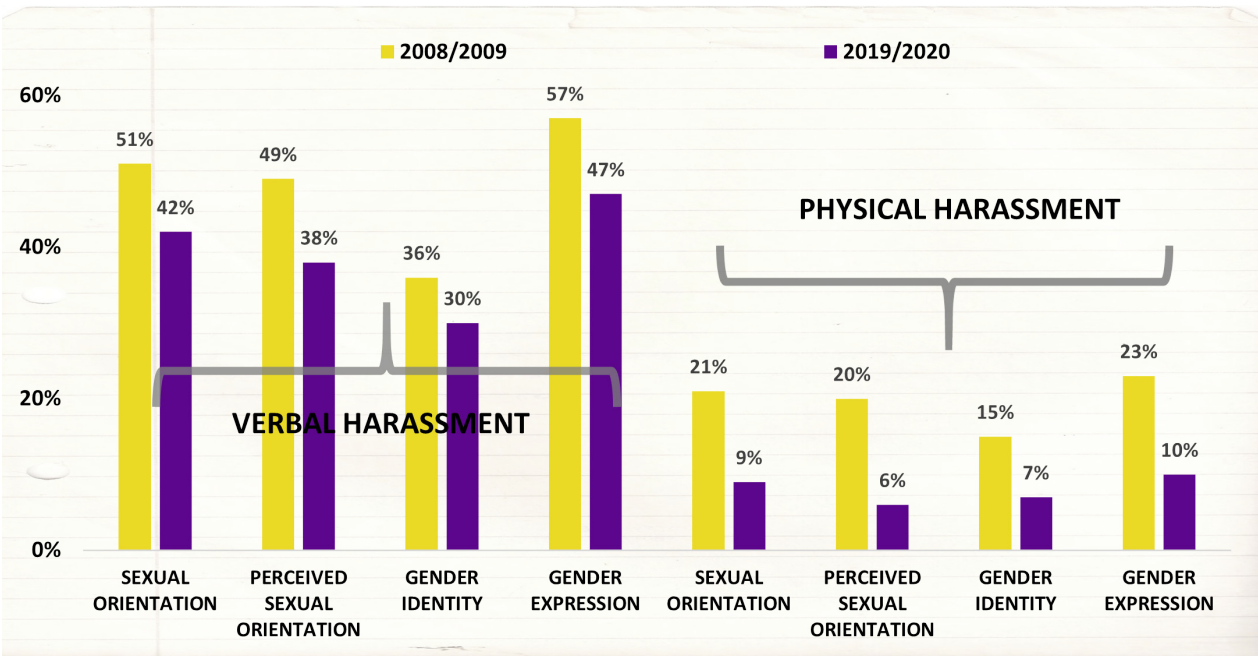


The Second Climate survey found that while there was no difference between cisgender GBQ boys and cisgender LGBQ girls with respect to overall incidence of verbal harassment (61% versus 62%, respectively), CH girls (31%) were more

likely to report verbal harassment than CH boys (25%). The overall incidence of verbal harassment was the same between the First (32%) and Second (31%) Climate Surveys for CH girls, but lower for cisgender LGBQ girls (77% in the First and 62% in the Second), cisgender GBQ boys (67% in the First and 61% in the Second), and CH boys (35% in the First and 25% in the Second). Trans students reported the highest incidence of verbal harassment in both climate surveys (79% in the First versus 75% in the Second, closely followed by students with one or more 2SLGBTQ parents (64% in the First versus 75% in the Second). The persistence of high rates of harassment among trans and non-binary students and the escalation of harassment among students with 2SLGBTQ parents suggests that they have not benefited from improvements in school climate over the past ten years, and that intervention efforts need to focus more specifically on improving the school experience for these groups.

In regard to overall physical harassment on the grounds of gender or 2SLGBTQ status, the largest decrease between the two time points was observed among cisgender LGBQ girls (32% versus 13% in 2019/2020), trans students (42% versus 27% in 2019/2020), students with at least one 2SLGBTQ parent (39% versus 26% in 2019/2020), and cisgender GBQ boys (27% versus 20% in 2019/2020). There were only nominal differences among CH students, who were far less likely to report having been targeted in this way in both surveys: CH girls (13% versus 10% in 2019/2020), CH boys (12% versus 11% in 2019/2020). While the overall percentage of CH participants who reported having experienced physical victimization in the past year is significantly less than 2SLGBTQ students, it still amounts to approximately 100 CH students in a school at 1000 students.

Directed harassment in the form of HBTP graffiti was also substantially lower in the Second Climate Survey, compared to the First Canadian Survey for both 2SLGBTQ participants (5% and 15%, respectively) and CH respondents (3% and 5%). There were no changes in 2SLGBTQ students' experiences being the target of mean rumours or lies between the First (47%) and the Second (46%) surveys, and there was actually an increase among CH students (8% versus 14%, respectively). Incidents of cyber-bullying slightly increased for both 2SLGBTQ and CH students between the two time points (28% to 30% for 2SLGBTQ participants and 6% to 8% for CH students), which is no doubt due to the fact that more young people are equipped with smart phones and thus spend more time accessing social media than an actual increase in incidents of cyber-bullying (in fact, one may expect there to be an even greater increase than what was observed).

# Impacts

*I think a lot of people don't mean to cause harm, they just don't understand the impact of their words.* (2SLGBTQ)

*I got so depressed at my old school… that I found a new school that is more welcoming and safe for me and my mental health.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Sometimes i hear harmful rhetoric like "gay people are fine i just hate when they make it their personality" but often that really is cishet people so used to the cishet status quo that everything different is annoying to them. I don't think being gay can even be a personality trait ?? its just how you're born? And what about [girl] and [boy] who makeout in the hallway every week?? hm? Is that them pushing their straightness on you?* (2SLGBTQ)

The findings on verbal, physical, sexual, and other forms of harassment demonstrate that 2SLGBTQ students experience higher instances of harassment and more negative school climates. As other research suggests, the impact of these negative experiences can result in a variety of adverse circumstances for 2SLGBTQ youth, including higher levels of emotional distress, more negative experiences in school, social marginalization, lower feelings of safety in schools, lower academic performance, and weaker school attachment (Baams & Russell, 2020; Birkett et al., 2014; Greenspan, Griffith, et al., 2019; Hatchel et al., 2019; Kosciw et al., 2020; Meyer, 2003; Proulx et al., 2019; Reisner et al., 2020; St. John et al., 2014; Veale et al., 2017; White et al., 2018).

In this section, we report on the responses to questions about the impacts of students' negative experiences in schools, including emotional distress, sense of safety in school, skipping school, school attachment, social isolation and connectedness, and academic achievement and aspirations.

## Emotional Distress

Unsurprisingly, 2SLGBTQ students were more likely than CH students to find homophobic comments upsetting (93% versus 59%). These numbers among CH students have stayed the same in the decade since the First Climate Survey (58%) but have increased for 2SLGBTQ students (from 86% in the First Climate Survey). As we stated in the First Climate Survey report, the fact that the majority of CH students reported finding homophobic comments to be upsetting on some level deserves attention. In the First Climate Survey, we suggested that 58% of CH students finding homophobic comments upsetting is encouraging in that it may indicate that there is untapped solidarity for 2SLGBTQ students among their CH peers. Further, this finding highlights how making schools safer

and more supportive for 2SLGBTQ students benefits all students. For instance, as described above, CH students also experience harassment based on gender and sexual orientation, albeit at lower levels than 2SLGBTQ students. Research has found that CH students also benefit from interventions such as GSAs that are intended to support 2SLGBTQ students (Peter, Taylor, & Chamberland, 2015; Saewyc et al., 2014).

> *Even though I don't identify with the LGBTQ community, I am a supporter of people being who they are. There is a lot of verbal harassment that goes on in my school about being a part of the LGBTQ community. Even though it's not said in front of people's faces it is constantly talked about how they think it's wrong and disgusting. Hearing my peers talk this badly about people when they are just being who they are makes me very mad and disappointed.* (CH)

> *Personally i think most people stick up for each other no matter what is said and that the person that said the thing that insulted the other person doesn't say it again.* (CH)

Not only has the untapped solidarity for 2SLGBTQ students among CH students remained over time, it has actually increased in its intensity. Compared to 2008/2009, participants in the current survey were twice more likely to find homophobic comments heard in their school to be "extremely upsetting," which was the same ratio for both 2SLGBTQ (50% versus 23% in 2008/2009) and CH students (6% versus 14% in 2019/2020). See FIGURE 21.

## FIGURE 21: FEELING UPSET BY HOMOPHOBIC COMMENTS: COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND CLIMATE SURVEYS



Legend: 2008/09 2SLGBTQ+, 2008/09 CH, 2019/20 2SLGBTQ+, 2019/20 CH

EXTREMELY UPSET: 23%, 6%, 50%, 14%
VERY UPSET: 33%, 14%, 32%, 23%
SOMEWHAT UPSET: 30%, 39%, 11%, 22%
NOT BOTHERED AT ALL: 14%, 42%, 7%, 41%
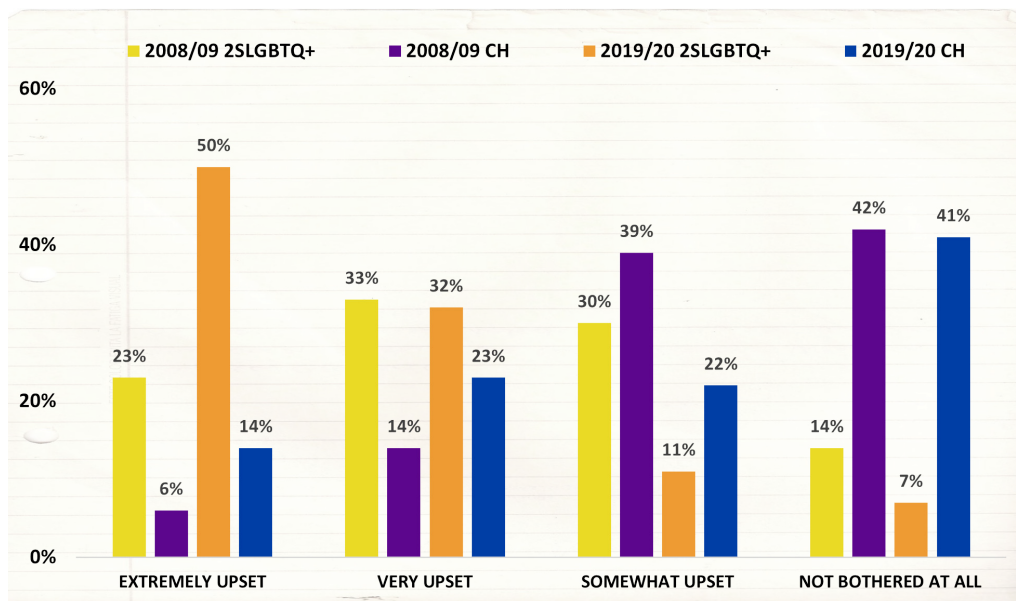
Cisgender LGBQ girls (94% in 2019/2020 versus 80% in 2008/2009) were more likely to find homophobic comments upsetting than cisgender GBQ boys (81% versus 90% in 2008/2009). Over half (57%) of trans students were "extremely upset" by homophobic comments, which was higher than it was for cisgender LGBQ students (47%), and double from the First Climate Survey for both groups (26% of trans participants and 23% of cisgender LGBQ respondents in 2008/2009). This finding may highlight the relative visibility of trans students as compared to cisgender LGBQ students, which could also contribute to the greater likelihood that they may overhear or be targeted for negative comments. Alongside this, the higher likelihood of their experiencing harassment and derogatory comments (both in schools and in broader society) may have heightened implications for their own sense of safety in schools, compounding the impacts of such comments and resulting in greater distress regarding these types of comments.

CH girls (73%) were substantially more likely than CH boys (44%) to be upset by the prevalence of homophobic comments at their school. Students with one or more 2SLGBTQ parents were also more likely to find homophobic comments extremely upsetting (47% versus 29% of students without any 2SLGBTQ parents), which doubled from the First Climate Survey (23% for participants with 2SLGBTQ parents versus 11% for CH parents).

## Unsafe Places at School

Given the picture of school climates for many 2SLGBTQ students produced by the results from the Second Climate Survey thus far, coming out, or disclosing one's sexual orientation or gender identity, may feel particularly unsafe or risky, especially for those who may become more visible than they already were or feel they may be targeted for harassment afterward. As such, we not only wanted to learn about the forms and extents of harassment students were experiencing, and how they had changed since the First Climate Survey, but we wanted to learn which locations in schools were experienced as unsafe in order to help inform future interventions by school officials.

*Places like change rooms are a nest of harassment.* (CH)

*Washrooms are uncomfortable and kinda scary for me to go in.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Generally it's safe if your in an area that had an adult or older peer. Without those people around though, some are more inclined to act cruel because others aren't around.* (2SLGBTQ)

*In the halls, students mock members of the LGBTQ community, extending the acronym and mockingly claiming to be non-binary for a "whole 24 hours".* (2SLGBTQ)

*Bathrooms and change rooms feels unsafe at times. Scared I'll be called out for not being feminine enough to use the girls bathroom/change room or that people will be suspicious of my intentions in either places.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Some people do understand the gender-fluid things and the being bisexual… some are uncomfortable calling me he (I was born a girl) or accepting that fact. A girl once told me she didn't want me in the girls changeroom (I've always gone in there and no one cared) because now that she new I was bi, she was uncomfortable even though I explained I never looked and always used a stall, but it was never a problem when she thought I was straight/cis* (2SLGBTQ)

*In my whole high school experience I have never used the change room because I've gotten rude comments because I'm a lesbian and masculine and people told me that I shouldn't be in there cuz I'm gay and it feels like there being spied on. I'm tired of people always making me feel like a predator when I try to do things every one else does but when I do it's wrong cuz I'm a lesbian.* (2SLGBTQ)

As we found with the First Climate Survey, some areas in school are less safe depending on such factors as exposure, opportunity, the presence of potential witnesses or authority figures, and the type of activity associated with the place, such as change rooms or physical activity. We asked a series of questions about unsafe areas in schools to better understand the potential impacts for 2SLGBTQ students.

2SLGBTQ participants were more likely than CH students to see washrooms (56% versus 34%), Physical Education change rooms (53% versus 27%), hallways (43% versus 34%), and physical education or gym class (40% versus 16%) as unsafe places for 2SLGBTQ students. See FIGURE 22.

### FIGURE 22: UNSAFE AREAS FOR 2SLGBTQ STUDENTS BY 2SLGBTQ & CH STUDENTS
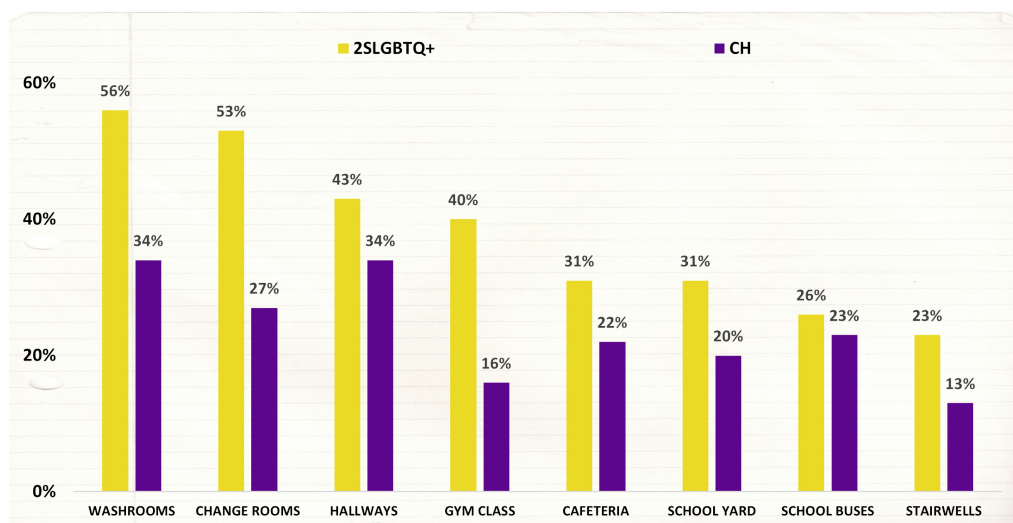
Among 2SLGBTQ youth, trans students were more likely to identify places as unsafe; the only exception was for Physical Education change rooms (i.e., locker rooms) in which cisgender LGBQ girls were more likely to report change rooms as being unsafe (59% versus 52% for trans participants, and 43% for cisgender GBQ boys). See FIGURE 23.

**FIGURE 23: UNSAFE PLACES AT SCHOOL BY GENDER AND SEXUAL IDENTITIES**
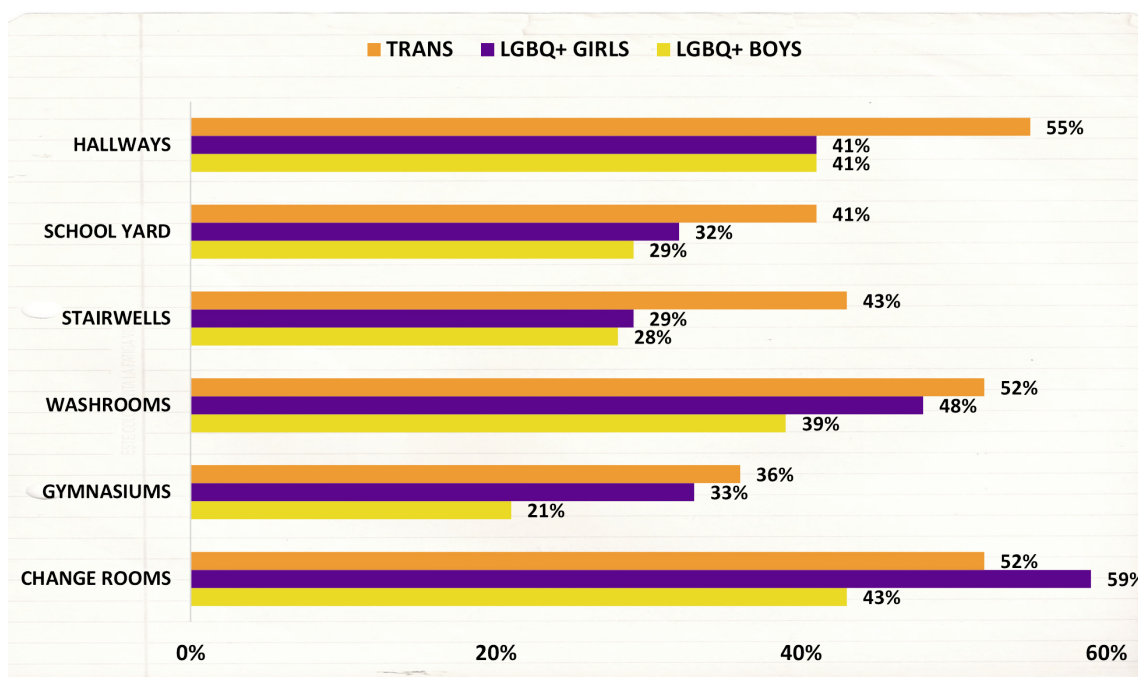


Data were also analyzed so that overall numbers of places seen as unsafe could be established. Again, gender identity and sexual identity make a difference in how students perceive the environment for 2SLGBTQ students:

- Nine out of ten (90%) of trans students identified at least one place at their school that is unsafe for 2SLGBTQ students. They also selected the largest number of unsafe places with an average of 3.5 places.

- Nearly three-quarters (73%) of cisgender LGBQ girls identified at least one unsafe place at their school, and on average identified 3.1 places.

- 64% of cisgender GBQ boys identified at least one unsafe place for 2SLGBTQ students, and on average identified 2.9 spaces.

- Among LGBQ students, respondents who indicated that they are questioning or are unsure of their sexual identity were the most likely to identify at least one place at their school that was unsafe for 2SLGBTQ students (79%). They also identified an average of 3.4 spaces within their school that they considered as unsafe.

- Participants who identified as bisexual were also more likely to select at least one unsafe place at their school for 2SLGBTQ students (71% of cisgender bisexual girls and 70% of cisgender bisexual boys). Collectedly, they identified an average of 3.4 unsafe space.

- Two-thirds (67%) of mostly heterosexual youth (i.e., those who identify as heterosexual plus at least one other sexual identity) reported at least one unsafe place at their school, and identified an average of 2.6 unsafe spaces.

- A large number of CH students recognize at least one unsafe place for 2SLGBTQ students within their school. In fact, half (50%) of CH boys and 62% of CH girls identified at least one unsafe place for 2SLGBTQ students at their school. They also identified an average of 1.9 and 2.4 spaces, respectively, that were unsafe for 2SLGBTQ students.

The percentage of students identifying unsafe places increased between the First and Second Climate Surveys for both CH youth and 2SLGBTQ students. In the 2008/2009 survey, 47% of CH and 71% of 2SLGBTQ students identified at least one place at their school that was unsafe for 2SLGBTQ students, which increased to 57% of CH students and 78% of 2SLGBTQ participants in 2019/2020. These findings are somewhat surprising, given the attention in the intervening years to 2SLGBTQ safety. The increase may reflect the greater attention given to 2SLGBTQ students' safety in schools which results in increased recognition that they feel unsafe in some places.

## General Sense of Safety at School by Gender and Sexual Identity Groups

One of the main objectives of the First Climate Survey was to better gauge 2SLGBTQ students' perceptions of their safety in school. As noted in the First report, 2SLGBTQ students are more likely to experience feelings of unsafety than CH students, and this finding is supported by a plethora of other research (Birkett et al., 2014; Bradlow et al., 2017; Greenspan, Griffith, et al., 2019; Kosciw et al., 2020; Kulick et al., 2018).

We also wanted to understand students' perceptions of other people's safety at school. The First Climate Survey found that standpoint (e.g., heterosexual, gay, transgender) made a difference to how safe school seemed for 2SLGBTQ people, with cisgender heterosexual students being less likely than 2SLGBTQ students to see spaces as unsafe for 2SLGBTQ students.

A related finding of the Every Teacher Project was that people were less likely to think of marginalized people unless they were specifically asked to. Almost all

educators (97%) replied that their school was safe (60% safe and 37% somewhat safe) when asked the general question; however, when asked if their school were safe for LGB students in particular, that confidence dropped to 72%, and a substantially lower 53% when asked about safety for trans students (Taylor et al., 2015).

These findings suggest that not only do 2SLGBTQ people experience safety in schools differently from CH people, but that their experiences may not be "on the radar" of other people, which suggests that generic safe schools programs and interventions that do not consult 2SLGBTQ people and take their particular situations into account from the design stage onward may be problematic.

To better understand how students conceived of feelings of safety, we asked about their own experiences of safety in schools and their perceptions of others' experiences.

*One of my friends was outed and she doesn't feel safe in her class anymore. Transphobia is absolutely rampant, and lots of people make rape or sexual assault jokes.* (2SLGBTQ)

*This Place Is Actually Hell, Nobody Is Safe, help us.* (2SLGBTQ)

*The schools don't care about the pronouns of lgbtq students or keeping us safe they'd be okay if we were killed.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Just the general feeling unsafe to come out/dress the way I want to because of students using lgbt terms negatively.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Because that i am not out yet and/or i dont act feminine i feel safe. Which i usually act feminine but preferred not to do in school because didn't wanted to people publicly find out im gay. (which i don't care about people in school to find out, im scared that my parents find out.)* (2SLGBTQ)

Over half (56%) of all participants (2SLGBTQ and CH combined) perceived their school environment to be "very safe" for students with a 2SLGBTQ family member (8% not safe), and almost half (49%) perceived their school as very safe for students with a 2SLGBTQ parent (12% not safe). Fewer than half perceived their school to be very safe for girls who act "masculine" (43%, 13% not safe), bisexual or pansexual girls (43%, 11% not safe), and lesbian or gay girls (40%, 12% not safe), which was higher than their assessments for boys who act "feminine" (30%, 28% not safe), bisexual or pansexual boys (35%, 17% not safe), or gay boys (34%, 18% not safe). Fewer still perceived their school to be safe for transfeminine (27% very safe and 33% not safe), transmasculine (28% very safe and 29% not safe), and gender non-binary students (30% very safe and 26% not safe). These

findings again suggest that gender is perceived as being more strictly regulated among students, with those who step outside the gender binary as being seen as the most unsafe at school. See FIGURE 24.

**FIGURE 24: OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY ACROSS GENDER AND SEXUAL IDENTITIES**
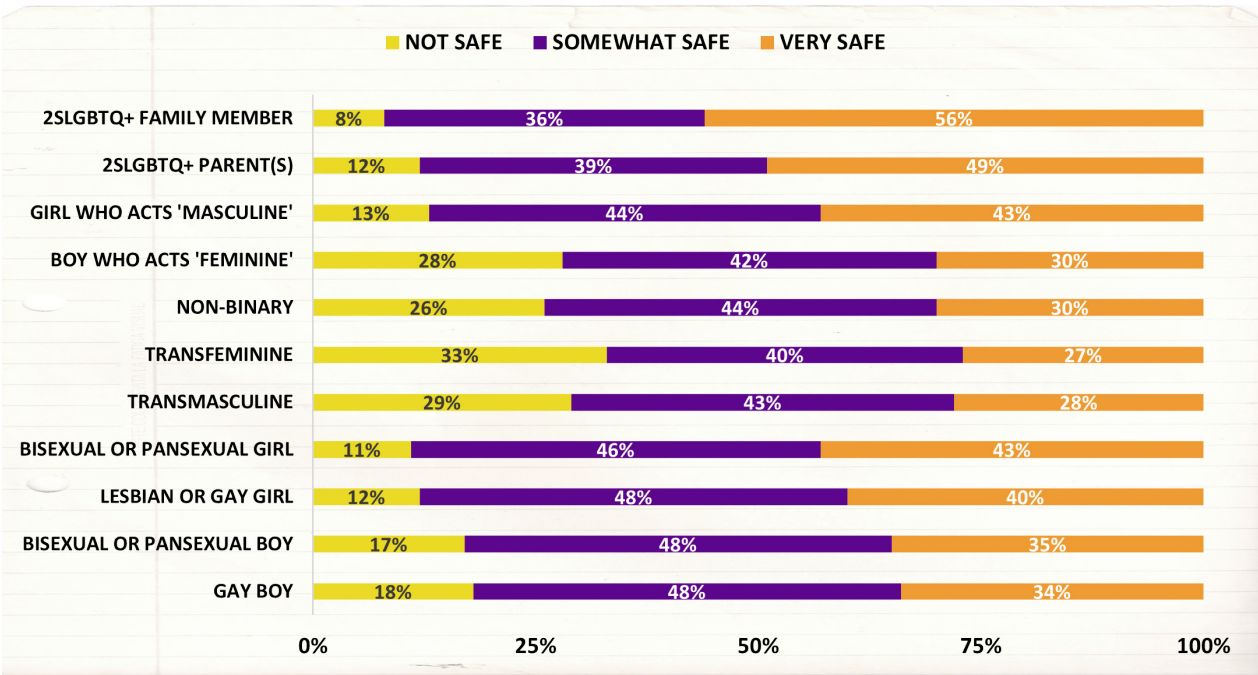


As expected, students who identified at least one unsafe space for 2SLGBTQ students were significantly more likely to perceive their school to be "not safe" across all gender and sexual identity categories; however, similar to the figure above, the degree of "un-safeness" varies considerably depending on one's gender or sexual identity (or perceived identities) or gender expression. Presented below are the percent of all students who consider their school to be "not safe" for each of the identity/expression groupings (see above figure for baseline numbers in terms of overall % who reported their school as "not safe") split by those who identified at least one unsafe space/place at their school for 2SLGBTQ students versus those who did not. For instance, 18% of students overall identified their school as being unsafe for gay boys, but those who identified at least one unsafe space in their school were more likely (27%) to consider their school to be unsafe for gay boys, compared to those who did not identify any place in their schools as unsafe (5%).

- Gay boys (5% no unsafe place versus 27% at least one unsafe place).
- Bisexual or pansexual boys (4% versus 25%).
- Lesbian or gay girls (3% versus 18%).

- Bisexual or pansexual girls (3% versus 14%).
- Transmasculine students (10% versus 43%).
- Transfeminine students (10% versus 49%).
- Gender non-binary students (9% versus 37%).
- Boys who act "feminine" (8% versus 41%).
- Girls who act "masculine" (6% versus 17%).
- Students with at least one 2SLGBTQ parent (3% versus 16%).
- Students with an 2SLGBTQ family member (3% versus 11%).

Perceptions of school safety also varied considerably by grade-level. As shown in FIGURE 25, students in grade 8 were more likely to report that their school was "not safe" for gay boys (26%), which then drops significantly to 16% among students in grade 9 and remains stable across grade 10 (18%), grade 11 (17%), and grade 12 (14%). A similar sharp decline was also observed in terms of perceived school safety for students with at least one 2SLGBTQ parent as nearly one in five (18%) respondents from grade 8 indicated that their school was not safe for them, which was reduced by half (9%) among students in grade 12. Although not as pronounced, there was a steady decrease in perceived lack of safety for girls who act "masculine," which was the highest for students in grade 8 (19% not safe), and is reduced to 10% not safe among participants in grades 11 and 12. These findings suggest that there is a real need for school-based interventions in grade 8 (and in the preceding middle-school years) that focus on 2SLGBTQ identities and content in order to support student safety during this period.

**FIGURE 25: PERCEPTIONS OF LACK OF SCHOOL SAFETY BY GRADE LEVEL**
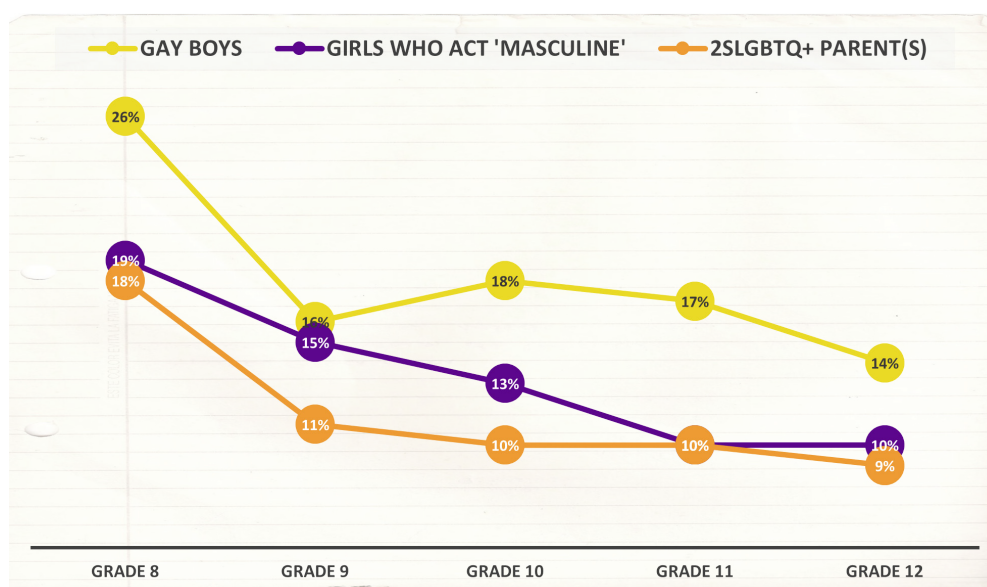
The rigidness of heteronormativity was somewhat more evident among students who attend school in small cities, towns, rural, and remote communities. For example, participants from these communities were twice as likely to perceive their school as unsafe for students with 2SLGBTQ family members (10%), compared to respondents from urban or suburban areas (5%). A similar distinction was found for students with at least one parent who is 2SLGBTQ (13% versus 8%).

Across all gender and sexual minority groupings, participants who attend a Catholic-based school were more likely to perceive their school as unsafe. For instance, 45% of respondents from Catholic schools reported that their school was not safe for gender non-binary students, compared to 24% of participants from secular schools. Similar disparities were found for transmasculine (49% versus 28%) and transfeminine (54% versus 31%) students, and for boys who identify as bisexual or pansexual (26% and 16% respectively).

School context is vitally important in addressing safety for 2SLGBTQ students, including attention to religious and rural contexts. The above findings suggest that 2SLGBTQ students in both rural/remote schools and those in Catholic schools are more likely to perceive their schools as being unsafe, which is in line with other research (Kosciw et al., 2020). Possible explanations for why this may be the case are of specific importance here. For instance, there have been efforts made in Catholic schools to provide supports and make schools more accepting for 2SLGBTQ students, but this requires educators to balance the strictures of official church doctrine that says homosexuality and gender diversity are pathological and sinful against the fiduciary responsibility of educators to provide safe and accepting schools for 2SLGBTQ students (Bailey et al., 2020; Callaghan, 2014, 2017), making it very difficult to create a climate in which 2SLGBTQ students are not seen as inferior. In rural schools, studies suggest that students in rural schools/communities have less access to school-based supports, that 2SLGBTQ interventions may be less common, and that there is less visibility of 2SLGBTQ people in rural spaces, which may lead educators to assume there is less need for supports and interventions. Research suggests, however, that when 2SLGBTQ students are, or perceive to be, less safe at school, there should actually be an increase in support (Bailey et al., 2020; De Pedro et al., 2018; Greteman, 2012; Hulko & Hovanes, 2018; Kosciw et al., 2020; Marple, 2005; O'Connell et al., 2010).

## Sense of Personal Safety At School

As we found with the First Climate Survey, many students report feeling unsafe in schools for a variety of reasons, including those specifically related to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, and being targeted for

harassment on these grounds. Other research supports these findings. GLSEN's most recent survey found that 59% of LGBTQ students reported feeling unsafe because of their sexual orientation, 43% felt unsafe because of their gender expression, and relatively high numbers of LGBTQ students felt unsafe because of their size/weight (40%), their gender (37%), a disability (30%), or because of their academic performance (23%) (Kosciw et al., 2020). Stonewall UK's survey found that one in five (19%) LGBT students reported feeling unsafe in school, with one in three (33%) trans students reporting feeling unsafe (Bradlow et al., 2017).

An important objective of our study was to gauge students' feelings of safety at school, specifically with reference to their sexual and gender identity as well as other aspects of their identities. Participants were asked if they ever felt unsafe at school due to: sexual orientation; perceived sexual orientation; gender identity; perceived gender identity; gender expression; racialized identity; religious or perceived religious identity; or family status (i.e., having one or more 2SLGBTQ parents). As illustrated in FIGURE 26, there were substantial differences between 2SLGBTQ and CH students; however, there has been little improvement between the First and Second Climate Surveys, and in the case of gender identity, perceived gender identity, and expression of gender, the situation is significantly worse.

**FIGURE 26: FEELINGS OF NOT BEING SAFE**
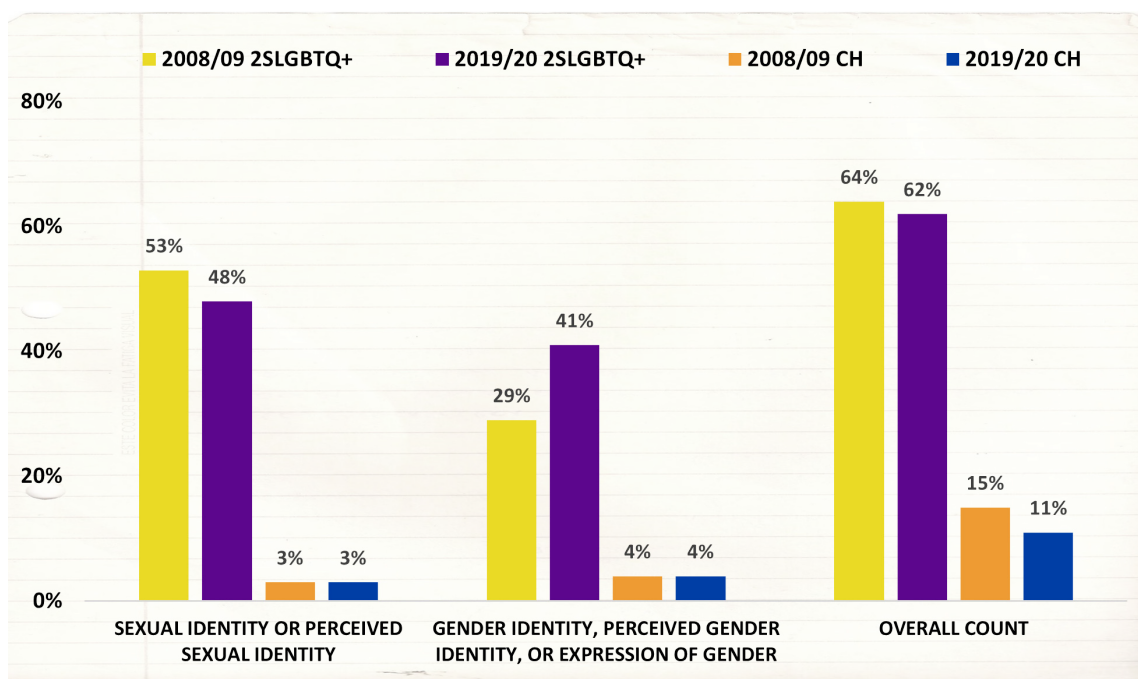


In both the First and Second Climate Surveys, the largest gap was with reference to sexual identity or perceived sexual identity where 48% of 2SLGBTQ

students reported feeling unsafe at school, compared to only 3% of CH participants.

> *I live in [northern community]... it isn't safe for a native queer teenage girl in any school in my town.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *I had to take PE online because the homophobia was scaring me.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *I used to live in the middle east, so a lot of my perceptions of lgbt acceptance are very different to my friends who grew up in Canada. I usually feel less safe than them, and that's not necessarily because that's what's actually happening and instead about the environment i grew up in.* (2SLGBTQ)

When all identity-related grounds for feeling unsafe are considered, including racialized identity and religious identity, 62% of 2SLGBTQ respondents feel unsafe at school, compared to 11% of CH students. When we compared data between 2SLGBTQ survey participants, results revealed even higher percentages of feeling unsafe in schools for trans students, especially (as might be expected) in regard to gender identity or gender expression, where three-quarters (76%) reported feeling unsafe at school, compared to 28% of cisgender GBQ boys and 23% of cisgender LGBQ girls. However, a higher percentage of trans youth (57%) also indicated feeling unsafe at school due to their sexual identity or their perceived sexual identity, compared to 46% of cisgender GBQ boys and 44% of cisgender LGBQ girls. Taking all grounds into consideration regarding feelings of safety, including gender, sexual, and racialized identities, we found more than four out of five (83%) trans participants and over half (53%, respectively) of cisgender GBQ boys and cisgender LGBQ girls indicated feeling unsafe in some way at school.

Gay boys were more likely than bisexual boys to feel unsafe because of their sexual identity or perceived sexual identity (51% compared to 44% for bisexual boys). Similarly, more lesbian than bisexual girls felt unsafe on those grounds (56% versus 42% for bisexual girls). These findings parallel results from the First Climate Survey and, as we wrote there, are interesting in a few ways.

First, popular understandings of bullying in school culture might lead one to expect that CH boys would be the most likely to commit homophobic harassment and that their targets would be gay boys, whom they would have opportunity to bully in unsupervised gender-segregated spaces such as change rooms and washrooms. Second, it is sometimes said that lesbians have it easier than gay boys, that society in general tolerates lesbians more than gay boys, and that being a lesbian or a bisexual girl is even trendy. These findings would refute both of these assumptions, as sexual minority girls were more likely to

feel unsafe than sexual minority boys, not less. Further, girls' likelihood of feeling safe did not increase much more than cisgender GBQ boys from having a bisexual identity rather than a lesbian or gay identity.

As illustrated in FIGURE 27, there is a strong association between experiences of verbal harassment and not feeling safe at school for both 2SLGBTQ and CH students. In particular, CH participants who reported experiencing at least one incident of verbal harassment at their school were more likely (33%) to indicate feeling unsafe at school than CH students who did not report experiencing verbal harassment (3%). In fact, CH participants who experienced verbal harassment at their school recorded slightly higher feelings of not being safe than 2SLGBTQ students who were not verbally harassed at their school (33% versus 31%). Though not comparable to the much higher rate of feeling unsafe reported by 2SLGBTQ students who had been verbally harassed (78%), these results speak to the importance of ensuring that school environments take incidents of verbal harassment seriously as they directly impact students' personal sense of safety, regardless of gender or sexual identity.

**FIGURE 27: FEELINGS OF NOT BEING SAFE AND EXPERIENCES OF VERBAL HARASSMENT**
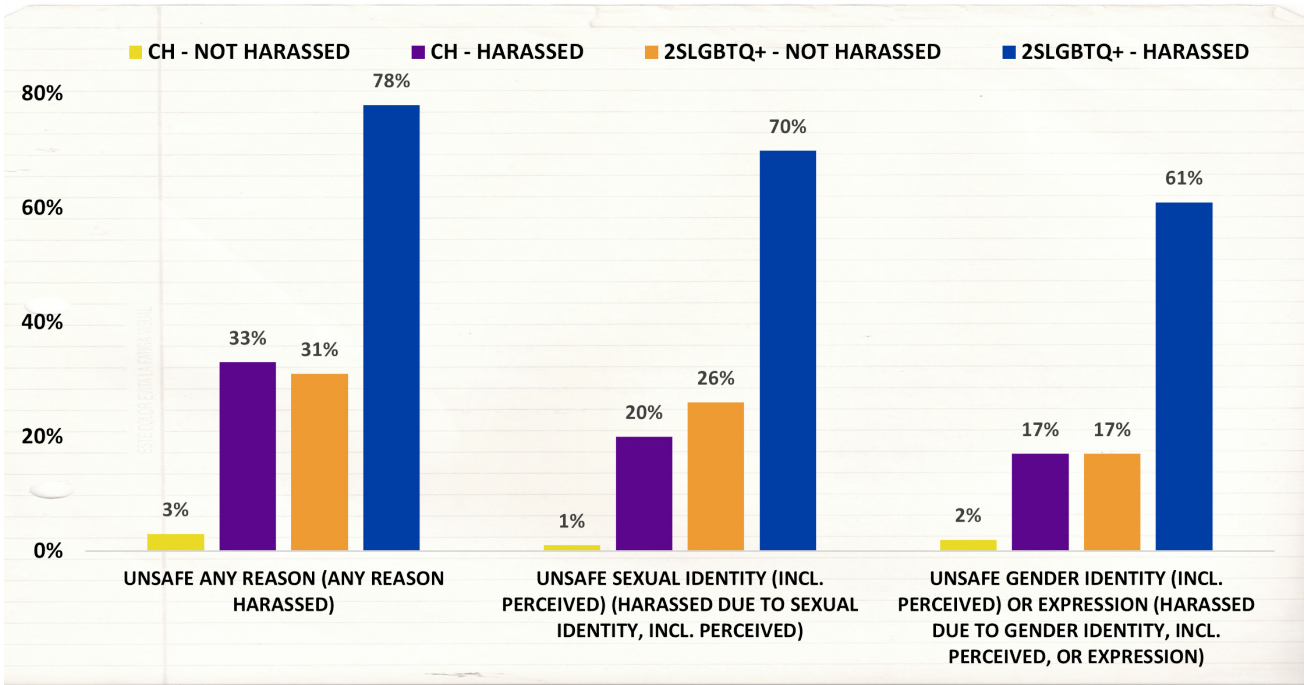


The impact of verbal harassment on feeling safe is even larger for both CH and 2SLGBTQ respondents when considering incidents based on sexual identity or perceived sexual identity. 2SLGBTQ students who reported experiences of verbal harassment at their school on these grounds were nearly three times more likely to feel unsafe at school (70%) than 2SLGBTQ participants who did not report at least one incident of verbal harassment (26%). One out of five

(20%) CH students who indicated being verbally harassed due to their sexual identity or perceived sexual identity reported feeling unsafe at school based on their identity or perceived identity, compared to only 1% of CH students who were not harassed.

Although not as pronounced as for sexual identity, experiencing verbal harassment on gender-related grounds seems to remove the protective factor of CH identity for many CH students: 17% of CH participants who experienced verbal harassment on the grounds of gender identity, perceived gender identity, or expressions of gender reported feeling unsafe at their school, which is the same number of 2SLGBTQ respondents who did not experience verbal harassment on these grounds.

While overall, 61% of 2SLGBTQ participants who experienced verbal harassment on gender-related grounds indicated feeling unsafe for these reasons, this disparity was substantially higher among trans students (87%) than it was for cisgender GBQ boys (50%) and cisgender LGBQ girls (40%).

Further, as shown in FIGURE 28, perceptions of personal sense of safety also vary by racialized identity, especially among Black students, Indigenous students, and students who identify as having a mixed racialized identity. These findings further confirm the need to recognize and appreciate the multifaceted impact that racism has on BIPOC students, especially in regard to experiences of verbal harassment and personal sense of safety.

**FIGURE 28: RACIALIZED 2SLGBTQ STUDENTS' PERSONAL SENSE OF SAFETY AND EXPERIENCES OF VERBAL HARASSMENT**
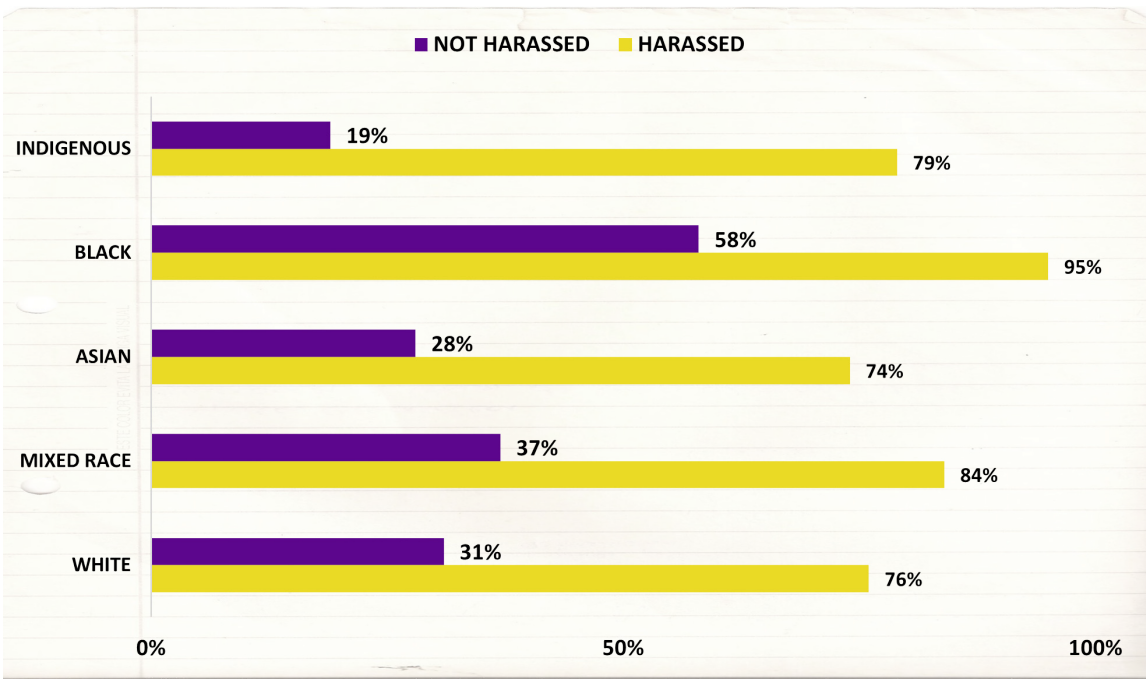
Parallel results were found with respect to physical harassment, although as to be expected, higher proportions of both cisgender and 2SLGBTQ students who were physically victimized felt unsafe at their school. This pattern was observed for any experience of physical harassment, physical victimization based on sexual identity or perceived sexual identity, and physical harassment due to gender identity, perceived gender identity, or expressions of gender. See FIGURE 29.

**FIGURE 29: FEELINGS OF NOT BEING SAFE AND EXPERIENCES OF PHYSICAL HARASSMENT**
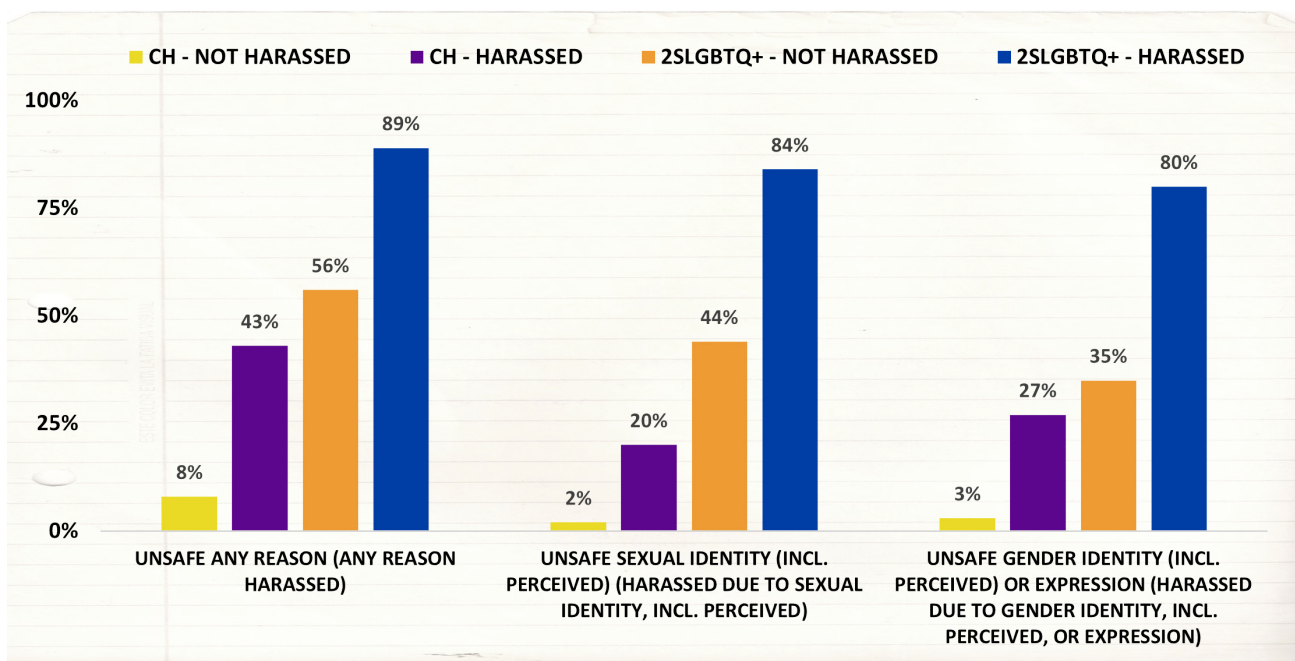


To put these results into context, in a school with 1,000 students, of which, say, 100 identify as 2SLGBTQ, 280 students will experience verbal harassment at school in the academic year, much of it on the grounds of gender and sexuality, and of those 105 will not feel safe there because of it. By the same calculations, 107 students will have experienced physical victimization at school in the past year, and 54 of them will not feel safe at school. **In a class of 30 students, teachers should expect two of their students not to feel safe at school because they have been physically victimized there.**

A comparison of students with one or more 2SLGBTQ parents to students without any 2SLGBTQ parents show significant differences in sense of personal safety. When all reasons for feeling unsafe are considered, 60% of students with one or more 2SLGBTQ parents reported feeling unsafe at school, compared to 32% of participants without any 2SLGBTQ parents. Students with 2SLGBTQ parents, compared to those with CH parents, were much more likely to feel unsafe on the grounds of sexual identity or perceived sexual identity (47% versus

21%) as well as their gender identity, perceived gender identity or expressions of gender (42% versus 19%). These results suggest that youth with 2SLGBTQ parents are more likely to feel unsafe at school, perhaps because other students may perceive them as targets for anti-2SLGBTQ comments or might wrongly assume that anyone with 2SLGBTQ parents is 2SLGBTQ themselves.

## Skipping School

*I feel like school in general is safer for stealth trans kids and people who can more hide their queerness. But for those of us who are very apparently LGBTQ it can get scary sometimes. I used to skip classes because I had homophobic and transphobic teachers who made me feel unsafe and unwelcome in the classroom.*
(2SLGBTQ)

*I feel unsafe all the time, I just choose to very rarely skip because I risk my safety for my grades.*
(2SLGBTQ)

*There were times i wished to skip school because of harassment but was not allowed to by my parents.* (2SLGBTQ)

Two questions asked respondents whether or not they ever skipped school because they felt unsafe either at school or on their way to school. Results show that 37% of 2SLGBTQ students, compared to 18% of CH participants, reported skipping because they felt unsafe at school or on the way to school. Trans students were even more likely to skip school because they felt unsafe (48%, compared to 32% of cisgender LGBQ participants), and they were more likely to have skipped multiple days in the past year because they felt unsafe at school (28% of trans students compared to 14% of cisgender LGBQ respondents).

Next to trans students, cisgender LGBQ girls were the mostly likely to have skipped school because they felt unsafe (33%), followed by CH girls (22%), cisgender GBQ boys (20%), and CH boys (15%). Students with one or more 2SLGBTQ parents were the most likely to report having skipped school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to school (52% versus 25%).

Among 2SLGBTQ participants, over half (54%) of Indigenous students reported not attending in the past year because they felt unsafe, compared to 39% of gender and sexual minority Black students, 37% of White respondents, 32% of mixed racial identities, and 20% of Asian students.

Compared to the First Climate Survey, students in the Second Climate Survey were more likely to have skipped school because they felt unsafe, which was consistent for CH participants (11% for First versus 18% for Second), trans respondents (44% versus 48%), cisgender LGBQ students (29% versus 32%), and those with one or more 2SLGBTQ parents (40% versus 52%). It seems that in the decade plus since the First Climate Survey (2008/2009), being on the outside of

the cisgender heteronormative mainstream where gender and sexuality norms are strictly regulated makes it even harder to feel safe at school and this holds true for both 2SLGBTQ students and for students with 2SLGBTQ parents.

These results are also important not only because of what they reveal about the degree of fear being experienced by students, and in particular about 2SLGBTQ students and those with parents who identify as 2SLGBTQ, but also because of the potential impact that missing classes can have on the academic performance of these students. The academic impact, among other negative outcomes, related to skipping school due to feeling unsafe will be discussed in later sections of this report.

## School Attachment

*I'm very glad I'm graduating because high school was a toxic place for me where I didn't feel comfortable in my own skin. Hopefully the future will be different and a place where all the students can feel comfortable.* (2SLGBTQ)

Research has highlighted the importance of school attachment – the feeling that one belongs in the school community – is a crucial issue, and is correlated with mental health, suicidality, social connection, and academic performance (Birkett et al., 2014; Hatchel et al., 2019; Peter, Taylor, & Campbell, 2016; Peter & Taylor, 2014; St. John et al., 2014; White et al., 2018).

As was done in the First Climate Survey, participants were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with a list of statements related to school attachment, some of them positive, such as "I feel like a real part of my school," and some of them negative, such as "I don't feel like I belong in my school." While 2SLGBTQ students were more likely than CH participants to either strongly or somewhat agree with the negative statements, the gap is the most pronounced between cisgender LGBQ and trans respondents. For instance, nearly three-quarters (74%) of trans students strongly agreed (30%) or somewhat agreed (another 44%) that "It is hard for me to feel accepted at my school," compared to 37% of CH participants (10% strongly and 27% somewhat) and 57% of cisgender LGBQ respondents (17% strongly and 40% somewhat). See FIGURE 30.

**FIGURE 30: SCHOOL ATTACHMENT: NEGATIVE COMPONENTS**
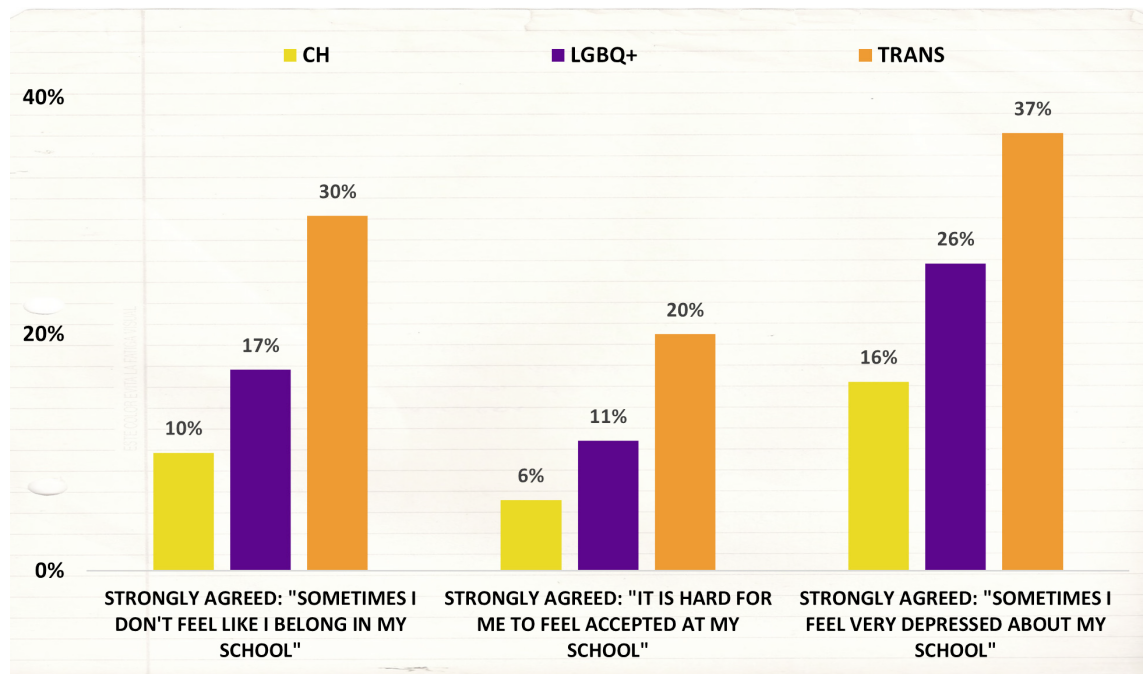


A similar pattern was observed in regard to the positive components of school attachment. For example, CH participants were almost twice as likely as cisgender LGBQ participants (31% versus 16%) to strongly agree to the statement "I can be myself at school," and more than twice as likely as trans students (13%). The gap was less pronounced between CH participants and cisgender LGBQ students than it was between CH and trans respondents for the following two statements: "I feel like a real part of my school" (24%, 20%, 11%, respectively) and "I am treated with as much respect as other students" (32%, 26%, 16%, respectively). See FIGURE 31.

There were also some disparities among cisgender identified students. For example, nearly two-thirds (63%) of cisgender LGBQ girls, compared to CH girls (44%) agreed that "Sometimes I feel very depressed about my school." They were also less likely to agree to the statement "I feel like a real part of my school" (61% versus 73%). Over half (52%) of cisgender GBQ boys agreed that "Sometimes I feel very depressed about my school," compared to a third (34%) of CH boys. They were also less likely to agree to the statement "I can be myself at school" (57% versus 76%).

**FIGURE 31: SCHOOL ATTACHMENT: POSITIVE COMPONENTS**



Bar chart with legend: CH (yellow), LGBQ+ (purple), TRANS (orange). Y-axis from 0% to 40%.

STRONGLY AGREED: "I FEEL LIKE A REAL PART OF MY SCHOOL": CH 24%, LGBQ+ 20%, TRANS 11%

STRONGLY AGREED: "I AM TREATED WITH AS MUCH RESPECT AS OTHER STUDENTS": CH 32%, LGBQ+ 26%, TRANS 16%

STRONGLY AGREED: "I CAN BE MYSELF AT SCHOOL": CH 31%, LGBQ+ 16%, TRANS 13%
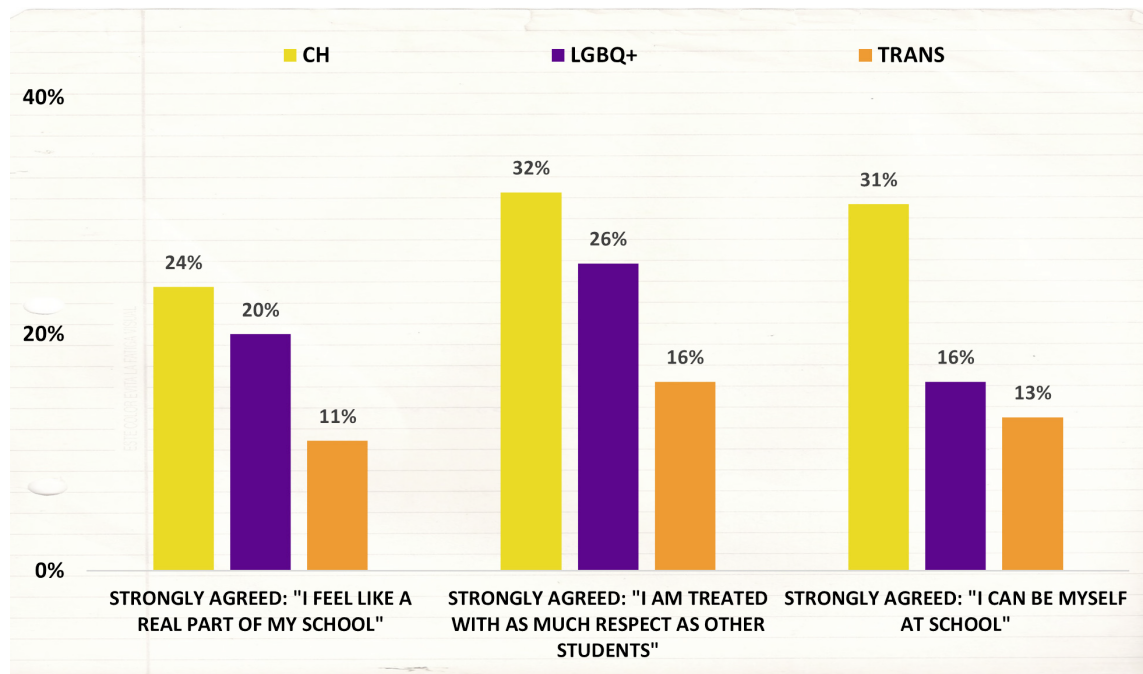
Even though many students with one or more 2SLGBTQ parents are not 2SLGBTQ themselves, their responses followed a similar pattern of school attachment to the responses by 2SLGBTQ youth. For instance, over three-quarters (77%) of students with at least one 2SLGBTQ parents agreed that "Sometimes I don't feel like I belong in my school," compared to 54% of participants without 2SLGBTQ parents. They were also less likely to agree to the statement "I feel like a real part of my school" (43% versus 68%). These findings suggest that students may find it just as socially alienating to have to either hide their parents' 2SLGBTQ identities or to navigate school environments that are hostile to family members' identities as they would their own 2SLGBTQ identity.

Two thirds (65%) of Black students who identify as 2SLGBTQ agreed to the statement "I wish I were in a different school," which was substantially higher than 2SLGBTQ White (31%), Indigenous (30%), and Asian students (21%). The same pattern, though less extreme, was observed among CH Black students (38%, versus 26% for White, 30% for Indigenous, and 27% for Asian participants). Compared to 2SLGBTQ White students (78%), Black participants who also identify as 2SLGBTQ (65%) were less likely to agree to the statement "There is at least one adult I can talk to in my school." These results suggest that the intersections of racialized, gender, and sexual identity need to be considered when developing strategies to enhance school attachment, especially among Black students.

Among 2SLGBTQ students, there were also important differences concerning their sense of belonging across grade levels. For instance, less than half (45%) of 2SLGBTQ participants in grade 8 agreed with the statement "I can be myself at school," a much lower percentage than in grades 11 (61%) and 12 (60%). 2SLGBTQ students in grades 8 and 9 (71% in both grades) were also somewhat less likely to agree that "There is at least one adult I can talk to at my school," compared to students in grades 10 (78%), 11 (83%), and 12 (79%). See FIGURE 32.

These findings suggest a lower school attachment in grades 8 and 9 for 2SLGBTQ students, which may be attributable to these grades corresponding to the ages when many 2SLGBTQ students are just beginning to understand their own sexual and gender identities within the context of puberty. Feelings that 2SLGBTQ students cannot be themselves or have an adult they can talk to at school may exacerbate the situation and contribute to feeling that they do not belong at their schools. Further, we might consider earlier findings that lower grade levels reported higher levels of verbal harassment, which may also contribute to why 2SLGBTQ students do not feel they belong at school.

**FIGURE 32: 2SLGBTQ SCHOOL BELONGING BY GRADE LEVEL**
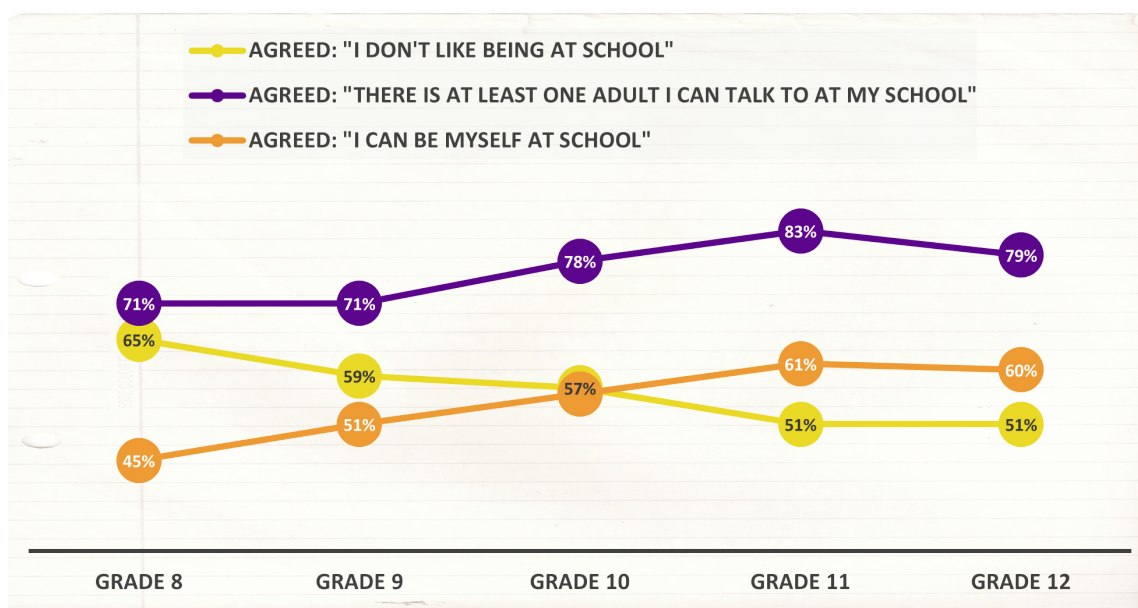


While there was no difference between CH students from small cities/towns, rural, or remote areas (36%) and those from cities or suburban areas (37%) in rates of agreeing that "I don't feel like I belong in my school," 2SLGBTQ participants from smaller communities were somewhat more likely to agree (67%) than those from more urban areas (58%). Only half (52%) of 2SLGBTQ students from smaller communities agreed to the statement "I feel like a real part of my school," which is lower than 2SLGBTQ respondents from urban communities (61%), CH students from small cities/towns, rural, or remotes areas

(73%), and CH participants from cities or suburban areas (78%). The lower number of 2SLGBTQ students who feel they belong at school in smaller communities or rural/remote areas may reflect less inclusive school environments and general feelings of belonging in rural spaces. For instance, researchers point out that 2SLGBTQ identities are often depicted in media and within communities as being urban experiences (Greteman, 2012; Marple, 2005). The Every Teacher Project found that educators working in small communities and rural schools were less likely to consider their school safe for LGBTQ students, were more likely to be aware of harassment and homonegative/homophobic comments made by students and by other educators, and were less likely to be aware of LGBTQ students (Taylor et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2016). These findings highlight and reaffirm the responsibility of educators to make a concerted effort to increase supports for 2SLGBTQ students, especially in rural schools.

Finally, 2SLGBTQ students who attend a Catholic school (70%) were more likely to agree to the statement "Sometimes I don't feel like I belong in my school," which is higher than 2SLGBTQ participants who do not go to a Catholic school (61%) and far higher than CH respondents who attend a Catholic school (44%). This finding may suggest that 2SLGBTQ students in Catholic schools do not feel that 2SLGBTQ identities are supported. For instance, Tonya Callaghan points out that Catholic schools too often absolve themselves of responsibility regarding 2SLGBTQ students by saying it is not an issue in their schools or by employing religious freedom arguments to resist anti-homophobia efforts in schools (Callaghan, 2014, 2016, 2017). However, Catholic schools, particularly when publicly funded, are increasingly called on to implement supports for 2SLGBTQ students in order to comply with the law and human rights responsibilities—and this call to ensure safe and equitable schools for 2SLGBTQ need not contravene with religious doctrine.

## Isolation

Another important aspect of school attachment and belonging for 2SLGBTQ students relates to socialization and the need to interact with others who share sexual and gender identities and experiences. Being able to see one's identity positively reflected in the world around oneself is an important principle of inclusive education, one which contributes to the wellbeing of 2SLGBTQ students. The absence of it, and feelings of social isolation, can have detrimental effects. Research describes the importance of social supports as being a protective factor for 2SLGBTQ students in terms of supporting identity development, moderating the impacts of harassment in school, supporting mental health and self-esteem, and reducing suicidality (Hatchel et al., 2019;

Peter & Taylor, 2014, 2017; Reisner et al., 2020; Saewyc et al., 2014; Spencer & Patrick, 2009; St. John et al., 2014; Taylor & Peter, 2011b; Veale et al., 2017).

A third (32%) of 2SLGBTQ students reported that they knew a teacher or staff person at their school who identified as 2SLGBTQ, which not surprisingly is higher than among CH participants (12%). The vast majority of both 2SLGBTQ (86%) and CH students (59%) knew at least one other student at their school who identified as 2SLGBTQ. Finally, almost all (99%) 2SLGBTQ students knew of at least one other person in their life who also identifies as 2SLGBTQ as well as 84% of CH participants. These findings are encouraging for several reasons, but most notably because they suggest that almost all 2SLGBTQ students know someone who identifies as 2SLGBTQ and most know another student who does so, which has the potential to ensure that 2SLGBTQ students do not feel like the "only one" and may mediate feelings of isolation.

*Most teachers at my school are often wearing some form of ally shirt, whether it be a "love is love" shirt or a pride shirt or an equality shirt. It's helped so much in my feeling of safety in my school.* (2SLGBTQ)

2LGBTQ students who personally knew a 2SLGBTQ teacher or staff person at their school were markedly more likely to agree to the statement "I feel like a real part of my school" (68%) than participants who did not know any 2SLGBTQ adults at their school (52%). Interestingly, though, having another 2SLGBTQ peer had no impact on feeling connected to their school as the same number of 2SLGTQ participants agreed that they feel like a real part of their school (57%). However, 2SLGBTQ respondents who knew of at least one other 2SLGBTQ student at their school were less likely to agree that "It is hard for me to feel accepted at my school" (42%) than participants who did not know another 2SLGBTQ student (52%). In addition, 2SLGBTQ students who personally knew of a teacher or staff person in their school who also identified as 2SLGBTQ were more likely to agree that "There is at least one adult I can talk to in my school" (87%), compared to 72% of participants who did not personally know of any 2SLGBTQ adults in their school. They were also more likely to agree to the statement "I can be myself at school" (68% versus 50% who did not know of any 2SLGBTQ teachers or staff at their school).

As a principle of inclusion, it is important for 2SLGBTQ students to see themselves reflected in the world and in their education, and these findings suggest that when 2SLGBTQ students know of 2SLGBTQ teachers or staff at their school, they report feeling more school belonging and less isolation. Research suggests that these positive effects are not incidental, but protect students from hostile and unwelcoming aspects of school environments as well as contributing

to 2SLGBTQ students' wellbeing (Gastic & Johnson, 2009; Peter, Taylor, Ristock, et al., 2015; Peter, Taylor, et al., 2017; Rhodes & David L. DuBois, 2008; Torres et al., 2012; Valenti & Campbell, 2009).

> *There's a lot more lgbt kids in school than [teachers] think, only a fraction of them are "out"* (2SLGBTQ)

> *Being closeted is so so difficult when you are surrounded by homophobes.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *I feel like I can't come out, because my friends would immediately assume I liked them.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *I've been outed many times without permission and I don't feel like my sexuality is my own anymore.* (2SLGBTQ)

Having to hide one's identity is another aspect of isolation, and an especially important one given the amount of time young people spend in a school environment. While the vast majority of trans participants (95%) as well as cisgender LGBQ girls (92%) were out to someone at their school, over one in ten (13%) of cisgender GBQ boys indicated that no one at their school knew about their gender or sexual identity. Trans youth (72%) were the most likely to be "out" to their whole school community, which probably speaks to their increased visibility that comes with violating strictly bound gender norms. Even though cisgender GBQ boys were more likely to report that no one at their school knows about their identity, there was no difference between cisgender GBQ boys and cisgender LGBQ girls in terms of being "out" to their whole school community (43% and 44%, respectively). While this may not reflect an "objective" difference between cisgender GBQ boys and cisgender LGBQ girls, it may suggest that there is a subjective difference, wherein cisgender GBQ boys feel less able to come out or experience greater internal conflict or isolation in relation to it. This may be reflective of the different experiences of cisgender GBQ boys and cisgender LGBQ girls regarding experiences of harassment or gender policing.

> *I mainly feel safe because I have people that are willing to help and protect me, not everyone at my school has access to that, especially not when they're facing against their own family members.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *I'm pretty solidly closeted so that acts like a barrier to any harm that may come by me. I'm not extremely concerned about direct violence, but transphobia and homophobia are definitely present in the school atmosphere and very concerning to me...* (2SLGBTQ)

> *It's fine I guess. I am very privileged, I am not super "out" (and I guess I make a point not to be).* (2SLGBTQ)

While the 2SLGBTQ students who were "out" to some or to their whole school community were similarly likely to agree that "It is hard for me to feel accepted at my school" (44% and 42% respectively), the majority of 2SLGBTQ participants who reported that no one knew of their gender or sexual identity (56%) agreed to the statement. Such a finding speaks to the isolating impact that not being "out" has on 2SLGBTQ students' sense of feeling accepted at school.

There was also tremendous variability in likelihood of being out across grade levels. Participants in grade 8 were the most likely to report being "out" to no one at their school (18%), and the least likely to be "out" to most of their whole school community (38%), whereas only 6% of respondents in grade 12 were "out" to no one at their school, and 63% were "out" to most or all of their school community. 2SLGBTQ participants in grade 8 who were "out" to no one were also less likely to agree that there is at least one adult they can talk to at their school (50%), compared to 69% who were "out" to some, and 75% who were "out" to most or all of their school community. Similar results were observed for 2SLGBTQ respondents in grade 9 (62%, 62%, and 81%, respectively).

2SLGBTQ students in earlier grades may be in the process of questioning and seeking to understand their identity, and the negative attitudes and behaviours of their peers would likely contribute to 2SLGBTQ students' sense that school is an inhospitable place for them to be out. Our findings suggest that there may be, unfortunately, good reasons for 2SLGBTQ students in earlier grades to conceal their gender and/or sexual identities. For instance, 2SLGBTQ students in grade 8 who were "out" to most or all of their school community were:

- More likely to feel unsafe at school due to their gender and/or sexual identities (87%) than those who were "out" to some (62%) or "out" to no one (59%).

- More likely to report being verbally harassed in the past year (82%), compared to 77% who were "out" to some and 71% who were "out" to no one.

- More likely to indicate being excluded by their peers (68%) than those who were "out" to some (42%) or "out" to no one (31%).

- More likely to have had mean rumours or lies spread about them by their peers (63%), compared to 50% of 2SLGBTQ participants who were "out" to some and 25% who were "out" to no one.

As one of the main locations that 2SLGBTQ students identified as being unsafe, washrooms are a location of significant anxiety for 2SLGBTQ students—particularly as they are not easily avoidable when spending most of the

day at school. The availability of single-user or all-persons' (gender neutral) washrooms for students has the potential to alleviate these concerns, especially for trans students. In contrast, the lack of safe washrooms has the potential to create significant discomfort and potentially reinforce isolation in schools for 2SLGBTQ students. Overall, a third (34%) of our participants affirmed that their school has a single-user/all-persons' washroom available for students, while another 10% indicated that there was such a washroom designated for staff, but students could use it with permission, and 16% reported either that it was only for staff use or some other caveat. In total, 22% indicated that their school did not have a single-user or all-persons' washroom available to students, and another 17% did not know. Not surprisingly, trans students (5%) as well as cisgender LGBQ participants (8%) were less likely not to know if their school had such a facility than CH respondents (23%).

> *I was not allowed to use the male bathroom even though I had been transitioning for 2 years before coming to the school. I passed relatively well and was using he/him pronouns, yet I was told not to use male bathrooms. (At this point in time there was no gender neutral bathroom, I had to use staff bathrooms and ended up not going to the bathroom the whole day. As a result of this I gained numerous, temporary, health issues).* (2SLGBTQ)

> *There aren't any gender neutral bathrooms or change rooms at school so I'm forced to use the gendered washroom for what I was assigned at birth, which I don't feel safe doing at all.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *having a neutral (non-gender) bathroom should be compulsory at every school.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *I was often allowed into the locked neutral washroom bc I was friends with the librarians who had the keys, but most weren't allowed. Even then, I never disclosed my gender identity, using the fact that I have intense social anxiety and preferred to be in a bathroom without other stalls.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *Lack of accessible bathrooms mean that any gender neutral bathrooms are in large open areas that are easily visible. It is obvious that I am using a gender neutral bathroom, which provides a chance for people to take issue with that.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *I am a lesbian and I dress fairly androgynous/masculine but almost every time I use the washrooms someone tells me to get out or tells me I'm using the wrong bathroom. I get it I kinda look like a guy but I find it really upsetting when people are constantly doing this. It happens from the student and the staff. I tried using the gender neutral washroom and the principal told me I couldn't use it. Because I identified as a girl and wasn't gender neutral... I went back to using the regular washroom because I was afraid that the principal would get me in trouble even tho I did nothing wrong.* (2SLGBTQ)

Our findings support the importance of having such a facility. As illustrated in FIGURE 33, 2SLGBTQ students who attend school without a designated single-user or all persons' washroom were far less likely to agree that "I can be myself at school" (41%) than 2SLGBTQ participants who indicated that there was such a facility (67%). Partial use of a gender-neutral washroom (e.g., student use of a staff washroom with permission) improved 2SLGBTQ students' sense of school belonging, but only marginally, and not as much as providing students with their own designated gender-neutral washroom. Providing safe washroom spaces for 2SLGBTQ students' contributes to their sense of belonging at school by ensuring that they have their needs met in a way that is safe, respects their identity, and addresses their needs in a way that prevents further stigmatization or exposure to unsafe situations.

**FIGURE 33: 2SLGBTQ STUDENT ACCESS TO GENDER NEUTRAL WASHROOM**
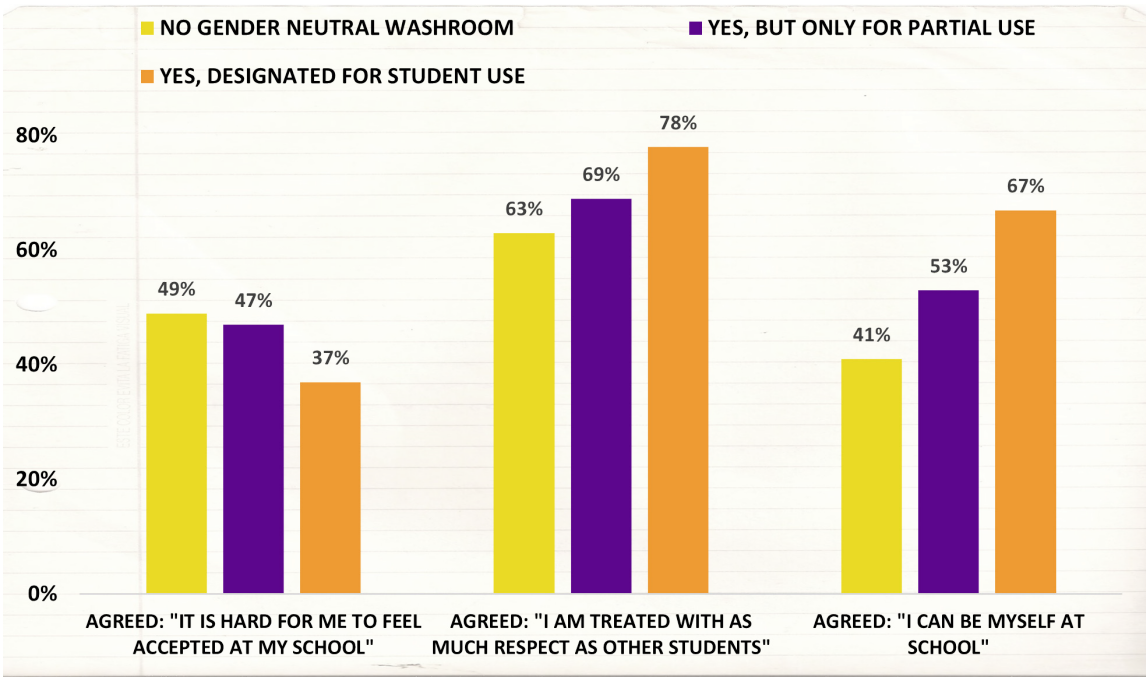


Another aspect of social isolation is to not be allowed to be oneself at school. For trans students the suppression of their gender identities can take multiple forms in a school environment. These include being prevented from wearing particular gendered clothes, being discouraged or prevented from participating in school sports, being denied using a chosen name or one's pronoun, and forced to use a bathroom or locker room of a particular gender they do not identify with or where they do not feel safe. As illustrated in FIGURE 34, two in five (42%) of trans students reported being required to use a washroom or locker room of a particular gender that they did not identify with, and 40% knew of another student with the same experience (note: participants could select both answers). A quarter (26%) were prevented from using a chosen name or

pronoun, 18% were prevented from wearing particular gendered clothes, and 12% were discouraged from participating in school sports.

*One time a classmate purposely misgendered a trans student and instead of correcting them my teacher also misgendered the trans student even though the rest of the class said no, his pronouns are he/him and i wanted to cry. I felt really anxious.* (2SLGBTQ)

*My school is very good with using proper pronouns and allowing lgbtq art, stories, literature etc. Despite living in a rural community. Trans kids can easily change their name in the school system.* (2SLGBTQ)

*A girl I know who is trans doesn't have all teachers call her by her preferred pronouns and they constantly deadname her. Don't know if it's on purpose or not, but it sucks to see.* (2SLGBTQ)

*My school staff are very supportive of students' pronouns and gender expressions, but other students often make fun of NB and trans students and ridicule their pronouns.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Most teachers don't include my preferred name and pronouns on their sub plans so i have to talk to the sub before attendance (hard to do, i can't talk to new people very well) or i have to deal with being misgendered and deadnamed.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Most teachers refer to Trans kids by their chosen name/pronouns, same with any announcements, but all official school mentionings of that person (tv board, principals list, attendance list, award certificates) all say their birth name without even a mention of their chosen name unless it's been legally changed.* (2SLGBTQ)

## FIGURE 34: PREVENTION AND/OR SUPPRESSION OF GENDER IDENTITY AMONG TRANS STUDENTS



PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED    KNOW OF ANOTHER STUDENT EXPERIENCING

| | PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED | KNOW OF ANOTHER STUDENT EXPERIENCING |
|---|---|---|
| USING A WASHROOM OR LOCKER ROOM DO NOT IDENTIFY WITH | 42% | 40% |
| USING A CHOSEN NAME OR PRONOUN | 26% | 32% |
| PARTICIPATING IN SCHOOL SPORTS | 12% | 12% |
| WEARING PARTICULAR CLOTHES | 18% | 30% |
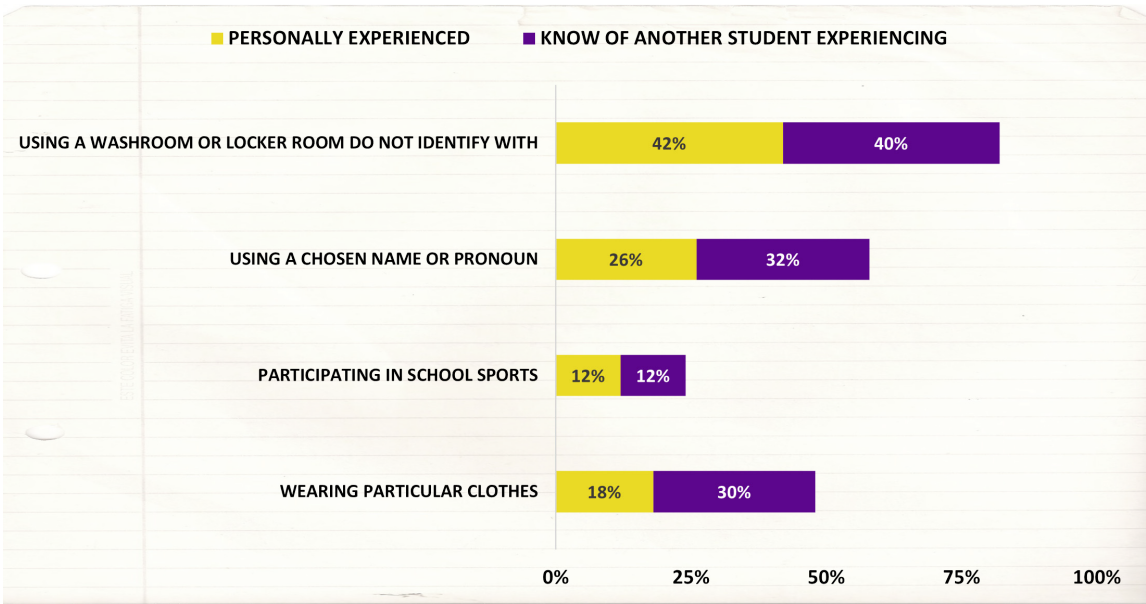
Being prevented, discouraged, or denied the right to live according to one's gender identity has a profound impact on school attachment. For instance, trans students who were required to use a washroom or locker room of a particular gender they did not identify with were less likely to agree that "I am treated with as much respect as other students" (52% versus 69% of trans students who were not denied this basic decency) as well as agree that "I can be myself at school" (38% versus 57%). They were also more likely to agree that "It is hard for me to feel accepted at my school" (72% versus 48%) and "I don't like being at school" (75% versus 57%). Similarly, trans participants who were prevented from using a chosen name or pronoun were more likely to agree to the following statements, compared to trans students who were not denied the use of a chosen name or pronoun:

- Agreed: "It is hard for me to feel accepted at my school" (77% versus 50%).
- Agreed: "I wish I were in a different school" (59% versus 29%).
- Agreed: "I don't like being at school" (80% versus 57%).

School belonging requires acceptance and respectful treatment of trans students' identities. These findings clearly indicate that trans students who have had negative experiences in schools and with staff—feeling less respected than other students, being denied the use of their affirmed name and pronouns, or being compelled to use washrooms and change rooms in their daily routines that contradict their sense of self—result in lower school attachment and feelings of not belonging at school.

> *I was in the school newspaper club, and when I wrote an article about lgbt community, they kicked me out of the club and never published the article.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *Some trans students have been forced to participate in physical education classes while grouped with their assigned birth sex. This makes them very uncomfortable.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *This was not the fault of the school, but a non binary friend of mine is on the cheerleading team and there are no options for pants as the team is entirely girls, and the people who ordered the uniforms were other students.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *I've been kicked out of places in my school for holding hands with my partner.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *My best friend came out as trans during high school and while administration was willing to change his preferred name and email address, his legal name was still used on lists etc (e.g. bus lists) that were circulated throughout the school. There was no effort on the part of admin to discourage transphobic comments from students. There have been lots of out LGB students and things are usually okay but this was the first time in several years that a student was trans and it wasn't handled that well.*
> (2SLGBTQ)

There were also marked differences between trans, cisgender LGBQ, and CH students in terms of being prevented from:

- Discussing or writing about 2SLGBTQ topics in extracurricular activities.
  - ▶ Trans: 12% personally experienced and 11% know of another student experiencing.
  - ▶ Cisgender LGBQ: 6% personally experienced and 8% know of another student experiencing.
  - ▶ CH: 1% personally experienced and 4% know of another student experiencing.
- Discussing or writing about 2SLGBTQ topics in class assignments or projects.
  - ▶ Trans: 17% personally experienced and 13% know of another student experiencing.
  - ▶ Cisgender LGBQ: 7% personally experienced and 10% know of another student experiencing.
  - ▶ CH: 1% personally experienced and 4% know of another student experiencing.
- Wearing clothes that support 2SLGBTQ issues.
  - ▶ Trans: 12% personally experienced and 14% know of another student experiencing.
  - ▶ Cisgender LGBQ: 4% personally experienced and 8% know of another student experiencing.
  - ▶ CH: 1% personally experienced and 4% know of another student experiencing.

2SLGBTQ students who attend a Catholic school were nearly three times more likely to report that they have been prevented from discussing or writing about 2SLGBTQ topics in extracurricular activities (16%) than 2SLGBTQ participants who do not go to a Catholic school (6%). They were also more likely to have been prevented from writing or discussing 2SLGBTQ topics in class assignments

or projects (17% versus 10%) as well as prevented from wearing clothes that support 2SLGBTQ issues (14% versus 6%). These findings are particularly troubling as they deny students the ability to actively engage in their own learning by pursuing topics of interest to them. It is also important to note that these numbers only reflect students who tried and were prevented/told not to; they should not be interpreted as the number of students who were allowed or even tried. For example, if 14% of students were prevented from wearing clothing that support 2SLGBTQ issues, this does not imply that 86% were permitted, allowed, or even tried to wear clothing supporting 2SLGBTQ issues.

## Social Connectedness

Social connectedness is the converse of social isolation, a feeling of belonging to a community and sharing a bond with others in that community. School connectedness is a mediating factor that supports 2SLGBTQ students' wellbeing, whether through the provision of GSAs or through activities that make 2SLGBTQ identities visible by affirming the validity and acceptability of 2SLGBTQ persons and content in school (Day, Fish, et al., 2019; Lapointe, 2017; Reisner et al., 2020; Saewyc et al., 2014; Spencer & Patrick, 2009).

> *lgbt people at my school are very much on the outside of everything.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *Anything gay during drama productions was explicitly not allowed...*(2SLGBTQ)

> *My school is a big advocate for LGBTQ rights. We even have yearly assemblies that educate us on current issues and history.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *It's not that the school is against LGBTQ students, it's just like they don't mention they exist. I always felt alone, like I was the only LGBT student form my school. I learned about sexual orientation through internet, not school. The problem is not direct homophobia it's the fact that this community is erased or even ignored....* (2SLGBTQ)

A fundamental principle of inclusive education is that schools ensure that students from marginalized identity groups can see clear signs that their identity groups are welcome and respected at school. Such experiences as seeing themselves represented visibly in schools, in course curriculum, and in school-wide events and activities support social connectedness in 2SLGBTQ students by clearly communicating that they are a valuable part of a school's population. We therefore asked students about the presence of various forms of 2SLGBTQ visibility at their school and whether or not they have participated in school activities.

The most common forms of 2SLGBTQ visibility were as follows:

- Safe space/ally stickers (66% trans, 55% cisgender LGBQ, and 24% CH).
- Posters/pictures (51% trans, 50% cisgender LGBQ, and 40% CH).
- Books or videos (53% trans, 41% cisgender LGBQ, and 21% CH).
- Displays of students' work (26% trans, 21% cisgender LGBQ, and 14% CH).

Although less common, 13% of 2SLGBTQ students indicated that their school put on a musical/play/concert with a 2SLGBTQ theme, 19% commented that their school participated in a related human rights event, and 19% that their school took part in a related student-led conference or workshop. Over one in ten (11%) of 2SLGBTQ students reported that their school had no forms of 2SLGBTQ visibility. A third (36%) of CH participants and 7% of 2SLGBTQ students did not know if their school had any such visible displays.

2SLGBTQ students in grade 8 were more likely to indicate that there were no visible displays at their school (25%), which decreases sharply in grade 9 (9%) and remains so across all high school grades. This change likely reflects the situation that Grade 8 is commonly the last year in elementary/middle schools and Grade 9 is often the first year in high schools. 2SLGBTQ participants in grade 8 were also less likely to report that there were safe space/ally stickers in their school (32%), which increased to 58% among grade 9 students, and was the highest for students in grade 12 (67%). This may speak to the above-reported findings that 2SLGBTQ students in grade 8 generally reported feeling less safe in their schools. With fewer visible indications of support, 2SLGBTQ students are less likely to read their environment as being accepting of them, and this may also indicate that schools are not including 2SLGBTQ content or addressing sexuality or gender identity in schools—a practice that may leave 2SLGBTQ topics unaddressed and convey that it is taboo or unfit for conversation.

Students identifying as 2SLGBTQ who attend a Catholic school were more likely to report that there were no 2SLGBTQ visible displays at their school (23% versus 9% of students not attending a Catholic school) and were less likely to indicate that safe space/ally stickers were displayed (35% versus 61% of students who do not attend a Catholic school).

As would be expected, trans (70%) and cisgender LGBQ students (55%) were more likely to report participating in 2SLGBTQ-inclusive events at their school than CH respondents (20%). There was a significant relationship between participation in 2SLGBTQ-inclusive events and the following school attachment measures:

- Agreed: "There is at least one adult I can talk to in my school" (86% for 2SLGBTQ students who participated in inclusive events versus 69% for those who did not).

- Agreed: "I can be myself at school" (64% for those who participated in inclusive events versus 52% for those who did not).

- Agreed: "I feel like a real part of my school" (63% versus 54% of 2SLGBTQ students who did not participate in inclusive events at their school).

- Agreed: "I feel proud of belonging to my school" (61% versus 54%).

Participation in specific 2SLGBTQ activities is valuable in itself, and also for its link to engagement in general school-based activities such as band, theatre productions, and sports. Research has found that 2SLGBTQ youth are less likely to participate in sporting activities than their CH peers, especially in regard to school-based and/or team-based sports due to experiences with discrimination as well as inaction from coaches (Greenspan, Griffith, et al., 2019; Greenspan, Whitcomb, et al., 2019; Kulick et al., 2018). A national representative sample of American adolescents enrolled in Grades 7 through 12 found that heterosexual boys were the most likely to participate in sports (63%), followed by heterosexual girls (55%), sexual minority boys (54%), and sexual minority girls (46%) (Toomey & Russell, 2013). Our results parallel the American study for cisgender GBQ boys (63%), but found the same number of CH girls reported participating in sports. Only two in five (40%) cisgender GBQ boys and a similar number of cisgender LGBQ girls (38%) indicated that they participate in sports (either within their school or as part of a community league/club). Trans students were the least likely to participate in sports (27%); however, the extent to which the school community knew about their sexual or gender identity moderated these results as trans students who were "out" to most or all of their school were less likely to participate in sports (24% versus 42% who were "out" to no one at their school, and 32% who were "out" to some).

The situation of 2SLGBTQ students is brighter with respect to other school activities. While they were less likely to participate in sports, 2SLGBTQ students were markedly more likely to engage in after-school activities such as drama, debate, band, and other non-sports clubs. Specifically, nearly two-thirds (64%) of trans respondents participated in after-school activities, followed by 62% of cisgender LGBQ girls, 58% of cisgender GBQ boys, 53% of CH girls, and 40% of CH boys. Over half (53%) of trans students reported participating in a specific 2SLGBTQ club within their school as did a third (34%) of cisgender LGBQ respondents.

As illustrated in FIGURE 35, 2SLGBTQ students who participated in sports and/or extra-curricular activities were more likely to agree to the statement "I feel like a real part of my school" (66% for sports and 65% for non-sports extra-curricular activities) than those who did not participate in these activities (53% for sports and 45% for other extra-curricular activities). Similarly, 2SLGBTQ students who participated in non-sport extra-curricular activities were more likely than those who did not to agree that "I don't like being at school" (66% versus 49%, respectively) and "I feel proud of belonging to my school" (60% versus 47%). One explanation as to why results are less pronounced for sports is that the question did not differentiate between school and community-based sports, unlike the question regarding non-sport extracurricular activities.

**FIGURE 35: 2SLGBTQ PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS & EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES BY SCHOOL ATTACHMENT**
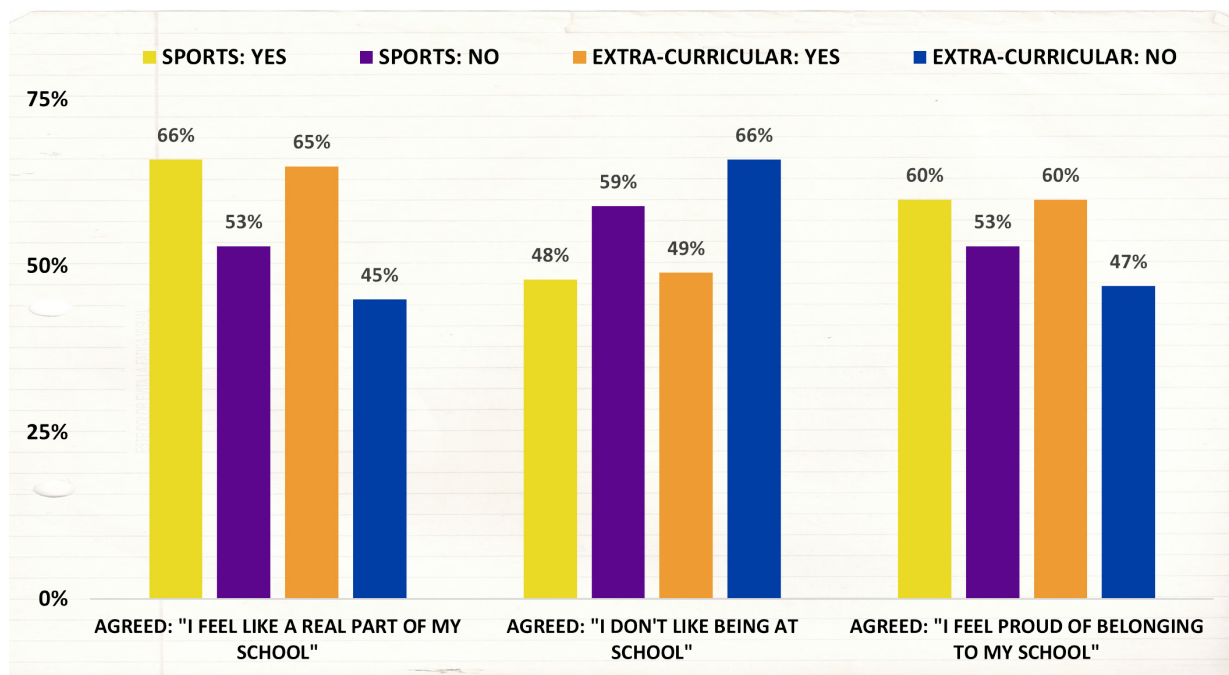


## Mental Health and Wellbeing

In recent years, there has been a growing acknowledgement that if we want to improve mental health, we need to focus on health rather than illness (e.g., Bariola et al., 2017). Scholars have conceptualized wellbeing as positive mental health, which is categorized into three components: emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing (Keyes, 2002). Emotional wellbeing is based on positive feelings and reflects the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect. Psychological and social wellbeing moves beyond feeling good and encapsulates the positive functioning aspects of wellbeing. Psychological wellbeing focuses on self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. The final criterion,

social wellbeing, is based on social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social coherence and social actualization (Peter et al., 2011). Although these individual aspects of wellbeing can be assessed separately, collectively positive mental health can be grouped into the following categories: flourishing, moderately healthy, or languishing (Keyes, 2006). Those who fit the criteria of flourishing have optimal emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing, while those who are struggling in these areas are conceptualized as languishing. Individuals who are neither flourishing nor languishing are considered to have moderate mental health (including those who may be struggling in one or two aspects of wellbeing, but not all three).

As illustrated in FIGURE 36, while over half (59% CH boys and 50% CH girls) of CH students were categorized as flourishing, only two out of five (40%) of GBQ boys met the criterion of flourishing, and astonishingly, only 18% of LGBQ girls were flourishing and less than one in ten (9%) of trans participants were classified as flourishing.

### FIGURE 36: POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING
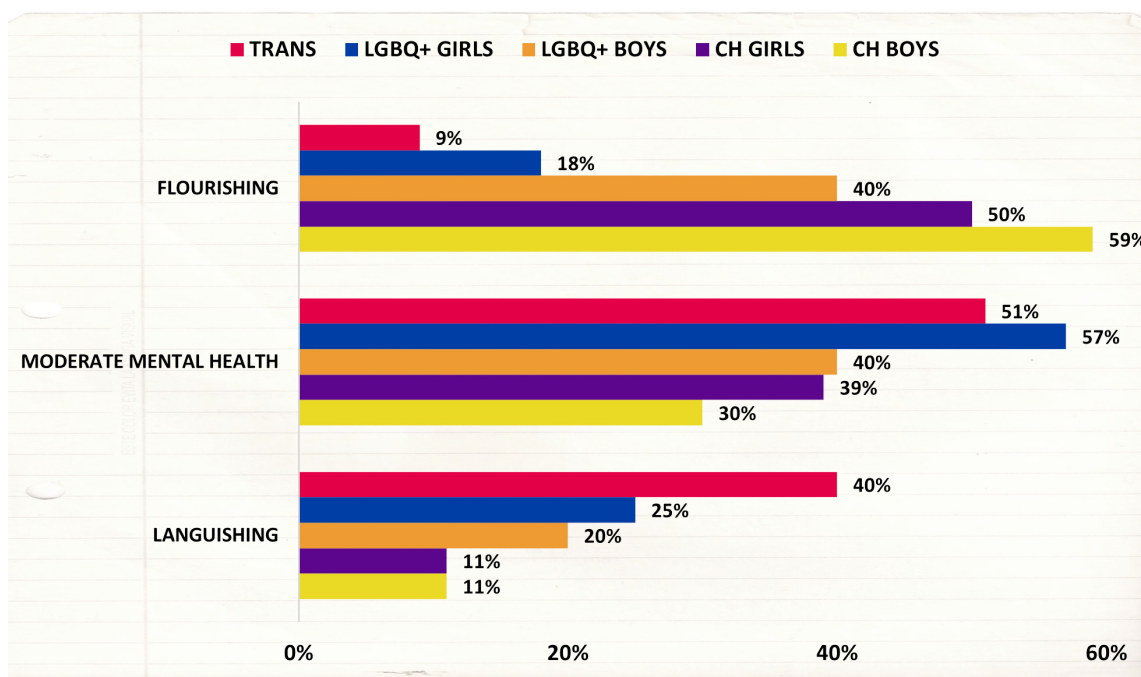


Even though there is a sizeable correlation between health and illness, the absence of one does not automatically imply the presence of the other, and vice versa (Bariola et al., 2017). While research has consistently shown that 2SLGBTQ youth are at an increased risk for mood, anxiety, substance abuse disorders, and suicidality (Peter, Edkins, et al., 2017; Veale et al., 2016; Watson et al., 2018), there is less documented research on robust measures of positive mental health, especially among young people (Peter, 2018a). Albeit with a

sample of adults, one study using data from the Canadian Community Health Survey found a sizeable disparity between heterosexual adults and Canadians who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Peter, 2018b). The same study calculated the relationship between mental health and mental illness, according to the dual-continua theoretical model (Keyes, 2002). Results show that 78% of lesbians without a mental illness were flourishing, compared to 13% who were screened for having a mental illness. Among gay men, 79% were flourishing who did not have a mental illness, compared to 41% with a mental illness.

We did not ask directly about mental illness or suicidal behaviour because we could not be sure that our participants, whether completing the survey in class or on their own, would have adequate support available to help them address any emotional distress that might arise from being confronted with such questions. We can, however, assess the correlation between wellbeing and other measures that may help explain disparities in mental health among youth; namely, weak school belonging, harassment, and feeling unsafe at school (See FIGURE 37).

It is important to note that the percentage of students flourishing is significantly lower regardless of gender or sexual identity; meaning, even CH students are substantially less likely to be flourishing (i.e., they have lower levels of positive mental health) if they have a low sense of school belonging, have experienced verbal or physical harassment in the past year, and/or feel unsafe at school for any reason. However, among 2SLGBTQ participants these indicators are particularly profound. For example, only 4% of trans students who agreed that "I feel depressed about my school" were flourishing, which was only slightly higher for cisgender LGBQ participants (12%), compared to CH students (34%). Being unable to be oneself at school also has a negative impact on the wellbeing of CH (25% flourishing), cisgender LGBQ (12% flourishing), and trans (5% flourishing) students. A similar disparity was observed for both verbal harassment and physical victimization at school in the past year as well as feeling unsafe at school for any reason.

These results highlight the degree to which negative social environments such as school can have on the overall mental health of students, especially when students lack supports (e.g., having at least one adult they can talk to at their school) (Spencer & Patrick, 2009), feel unsafe at school, and face discrimination and harassment—all of which have been well documented in previous research. Equally frightening is the plethora of research that has linked lower levels of mental health with detrimental outcomes such as suicidal behaviour (Cochran & Mays, 2000; Swannell et al., 2016), substance abuse (Drabble et al., 2005), and

future physical and mental illness (Bostwick et al., 2010; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010; Keyes & Grzywacz, 2005; Keyes & Simoes, 2012).

**FIGURE 37: PERCENT FLOURISHING BY SCHOOL BELONGING, HARASSMENT, AND SAFETY**
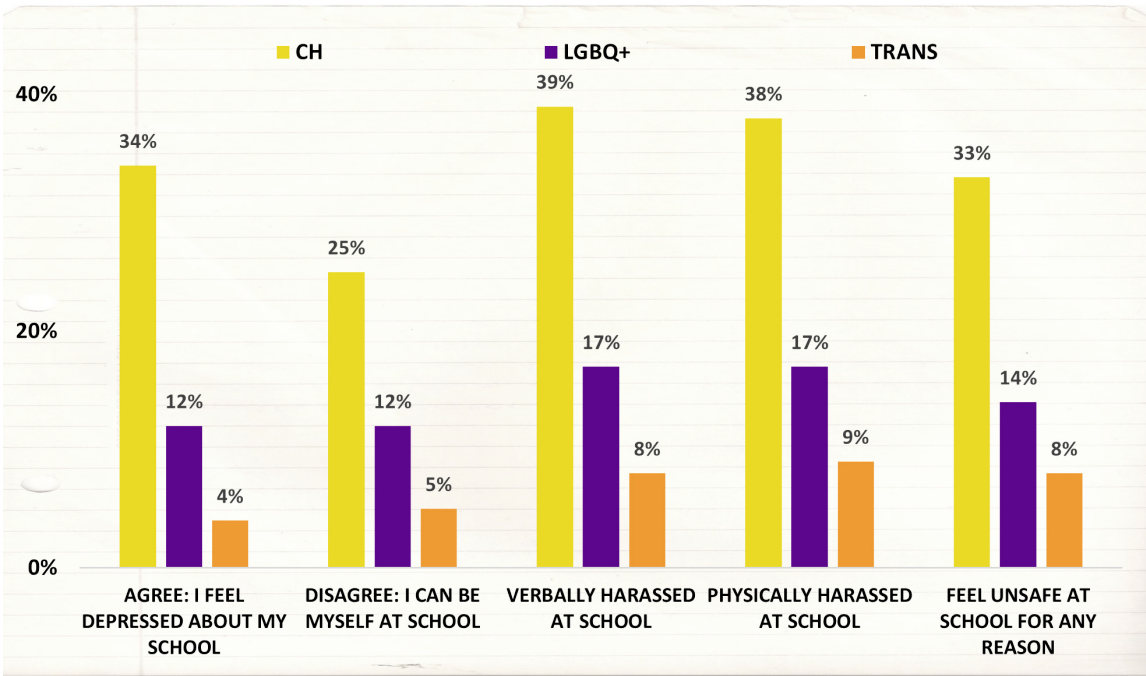


## Academic Achievement and Aspirations

Research on the impacts of anti–2SLGBTQ harassment for academic achievement has generally found that students who experience victimization on a regular basis are at greater risk for negative academic outcomes, such as lower academic achievement and poorer attendance (Birkett et al., 2014; Day, Ioverno, et al., 2019; Gardella et al., 2016; Garvey et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2020; Kosciw et al., 2013). Given the correlation between experiences of harassment and school attachment, it is important to remember that this is not a straightforward relationship, as social support and school attachment may help support academic achievement even when students experience negative school climates more generally.

Overall, there were no notable differences in academic achievement, with cisgender LGBQ students actually reporting slightly higher grades than CH students. Trans participants, however, were somewhat more likely to be struggling academically in school as 4% indicated that they are typically "D" students, compared to 1% of cisgender LGBQ respondents and 2% of CH students. Another 2% reported that they were failing while only 1% of CH and cisgender LGBQ participants indicated that they are usually are assigned "F's" by their teachers. Trans respondents were also slightly less likely to report that they were "A" students (22%) than cisgender LGBQ (30%) or CH students (29%).

Among cisgender LGBQ and CH students, girls were more likely to report higher grades than boys (69% cisgender LGBQ girls, 50% cisgender GBQ boys, 72% CH girls, 53% CH boys, and 57% of trans participants reported receiving grades of an "A" or an "A"). Since the vast majority of all students indicated that they are receiving relatively high grades (e.g., 63% reported that they are assigned either "A's" or "A's" by their teachers, and 90% of students indicated receiving "B's" or higher), results in regard to academic achievement as an outcome measure have been collapsed so that any grade of a "C" or lower represents one category.

Among 2SLGBTQ students there was a positive association between school attachment and academic achievement. For instance, 2SLGBTQ participants who disagreed with the statements "I am treated with as much respect as other students" and "I feel like a real part of my school" were three times more likely to report that the typical grades assigned by their teachers were "C" or lower (10% and 8%, respectively) than students who agreed to these statements (3% for each statement). See FIGURE 38. Conversely, only 22% of 2SLGTQ respondents who agreed that "I don't like being at school" indicated that they typically received "A's," compared to 36% of those who disagreed with that statement.

### FIGURE 38: SCHOOL ATTACHMENT BY ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT (2SLGBTQ STUDENTS)
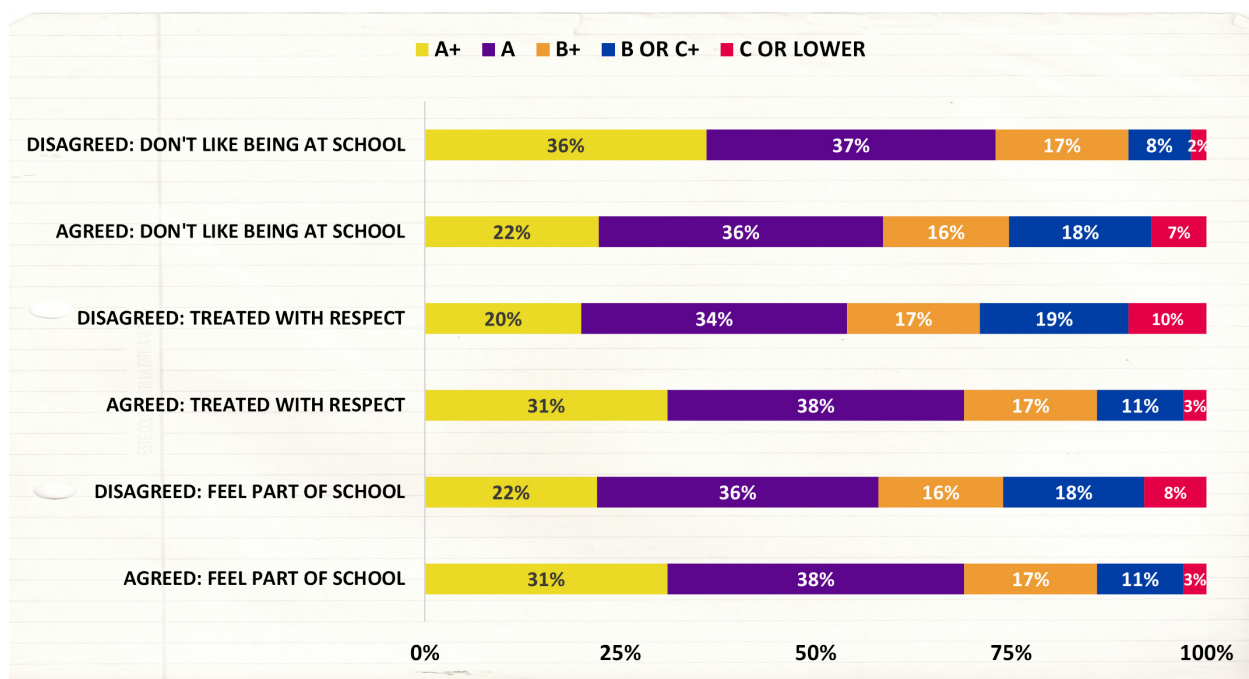


2SLGBTQ students who reported skipping school in the past year because they did not feel safe indicated that they typically receive lower grades than 2SLGBTQ participants who did not skip school. As shown in FIGURE 39, this correlation was particularly pronounced among trans students as only 13% who

skipped school in the past year reported that they were "A" students, compared to 31% of those who did not skip school. Although not as profound as the differences observed with trans participants, cisgender GBQ boys who skipped school because they did not feel safe also had lower grades. These findings are particularly concerning given that trans students as well as cisgender boys (regardless of sexual identity), overall, are outperformed academically by cisgender girls; therefore, they are at an even greater risk than cisgender girls when they miss school, which is even more insidious when the reason for skipping is that they do not feel safe.

**FIGURE 39: SKIPPED SCHOOL IN PAST YEAR BY ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT (SEXUAL AND GENDER IDENTITY)**
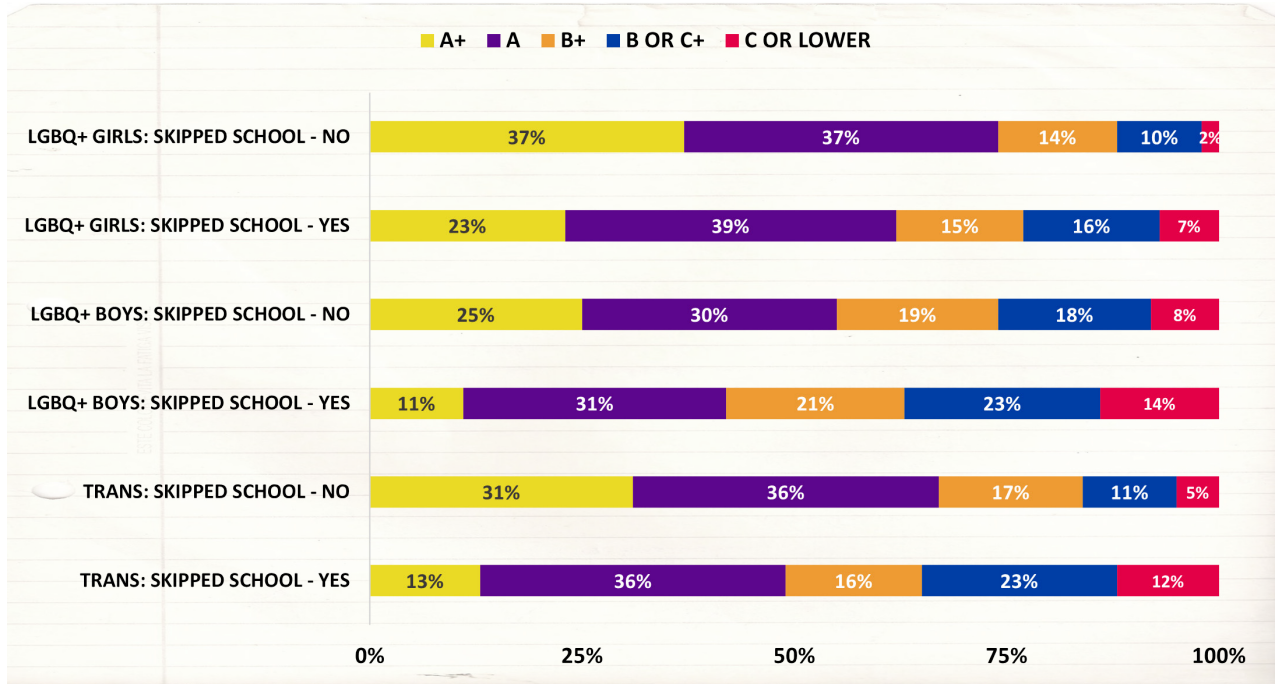


2SLGBTQ students in our study were just as ambitious, if not more, than CH participants. For instance, they were more likely than CH students to report wanting to pursue their education beyond high school (93% versus 88%). Just as cisgender girls were more likely than cisgender boys to have high grades, cisgender girls (regardless of sexual identity) were more likely than cisgender boys to indicate a desire to pursue higher levels of education. Despite there being little difference between cisgender LGBQ and CH girls in terms of educational aspirations, cisgender GBQ boys were more likely than CH boys to wish to complete a Master's, professional, or doctoral degree (44% versus 33%). See FIGURE 40.

## FIGURE 40: EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS BY GENDER & SEXUAL IDENTITY



Legend:
- HIGH SCHOOL OR LESS
- VOCATIONAL, TECH., OR COMMUNITY COLLEGE
- BACHELOR'S DEGREE
- MASTER'S, PROFESSIONAL, OR DOCTORAL DEGREE

| Group | High School or Less | Vocational, Tech., or Community College | Bachelor's Degree | Master's, Professional, or Doctoral Degree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| CH GIRLS | 8% | 12% | 25% | 55% |
| CH BOYS | 18% | 27% | 22% | 33% |
| LGBQ+ GIRLS | 6% | 11% | 30% | 52% |
| LGBQ+ BOYS | 15% | 15% | 25% | 44% |
| TRANS | 7% | 16% | 34% | 43% |
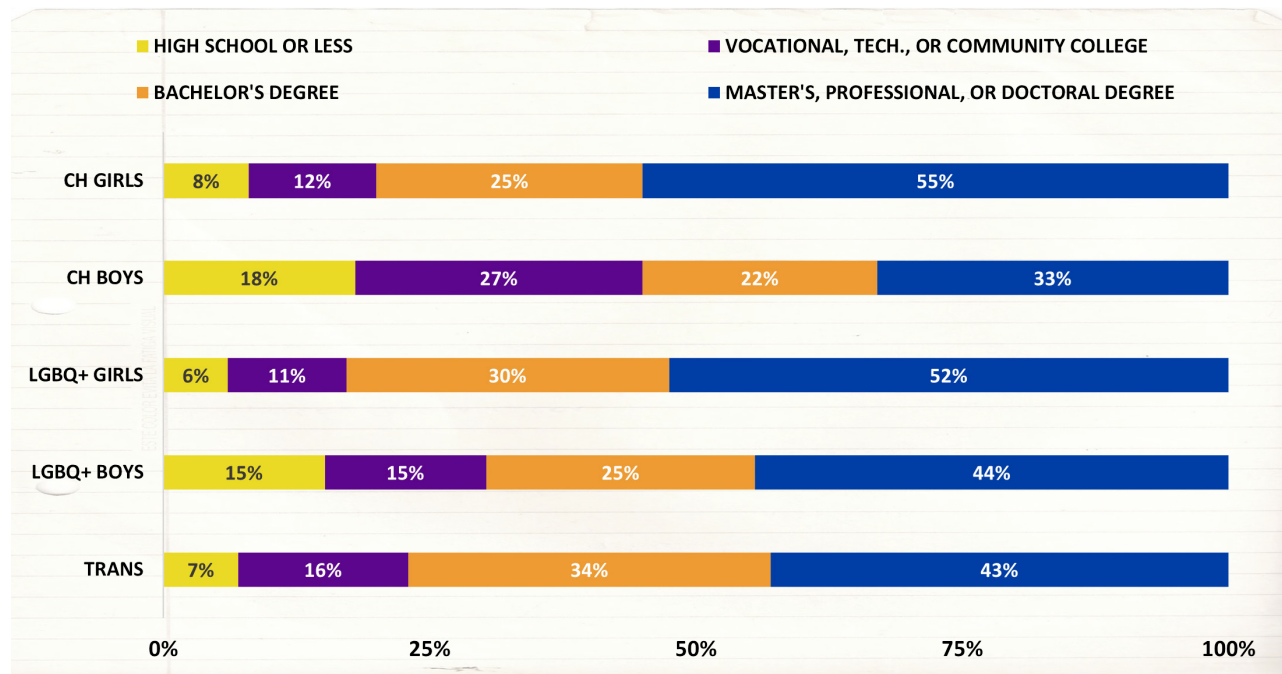
Among cisgender LGBQ girls, several measures help to explain variations in academic aspirations. These include: agreement to the statement "I don't like being at school"; experiences of physical harassment at school; and incidents of sexual humiliation at school due to their sexual identity or perceived sexual identity. For instance, cisgender LGBQ girls who reported experiencing sexual humiliation at school in the past year were five times more likely than cisgender LGBQ girls who did not to indicate that they did not want to pursue education beyond high school (24% versus 5%). They were also substantially less likely to aspire to achieve a Bachelor's degree or higher (52% versus 84%). Although not as pronounced, similar disparities were observed when cisgender LGBQ girls reported experiencing physical harassment for any reason in the past year at school (10% did not wish to obtain educational credentials beyond high school, compared to 5% who did not experience physical harassment). Moreover, cisgender LGBQ girls who "don't like being at school" were five times more likely (10%) to aspire only to high school graduation than 2% of cisgender LGBQ girls who like being at school. See FIGURE 41.
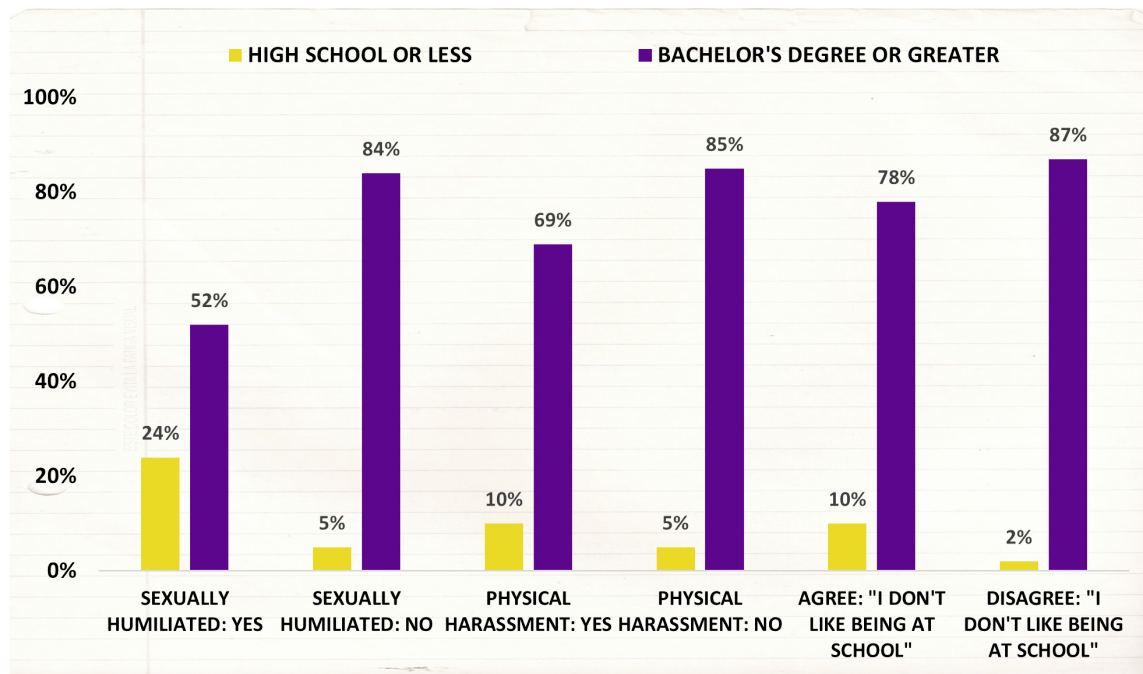
Unsurprisingly, students who experience harassment are more likely to have their academic achievement and aspirations negatively impacted, though this is not necessarily a straightforward relationship. As the previous finding indicates, despite a generally high level of aspiration for cisgender LGBQ girls (with 52% aspiring to a Master's, doctoral, or professional degree), other factors such as low school attachment or sexual humiliation seem to moderate that relationship. Other research suggests that the more comfortable a student is at school, the higher their academic success (Garvey et al., 2018). Additionally, when students experience more harassment, there are increased likelihoods that they will skip school and under-perform academically (Birkett et al., 2014; Gardella et al., 2016); importantly, though, school-based supports further moderate these findings and play a significant role in lowering victimization and enhancing academic outcomes (Kosciw et al., 2020).

# Institutional Responses

*My school's super inclusive. We have several lgbt friendly and encouraging events, such as fundraisers, a drag race, two gsa clubs, and a rainbow painting (representing the gay straight alliance) right outside the school. Issues surrounding homophobia are usually limited to the odd student who uses derogatory language, otherwise it's due to misinformation but it's rare nonetheless.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *My school is probably the most LGBTQ friendly place I've ever been.*
> (2SLGBTQ)

> *Our school has no bullies basically... everyone is super inclusive. It's a theatre school so at least half of the school is queer and really progressive.* (2SLGBTQ)

The importance of the role of schools in responding to anti-2SLGBTQ behaviours and attitudes, and in supporting 2SLGBTQ students cannot be overstated. School officials have the opportunity to proactively respond to negative aspects of school climate and ensure that both students and staff clearly understand that 2SLGBTQ students are welcome and should be affirmed. This can take multiple forms, such as ensuring that there are clear policies that explicitly support 2SLGBTQ students and prohibit HBTP behaviours, providing professional development to support educators in doing effective 2SLGBTQ-inclusive work, ensuring that GSA clubs are effectively resourced and supported, introducing 2SLGBTQ curriculum, and holding 2SLGBTQ positive events and activities. Research suggests that these efforts are mutually supportive and more effective in providing safe school climates (Konishi et al., 2013; Szalacha, 2003; Peter & Taylor, 2017; Taylor et al., 2016; Taylor & Peter, 2011b). For instance, GSAs contribute to greater peer support for 2SLGBTQ students and 2SLGBTQ-specific policies contribute to greater teacher support (Day, Fish, et al., 2019). Further, educators working at schools where there was strong institutional support, as evidenced by 2SLGBTQ-specific policies and clear administrator support, were less likely to provide reasons for not practicing 2SLGBTQ-inclusive education (Campbell et al., 2021).

## Supportive Teachers and Teacher Intervention

The role of teachers is important in supporting 2SLGBTQ students, as they are often on the front-line of teaching and interacting with students. The Every Teacher Project found that there was a great deal of support for LGBTQ-inclusive education among educators, with 85% expressing support for it; however, there were lower levels of educators actually practicing LGBTQ-inclusive education, with only 37% reporting having participated in LGBTQ-inclusive efforts at their schools (Taylor et al., 2015). This gap between values and practice needs to be bridged in order to effectively engage teachers in supporting 2SLGBTQ students. When asked about their reasons for not teaching in 2SLGBTQ-inclusive ways, educators cited lack of formal support, lack of training or resources, and various forms of potential opposition (Campbell et al., 2021; Peter et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2016). These reasons may be effectively addressed by ensuring that there is strong administrative support for 2SLGBTQ students, backed by policy and professional development

opportunities, that provides institutional assurance that 2SLGBTQ-inclusive education is a priority in school.

Other research shows that 2SLGBTQ content is not often included in schools. For instance, Stonewall UK found that 40% of LGBT students had never been taught anything about LGBT issues while in school; further, only 20% of LGBT students learned about where to go for help or advice in school about same-sex relationships, 58% had never been taught about same-sex marriage or civil partnerships, 76% had never learned about or discussed bisexuality, and 77% had never been taught about or discussed gender identity or what "trans" means (Bradlow et al., 2017).

*... when we had a small rally to support lgbtq rights at our school, there were more people there who were screaming homophobic comments, than people who were there for its intended purpose. Unfortunately the supervisors who were supervising this event did not stop them.* (2SLGBTQ)

*I usually feel pretty safe at school, but sometimes I wish the adults would make more of an effort with correcting derogatory behaviour. It shouldn't be my or my peers' responsibility to make ourselves feel safer.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Teachers need to intervene more than they do. We receive presentations about the harmful effects of bullying but when situations arise when a student is being bullied it is heavily brushed off by teachers and administrative staff.* (2SLGBTQ)

*I just want people to accept LGBTQ in my school. I tell my principle and vice principle that I'm being bullied for my gender/sexual orientation but they don't do anything about it.* (2SLGBTQ)

*The students are all very accepting, the staff and administrators are NOT. They display very gross homophobic things.* (2SLGBTQ)

*It's not that people are actively mean or homophobic. It's that they automatically assume no one in the room is a part of the community. Even teachers talking about LGBTQ issues in school, they talk in a way where LGBT students don't actually exist. They are distant, they are outcasts.* (2SLGBTQ)

We asked students in our study to gauge the frequency of intervention by school staff when homophobic and transphobic comments were being made. Over half (52%) of CH participants indicated that if a teacher or school staff member was present when they heard inappropriate remarks based on gender or sexual identities, they intervened either always (19%) or most of the time (33%), which was substantially higher that assessments by 2SLGBTQ respondents (12% always and 24% most of the time). Only a quarter of 2SLGBTQ participants who

attend Catholic schools reported that teachers or school staff always (9%) or most of the time intervene (17%) when these remarks were made.

Student perceptions of how often teachers and staff intervene when inappropriate comments and remarks are made in relation to gender and sexual identities has improved between the First and Second Climate Surveys. For instance, in the 2008/2009 survey, a third (33%) of 2SLGBTQ participants and 19% of CH students reported that school staff members never intervene when such comments are made, which were reduced to 23% for 2SLGBTQ and 14% of CH students in the current study. In addition, while trans participants in both time periods were more likely to indicate that staff never intervened (43% in 2008/09 and 26% in 2019/20), compared to 2SLGBTQ respondents (32% in 2008/09 and 22% in 2019/20), these were sizeable decreases for both groups, which affirms that teachers and school staff are increasing their efforts to intervene.

There were also improvements in terms of the effectiveness of teacher or staff intervention in addressing homophobic harassment among cisgender GBQ boys (65% in 2008/09 versus 32% in 2019/20), cisgender LGBQ girls (67% in 2008/09 versus 45% in 2019/20), and trans (67% in 2008/09 versus 52% in 2019/20) participants. The Second Climate Survey included two additional questions in order to gauge the effectiveness of teachers and school staff in addressing transphobic and biphobic harassment. For both transphobic and biphobic harassment, trans participants were more likely to see school staffs' efforts as ineffective (64% for each type of harassment), which is followed by cisgender LGBQ girls (56% for each type of harassment) and then cisgender GBQ boys (37% and 36%, respectively). See FIGURE 42. Results suggest that while schools are gaining headway in terms of being more effective in addressing homophobic harassment, they are perceived as less effectively attending to transphobic and biphobic harassment. There is even less optimism among 2SLGBTQ students attending Catholic schools as 62% see their teachers as ineffective in addressing homophobic harassment (versus 44% non-Catholic school), 74% as ineffective in dealing with transphobic harassment (versus 54%), and 76% as ineffective in attending to biphobic harassment (versus 54%).

## FIGURE 42: INEFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF IN ADDRESSING HARASSMENT INCLUDING THOSE EXPERIENCING PHYSICAL VICTIMIZATION (PH)
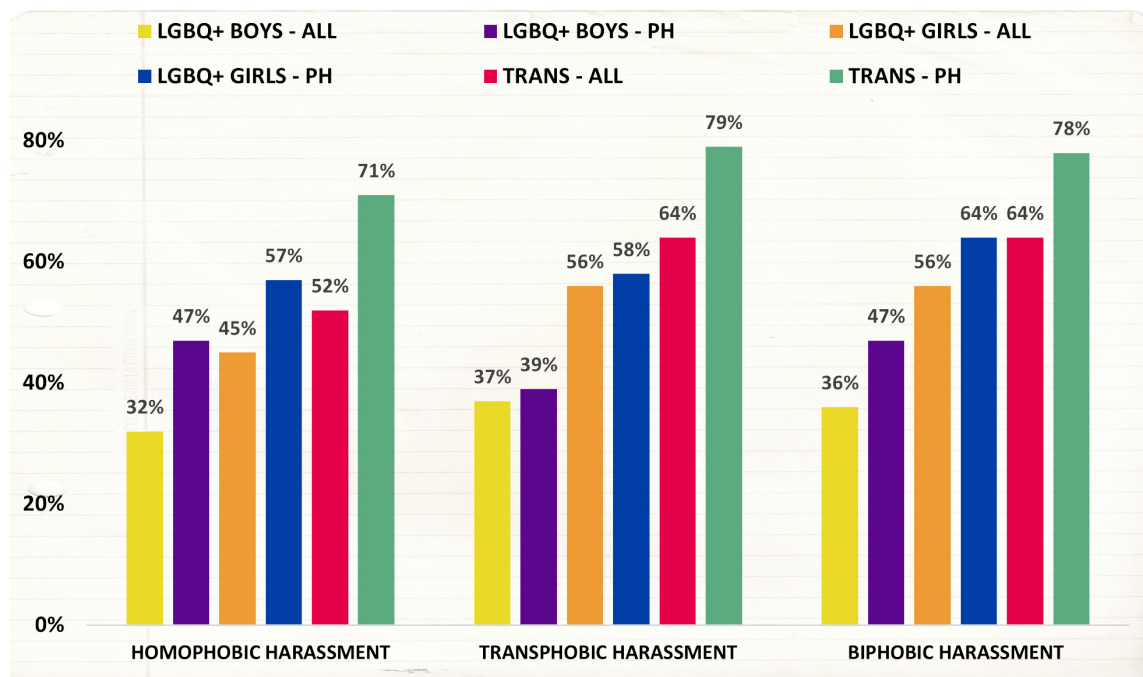


Confidence in the effectiveness of teachers and school staff to address harassment is a fragile thing, and quickly dissipates when students experience physical victimization at school. As shown in FIGURE 42, 2SLGBTQ students who report experiencing some form of physical harassment in the last year at their school were more likely to regard teacher and staff as being ineffective in addressing harassment. The greatest disparity is among trans participants who report experiencing physical victimization as four out of five see staff members as ineffective in addressing transphobic harassment (79%) and biphobic harassment (78%), and 71% in reference to homophobic harassment.

> *Bullies are never punished. There are many great teachers who want them to be but the school board says it will make them look bad. So they just get a slap on the wrist. They post anti-bullying posters all over the school, but when it's a popular kid or privileged kid being a bully, they won't do anything. But if it is a kid who comes from a reserve, or is underprivileged, they will be suspended. They always say that "they didn't see it" so they can't do anything about it. It's very frustrating.* (2SLGBTQ)

The difference between effective interventions on the one hand and supportive teachers and school climates on the other is important to briefly explain. While effective interventions have an educative character that seeks to address the inappropriateness of HBTP harassment and ultimately attempts to correct the behaviour in such a way that it does not recur, supportive teachers and school climates more proactively provide for the wellbeing of students in fostering more positive, affirming environments. Support may be understood as having

both a more proactive role and a broader approach that makes space for 2SLGBTQ people and affirms their identities through a variety of means, such as inclusion in school life through 2SLGBTQ themed events, resourcing of GSAs, curricular inclusion, and ensuring there are supportive teachers and school staff that 2SLGBTQ students can talk with.

Two-thirds of 2SLGBTQ students view their school community as either very supportive (25%) or somewhat supportive (39%) of 2SLGBTQ people. The importance of being in a supportive school versus an unsupportive environment is particularly remarkable when analyzed by a series of outcome measures. The differences between being in a "very supportive" school versus an "unsupportive" environment are that 2SLGBTQ participants are:

- More likely to be flourishing in their mental health and wellbeing (32% in supportive schools versus 6% in unsupportive schools).
  - ▶ Conversely, less likely to be languishing in their mental health and wellbeing (21% versus 45%).
- Over three times less likely to feel that "It is hard for me to feel accepted at my school" (20% versus 72%).
- Almost four times more likely to agree that "I can be myself at school" (81% versus 22%).
- Less likely to wish they were in a different school (11% versus 57%).
- More likely to agree that they are proud of belonging to their school, compared to only a quarter who indicate that their school is unsupportive (85% versus 25%).
- More likely to report that if a teacher or school staff member has been present when homophobic remarks are made, they have intervened (57% versus 18%).
- More likely to feel safe at school in regard to their gender or sexual identity as well as their gender expression (69% versus 16%).
- Less likely to have skipped school in the past year because they did not feel safe (54% versus 20%).
- Less likely to report being "left out" or excluded by their peers (26% versus 67%)
- Less likely to have been the target of mean rumours or lies (28% versus 68%).
- Less likely to identify at least one space in their school as unsafe (57% versus 95%).

- Less likely to label teachers and school staff as ineffective in addressing homophobic harassment (13% versus 82%).
  - ▶ Conversely, far more likely to agree that their teachers very effectively address homophobic harassment (45% versus 4%).

These findings emphasize the vital role of ensuring a supportive school climate for 2SLGBTQ students—and the positive impact of supportive school climates must not be underestimated. 2SLGBTQ students in supportive schools were significantly more likely to have flourishing mental health, feel stronger school connection, feel safer at school, and experience less harassment by peers. Schools have an opportunity to cultivate these outcomes for 2SLGBTQ students by seeking to create supportive school environments. This requires not simply attempting to ameliorate the effects of harassment or negative school climates through reactive measures such as punishment and counselling, but focusing on proactive efforts to create school climates where harmful incidents are less likely to occur and 2SLGBTQ students' wellbeing and social connection are supported.

## Anti-Homophobia/Biphobia/Transphobia Policies

As one of the staple interventions for 2SLGBTQ-inclusive education, the importance of 2SLGBTQ-focused policy in schools is a key intervention in supporting 2SLGBTQ students. However, as it is an intervention that is focused on the institutional, regulatory aspect of schools, it is more likely to be apparent to teachers and school staff than it is to students unless efforts are made to communicate policies clearly to students. Generally, policy contributes to the regulatory context of schools and has the ability to confer institutional support for 2SLGBTQ-inclusive practices to teachers and school staff to "take action" with the backing of the school administration. Research consistently recommends policy interventions as a way to improve school climates for 2SLGBTQ students, underscoring the importance of policy by emphasizing its usefulness in supporting teachers to engage in 2SLGBTQ-inclusive education. 2SLGBTQ-focused policy, coupled with explicit support from administrators, grants institutional support and removes uncertainty about whether teachers can or should address 2SLGBTQ content. Further, policy establishes that 2SLGBTQ students are valued and 2SLGBTQ content is of value, and that both are institutionally backed, which allows for resources to be devoted to professional development and the implementation of 2SLGBTQ-inclusive practices (Hansen, 2007; Szalacha, 2003; Taylor et al., 2016). Other research found that the presence of 2SLGBTQ-focused school policies resulted in higher levels of teacher support for 2SLGBTQ students, which suggests policy provides needed guidance that they can and should support 2SLGBTQ students and

content, as well as assurance that they may do so without fear of facing opposition without administrator support (Campbell et al., 2021; Day, Fish, et al., 2019).

Little has changed in the decade plus since the First Climate Survey in 2008/2009 when only a third (34%) of respondents reported that they knew whether or not their schools had policies about or procedures for reporting incidents of homophobia as this number only improved to 37%. In addition to asking about policies or procedures in regard to homophobia, the current study asked participants if their school has a policy or a procedure for reporting incidents of transphobia, which only 35% reporting knowing one way or another.

Not surprisingly, we found (as we did in the First Climate Survey) that more 2SLGBTQ students knew whether or not their schools had policies about or procedures for reporting incidents of homophobia (42%, compared to 33% of CH participants). Similar results were found for transphobia policies or procedures in which trans respondents were more likely to know whether or not their school had something for reporting incidents of transphobia (43%, compared to 41% of cisgender LGBQ participants and 31% of CH students). Only one in five (20%) 2SLGBTQ respondents answered "yes" to the question asking if their school had a policy or a procedure for reporting incidents of homophobia while 24% indicated that their school did not, and 16% reported that their school had a policy or a procedure in relation to reporting incidents of transphobia (26% maintained that their school did not).

2SLGBTQ students who reported that their school has either a policy or a procedure (or both) for reporting incidents of homophobia or transphobia were more likely to agree that they can be themselves at school (64% versus 42%), have teachers who intervene always or most of the time when homophobic or transphobic language is used (46% versus 24%), and are less likely to report being the target of mean lies or rumours at their school in the past year (42% versus 63%). They were more likely to view their teachers as being very effective in addressing homophobic harassment (34% versus 7%), and less likely to regard their teachers' efforts in attending to transphobic harassment as ineffective (43% versus 77%). Finally, 44% of 2SLGBTQ participants who go to a school with such policies or procedures (and are aware of them) reported that their school is very supportive of 2SLGBTQ people (versus 9% in schools without policies or procedures). See FIGURE 43.

## FIGURE 43: ANTI-HOMOPHOBIA & ANTI-TRANSPHOBIA POLICIES AND PROCEDURES BY VARIOUS OUTCOME MEASURES
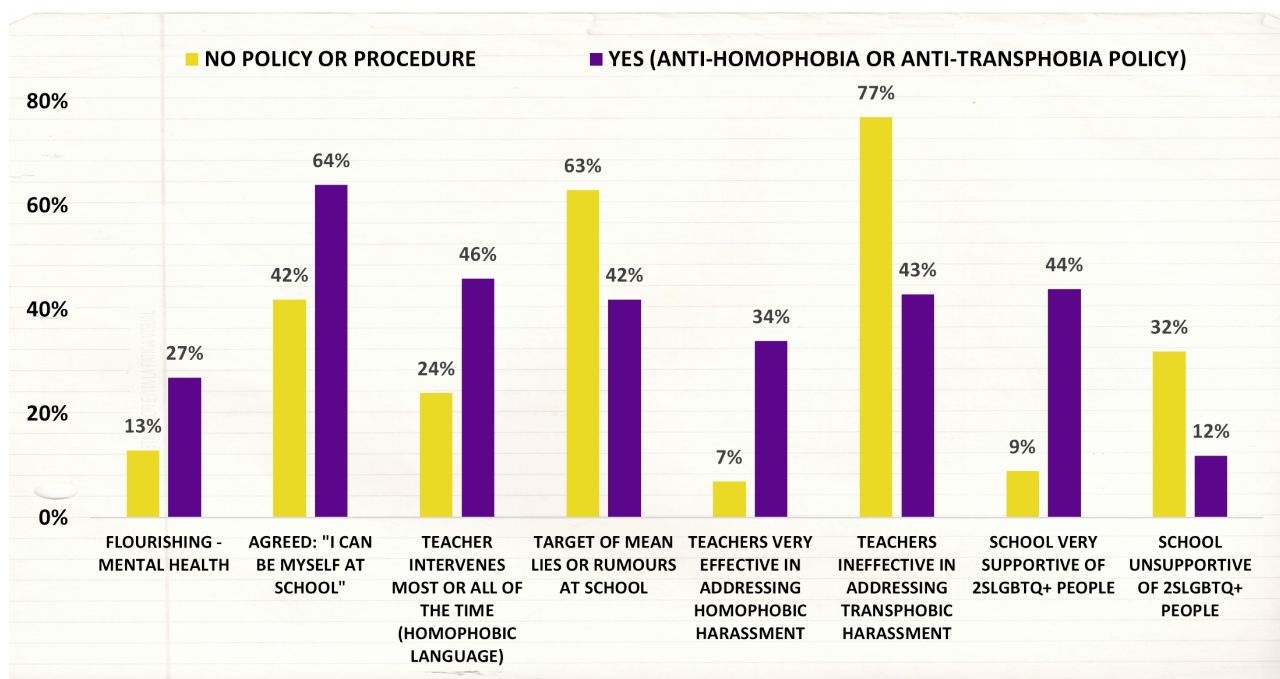


In addition to all of the aforementioned improvements, having a policy or a procedure for reporting incidents of homophobia or transphobia also has a positive impact on the overall school climate. Over half (54%) of 2SLGBTQ participants who attend schools with these protections regard their school as effectively responding to incidents of homophobic or transphobic harassment, compared to only 12% of participants who do not attend such schools and 21% of students who do not know if their school has such policies or procedures.

*Schools like to say we have a racism free school or homophobia/transphobia free school, but just saying it doesn't make it true.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Add a rights and protection policy for members of the LGBTQ community in school.* (CH)

We caution readers, however, about the optimism generated from these results, and remind readers that the majority of respondents did not know one way or another if their school had such policies or procedures. For these participants, perceptions of their school climate are not as favourable as students who know their school has policies and procedures for reporting incidents of homophobia or transphobia; yet, they are more favourable than those who report that their school does not. While policies and procedures can never be the singular solution to the eradication of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools, they are perhaps the bridge across the chasm, rather than a panacea per se, and our results clearly confirm they are necessary as a starting

point toward ensuring safe and respectful schools for 2SLGBTQ individuals—but only if they know about them.

## 2SLGBTQ Inclusive Curriculum

*Literally anything taught about the LGBT community would be helpful. I shouldn't have to learn everything on a private browser in my bedroom, hiding my search history from my parents so I could learn about the community and everything related to it.* (2SLGBTQ)

*I would like it if LGBTQ issues were discussed in class and not just ignored.* (2SLGBTQ)

*I shouldn't have to think so hard about whether or not lgbtq people are represented in my classes, it should just be a given.* (2SLGBTQ)

*I live in stick in the mud, ultra conservative [suburb] and most of these people are severely uneducated. Doesn't make it any less uncomfortable or hurtful, but a little bit easier to swallow. I'm at a Catholic school, so the sexual education I got is just nonexistent.* (2SLGBTQ)

*My school has a course called Gender Studies that learns about lgbt history and organizes pride events, fundraisers, etc.* (2SLGBTQ)

*There were some teachers who would negatively express their opinions on LGBTQ and that it was "wrong". This caused me to feel uncomfortable during their classes.* (2SLGBTQ)

*I think teachers who aren't part of the LGBTQ community should still teach and learn about the LGBTQ community in different subjects such as Music, Science and History.* (CH)

2SLGBTQ-inclusive curriculum is another common recommendation for supporting 2SLGBTQ students in schools, based on the inclusive principle that students are better supported when they see themselves reflected in the curriculum. However, 2SLGBTQ content has not been as comprehensively or systematically implemented in school systems. The Every Teacher Project found that the majority of teachers (78%) reported that they had included LGBTQ content in some way in their curriculum, ranging from once-only references to multiple methods and occasions (Taylor et al., 2015). GLSEN's most recent study found that the majority of students (67%) had encountered no representation of LGBTQ-related topics in any classroom curriculum, while 16% had encountered

positive representations, 14% negative representations, and 3% both positive and negative representations (Kosciw et al., 2020).

As shown in FIGURE 44, there was considerable variation in terms of whether or not respondents attended schools with formal policies or procedures for reporting incidents of homophobia or transphobia. These 2SLGBTQ students were less likely to indicate that such inclusive curriculum was never addressed (17% versus 42% that went to school without these policy protections). They were also four times more likely to report that their teachers challenged transphobia (e.g., lessons on why gender identity discrimination is harmful) (36% versus 9%), almost three times more likely to state that their teachers used inclusive language and examples (43% versus 15%), and were over two times more likely to indicate that their teachers challenged homophobia (e.g., lessons on why sexual identity discrimination is harmful) (51% versus 20%).

**FIGURE 44: 2SLGBTQ INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM BY SCHOOL-BASED POLICIES (2SLGBTQ STUDENTS)**
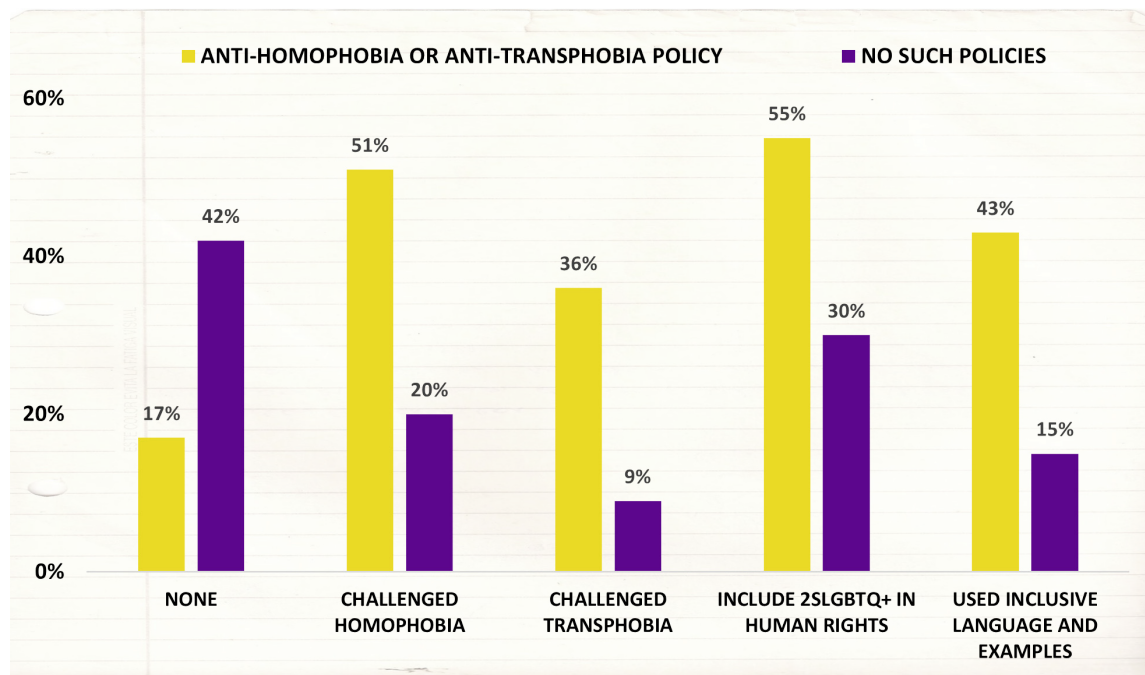


When discussions around 2SLGBTQ dating or sexuality was addressed, they were more often in either a very positive way (43%) or in a somewhat positive way (50%), although 7% of 2SLGBTQ students indicated the discussion was framed in a negative way.

*Especially in sex education classes, at least be able to answer our questions if they don't teach us the contraceptive methods of gay sex.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Lack of education on sexual identity and sexual orientation in primary and secondary schools.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Heard derogatory comments about my sexual orientation in a discussion about teen love in class. Like "Gays = just Sodomy" or "It's against nature"* (2SLGBTQ)

There is considerable variation regionally in students' reported experiences in regard to discussions about sexuality in sexual education or family planning classes. Excluding those who "didn't know," which was equally distributed across the regions, 58% of 2SLGBTQ participants from Alberta and 53% from Ontario reported that these topics were never discussed, whereas only 25% of 2SLGBTQ students from New Brunswick indicated that these topics were never discussed. Participants from Alberta (14%) and Ontario (9%) were also more likely to report that, when 2SLGBTQ people's relationships were included in discussions about dating or sexuality, they were framed in a negative way.

The higher numbers in Alberta and Ontario are interesting and may be reflective of the different character of school systems in those provinces, as they both publicly fund Catholic schools, or due to political circumstances in each province, as Ontario underwent some uncertainty under the provincial government's rollback of their sex-ed curriculum and Alberta has experienced an ongoing conflict in their regulatory context regarding 2SLGBTQ content in schools (which undoubtedly has created confusion among educators as to their job protections and likely results in their being more cautious about what and how to address 2SLGBTQ content).

*In English class we were discussing discrimination and… my English teacher… that I really respected said that there also might be some LGBTQ discrimination but does not think it is as much of an issue anymore after gay marriage was legalized. She had an open discussion about all other discrimination such as racial or religious but not queer. Me and one other student tried to voice a different perspective but the discussion quickly moved away from anything lgbt. I had previously felt accepted by that teacher if she had known that I was queer but now I can't feel as at ease in her class anymore and it only forced me deeper into the closet at school. I really wish cis/het students and teachers were more aware of the impact of their words and how hurtful it can be to their peers.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *I wish we learned more about queer theory and LGBTQ\* history in school. The sad truth is that we don't. I researched the Stonewall Riots on my own time. Heroes like Marsha P Johnson, Gilbert Baker, and Allison Bechdel were never mentioned in classrooms… But they are the names of heroes. Why shouldn't we know them? We should start adding LGBTQ\* books into our curriculum. Like "The Colour Purple". Or "The Price of Salt", or SOMETHING. It's silly to not include it.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *Historically gay people are important! And interesting! As well as reading about and hearing stories about them. I've read The Great Gatsby THREE TIMES- not one of my teachers encouraged the idea of Nick Caraway pining after Gatsby, even though its commonly talked about when reading the book. It would be nice for the teachers to show some confidence in mentioning someone is gay, or even the possibility of it without it being an insult.* (2SLGBTQ)

Students were also asked whether, in the past year, they were ever taught about 2SLGBTQ history or people, or were exposed to literature with 2SLGBTQ characters or themes, with a third (33%) of CH participants reporting that they did not know (versus less that 10% of 2SLGBTQ respondents). Of those who recalled, CH students were more likely than 2SLGBTQ participants to report being taught about famous 2SLGBTQ people (34% versus 17%), 2SLGBTQ history (25% versus 18%), and learning through literature about 2SLGBTQ characters or themes (29% versus 25%). One possible explanation for the higher numbers of CH students reporting they had learned 2SLGBTQ content may be that students' judgement about what constitutes meaningful curricular content. For example, CH students may consider any mention of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression to be 2SLGBTQ content, whereas 2SLGBTQ students may desire more in-depth content or may be more aware of 2SLGBTQ content generally and recognize when such content is missing or excluded from the curriculum.

## Gay-Straight Alliances/Gender & Sexuality Alliances

> *We tried to make an lgbt club last year, but we kind of all stopped going… Our principal is not a fan of the community, though, and he said that the rainbow flag was not a real flag.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *Lgbt people are silenced and gsa is useless because you're still keeping it a group not the entire school.* (2SLGBTQ)

Sometimes going by different names (such as Queer/Straight Alliances or Gender Sexuality Alliances) and a variety of mandates, GSAs have been one of the key interventions in support of 2SLGBTQ students in schools. Using the findings from the First Climate Survey, Egale Canada was able to develop a comprehensive GSA initiative (MyGSA.ca) and developed province/territory-specific guides on supporting 2SLGBTQ students in many of Canada's provinces and territories.

Depending on the character of a GSA, its benefits include increased social connection, less harassment in school based on sexuality or gender, better mental health and wellbeing, the ability to develop advocacy and activism initiatives, and ensuring supportive connections between peers and to teachers/staff (Baams & Russell, 2020; Day, Fish, et al., 2019; Fetner et al., 2012; Konishi et al., 2013; Lapointe, 2017; St. John et al., 2014). Further, research suggests that the wide-ranging potential effects of GSAs extend to CH students as well, providing more positive and supportive school climates for all students (Saewyc et al., 2014). It is important to note that while the benefits of GSAs are well documented in the research literature, they may fall short in providing welcoming spaces for BIPOC students or those marginalized within 2SLGBTQ communities (Lapointe, 2017; McCready, 2004a); it is vital for GSAs to enact intersectional and anti-oppressive approaches within these groups to ensure all students are welcomed.

While the vast majority of students did not know whether or not their schools had a policy or a procedure for reporting either incidents of homophobia or transphobia, this was less the case when participants were asked if their school district publicly supports the formation of GSA clubs or other clubs that focus on 2SLGBTQ students and issues. Nevertheless, among LGBQ participants, 43% did not know. Roughly a third (36%) of trans students did not know, and unsurprisingly, over half (53%) of CH participants did not know. Over half (51%) of trans students answered "yes", followed by 46% of cisgender LGBQ participants, and 39% of CH youth.

While many participants were unsure if their school districts officially supported the formation of GSA clubs, they were more certain when asked whether or not there was a GSA or other such club that focuses on 2SLGBTQ students and issues as only 6% of 2SLGBTQ participants did not know (28% of CH respondents did not know). Three-quarters (75%) of trans participants as well as 72% of cisgender LGBQ students and 59% of CH respondents confirmed that their school had a GSA or other club that focuses on 2SLGBTQ students and issues.

Hands down, one of the greatest success stories in the decade since the First Climate Survey has been the dramatic increase in the number of GSAs or similar type clubs in every region of the country. With the exception of Québec (42%), the majority of 2SLGBTQ students from provinces or territories with an adequate sample size indicated that their school has a GSA or another club that focuses on 2SLGBTQ students and issues. See FIGURE 45.
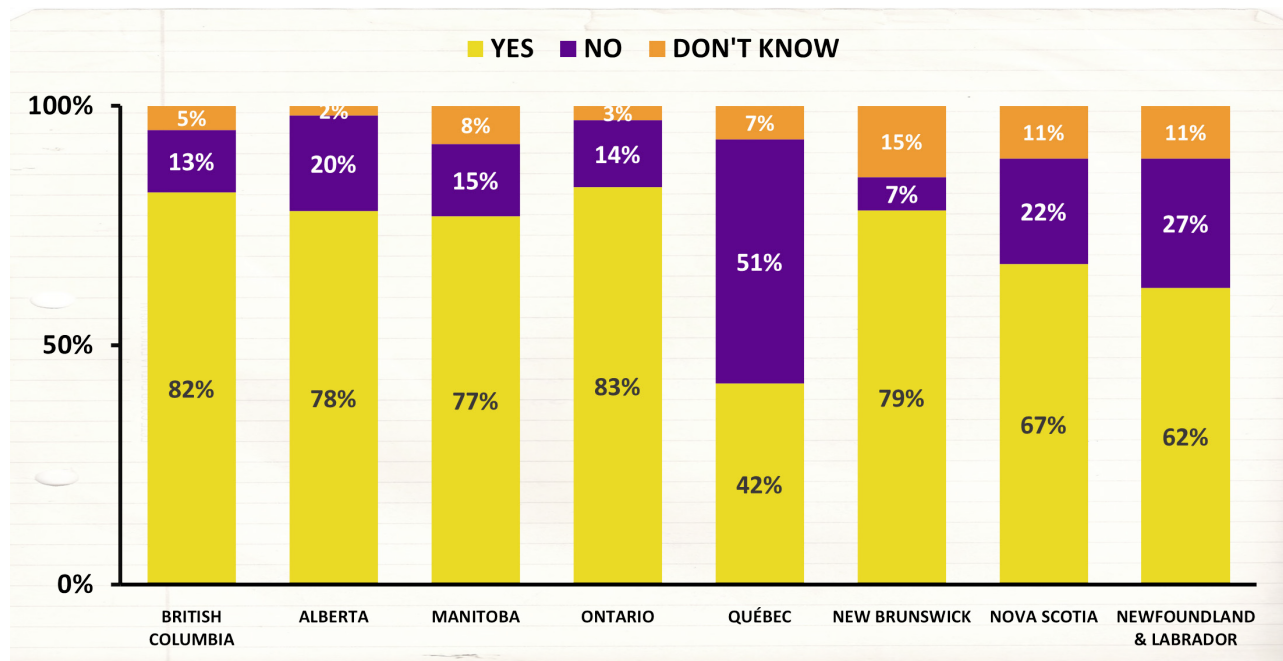
High school students were more likely to report that their school has a GSA or similar club than students in Grade 8, where only 41% of 2SLGBTQ participants affirmed that their school had such a club (11% did not know and 48% replied that their school did not have one), compared to 78% of 2SLGBTQ students in grade 12 (7% did not know and 15% indicated that their school did not have a GSA). One explanation for the somewhat lower prevalence of GSAs in Newfoundland & Labrador as well as Nova Scotia is no doubt due to the fact that both provinces had a larger representation of grade 8 students than the rest of the country. For example, when 2SLGBTQ grade 8 students from Newfoundland & Labrador are excluded, the percent of participants who confirm that their school has a GSA increases to 77%, which is in line with the rest of the country. There is not a self-evident explanation as to why Québec has such significantly lower numbers of GSAs or similar clubs; it may simply be that GSAs are less common or that there is not a culture of GSAs in schools. When we looked at other regional data to see how Québec compared across other interventions in support of 2SLGBTQ students (such as 2SLGBTQ-inclusive curriculum), we found that Québec was on par with other provinces and, in fact, was in some areas higher than other provinces (e.g., highest percentage of teachers who challenged homophobia in class). More research looking at GSAs in Québec would be useful to see how social support among students is developed.

2SLGBTQ participants from schools with anti-homophobia and/or anti-transphobia policies (81%) were substantially more likely to attend a school that has a GSA than respondents from schools without such a policy (58%). Relatedly,

2SLGBTQ students who indicated that their school district publicly supports the formation of GSA clubs or similar clubs that focus on 2SLGBTQ students and issues were significantly more likely to confirm that their school had such a club (87%), compared to participants from schools without this district-level support (49%), or respondents who did not know if this higher-level support existed (63%).

*We were allowed to operate a GSA but we were under no circumstances allowed to call it a GSA or talk about LGBTQ stuff outside of the club as per the Catholic school board's directive...we had to call it "unity group". Our "teacher leader" was a nun who was very much rooted in traditional catholic views and had no knowledge of LGBTQ issues. I was on the planning committee and I often felt like we were just very very restricted in what we could do, and as if we were always being watched/censored. It wasn't fun.* (2SLGBTQ)

2SLGBTQ participants who attend Catholic schools were less likely to report that their school had a GSA or similar club (57%) than those who do not go Catholic-based schools (75%). This finding lends itself to the proverbial phrase "Is the glass half empty or half full?" On the one hand, this is a sizeable difference between 2SLGBTQ students who attend and those who do not attend Catholic schools; on the other hand, this is a colossal improvement from the First Climate Survey in which the vast majority (94%) of 2SLGBTQ respondents attending Catholic schools reported that their school did not have a GSA or some other club that focused on 2SLGBTQ students and issues.

Our study confirms that having district-level validation for the formation of GSAs is an important first step to actually having a GSA. We also found that having support of such a club from school administration is equally imperative, if not more so, to providing a school climate that is conducive to the success and wellbeing of 2SLGBTQ students.

As a precursor, our results show that 2SLGBTQ participants from schools in districts that publicly endorse the formation of GSA clubs are three times more likely (63%) to indicate that their principal or vice-principal is very supportive of their school's club, compared to 20% whose district does not openly promote GSAs and 44% of respondents who did not know. We also found that 2SLGBTQ students who report that their principal or vice-principal is very supportive were more likely to:

- Agree that "I feel like a real part of my school" (75% versus 61% who indicate they are somewhat supportive, and 34% who report that they are either unsupportive or neither supportive nor unsupportive).

- Agree that "I feel proud of belonging to my school" (73% versus 59% and 29%).

- Report that if a teacher or school staff member has been present when homophobic remarks are made, that they intervene most of the time or always (48% versus 35% and 21%).

- Regard teachers as being very effective in addressing homophobic harassment (31% versus 13% and 6%), transphobic harassment (26% versus 9% and 4%), and biphobic harassment (25% versus 8% and 6%).

- Generally see their school community as being very supportive of 2SLGBTQ people (46% versus 13% and 9%).

Additionally, 2SLGBTQ participants who view their principal or vice-principal as very supportive of their school's GSA were less likely to:

- Experience physical victimization at school in the past year (13% versus 21% who report they are somewhat supportive, and 32% who state that they are unsupportive or are neither supportive nor unsupportive).

- Report being sexually harassed (14% versus 27% and 38%).

- Feel unsafe at school due to their sexual identity or perceived sexual identity (38% versus 52% and 67%).

## What Students Want Teachers to Know About Supporting 2SLGBTQ People

> *Don't set heterosexual as the "normal"* (2SLGBTQ)

> *Don't assume everyone is straight lmao* (2SLGBTQ)

> *We exist, and we need to be educated on topics such as sexual health and wellbeing.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *Stop assuming everyone is straight/cis when speaking about our issues, stop using outdated videos to teach about name-calling.* (2SLGBTQ)

> *Being overly careful around us makes us feel awful too, we aren't snowflakes or porcelain. Treat us like normal people.* (2SLGBTQ)

*How to intervene and educate students who perpetuate harm.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Don't out kids to their parents. I've seen it happen and it's incredibly harmful.* (2SLGBTQ)

*That so many students especially boys say That is SO GAY, lol and that this statement smudged with a ton of stigma should be addressed by the teachers and should be forbidden to be said.* (2SLGBTQ)

*How intersecting identities work, particularly w/ LGBTQ identities and religions beyond Christianity.* (2SLGBTQ)

*I really want more representation in projects and such. It has always been straight straight straight when it realistically not always straight relationships.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Considering I go to a Catholic School, I don't expect them to change their beliefs about Homosexuality (and others), but simply respect that others beliefs about it.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Sometimes teachers will joke around and say things like "this playboy, after the hot girls," and they don't seem to take it seriously in any way, but it still sort of feels like them saying general statements like that are still defaulting straight, not to mention telling the class that the default is straight.* (2SLGBTQ)

*To teach about... lgbt people, and how it's not okay. Whenever I'm fem presenting around certain people that find out I'm queer, all get is the classic 'lesbians are hot' from straight men around me. It's not okay, and has always made me uncomfortable on many levels. It happens to my other gay friends aswell, yet, nobody talks about it.* (2SLGBTQ)

Toward the end of the survey, we asked participants what they wanted their teachers to know about supporting 2SLGBTQ people. The sheer volume of multiple suggestions in and of itself is a testament to 2SLGBTQ students' desire to have teacher's aide them in creating a safer and more inclusive school environment. Among 2SLGBTQ participants, they wanted their teachers to:

- Understand why silence around 2SLGBTQ topics is harmful (trans 80% and cisgender LGBQ 78%).
- Avoid making assumptions about students' gender and/or sexuality (trans 81% and cisgender LGBQ 76%).
- Learn how to address gender neutral pronoun options (trans 81% and cisgender LGBQ 71%).
- Include 2SLGBTQ people in classroom examples (trans 79% and cisgender LGBQ 75%).

- Become more informed about trans people's experiences (trans 79% and cisgender LGBQ 70%).

- Recognize the importance of supportive teachers and school staff (trans 75% and cisgender LGBQ 69%).

- Respect the individuality and experiences of 2SLGBTQ students (i.e., avoid tokenizing 2SLGBTQ experiences/students) (trans 74% and cisgender LGBQ 68%).

- Acknowledge the specific barriers that 2SLGBTQ students face (trans 73% and cisgender LGBQ 69%).

- Appreciate the importance of "out" 2SLGBTQ teachers and school staff (trans 74% and cisgender LGBQ 68%).

- Better support 2SLGBTQ students in parent/guardian interactions (trans 72% and cisgender LGBQ 66%).

- Learn language about specific 2SLGBTQ identities (trans 68% and cisgender LGBQ 61%).

- Understand that students want to have more of a voice in how to make school better for 2SLGBTQ students and/or topics (trans 68% and cisgender LGBQ 59%).

- Provide more information about intersex people's experiences (trans 65% and cisgender LGBQ 60%).

- Learn more about community-specific resources that support 2SLGBTQ youth (trans 66% and cisgender LGBQ 62%).

This list of knowledge and strategies 2SLGBTQ students would like their teachers to know about in supporting 2SLGBTQ people provides a useful cataloguing of approaches that may be taken up through professional development. Some of this information is key in prompting teachers to engage in meaningful 2SLGBTQ practices, such as understanding why silence about 2SLGBTQ topics is harmful, whereas other aspects represent ways that teachers may better respect the identities of students, such as avoiding making assumptions about student gender and sexuality, learning to address pronoun conversations, and respecting the individuality and experiences of 2SLGBTQ students. Other strategies speak to knowledge gaps and the need for teachers to develop curricular content that more comprehensively and accurately reflects 2SLGBTQ experiences and identities.

*Please, please, please start using singular they instead of he/she or "he or she".* (2SLGBTQ)

*I would love for teachers to begin using gender neutral pronouns as a default when teaching. It would also be fantastic if more 2SLGBTQIA history was taught, and when showing examples, having more open queer representation.* (2SLGBTQ)

*When a student wants to change the name and pronouns they go by at school for reasons i don't understand the parent must be made aware. I feel like schools should take the child's safety into consideration more in these circumstances. If a child is outed to an unsupportive parent it can put the child in serious danger. Most of the time you don't know and a kids home life is like, school might be the only place they feel like they can be themselves. And having to make the parent aware of a change in name and pronouns can cause a kid to lose the sense of safety they may have had at school. Overall i feel like this needs to be rethought. It's understandable, and i get why this would need to happen but there needs to be a different way to go about it.* (2SLGBTQ)

*Its like straight people are immune to "being too straight" but us gays are always too gay or not gay enough. Being an entire lesbian in a school with like four lesbians is rough… it's quite isolating… it's easy to feel misunderstood…*(2SLGBTQ)

*INCLUDE people, the teachers at my school talk about how important LGBTQ students are, but they never make actions. Yeah, okay, putting the pride sign on the classroom doors, but they get ripped down and made fun of and nothing is done. My school only talks, the teachers do not bring in speakers, and punish hard, and check up on students included in LGBTQ and see if there's anything they need, and if they're okay.* (CH)

*I had a handful of teachers who were very supportive and receptive to our frustrations as LGBTQ students. I want them to know how appreciated they are. They saved my life.* (2SLGBTQ)

# Limitations

Despite the large sample size, particularly among 2SLGBTQ youth, the study should not be regarded as a probability sample as participants were not randomly selected and therefore it would be inappropriate to generalize the findings to all students.

The findings are illustrative of the perceptions and experiences of the students who responded, but do not necessarily reflect the perceptions and experiences of all middle- and high-school students across Canada. Despite these limitations, especially since national population parameters do not exist

in Canada regarding 2SLGBTQ youth, we are confident that the methods employed as well as the large sample size obtained has resulted in a robust assessment of the school climate in Canada.

## Intersectionality

2SLGBTQ youth have varied and different experiences of being 2SLGBTQ based on other aspects of their identity beyond sexual orientation or gender identity and expression, such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), and/or disability. While we recognize the importance of an intersectional analysis in understanding the varied experiences of 2SLGBTQ youth, there are limitations to employing an intersectionality framework using statistical analyses (Bauer & Scheim, 2019; Codiroli Mcmaster & Cook, 2019).

Throughout this report, we have relied on between-group comparisons based on statistical bivariate crosstabs to help describe the varied experiences of 2SLGBTQ youth based on other aspects of their identity or social context, such as gender (cisgender and trans/non-binary; boys and girls), sexual orientation (2SLGBTQ and heterosexual), racialized identities (Black, Indigenous, Asian, mixed race, and White), and school context (Catholic schools; regions; urban and rural). These between-group comparisons provide insight into the different experiences of 2SLGBTQ youth, but they are limited in their ability to fully develop and adequately explain experiences using an intersectionality framework. For instance, intersectionality seeks to recognize the impacts of multiple marginalization on people's experiences, and more specifically, to understand the compounding effects of multiple marginalization for experiences of oppression, discrimination, and privilege (Balsam et al., 2011; Coulter et al., 2021; Crenshaw, 1991; Cyrus, 2017); there are ongoing conversations about how statistical analyses may address these experiences accurately (e.g., would the compounding effect be represented by an additive model or an exponential one). As such, we primarily rely on bivariate or trivariate between-group comparisons to highlight the effects of multiple marginalization on the experiences of 2SLGBTQ youth, but also recognize its limitations, which are predominant in most large-scale surveys that employ statistical methods (Bowleg, 2012).

We also acknowledge that our ability to present between-group comparisons is limited by our sample and by the survey instrument. First, our sample is non-representative of the student population in Canada, and this meant that we were not able to report on analyses for all our between-group sub-populations; where possible, and where we were able to conduct these analyses in statistically reliable ways, we have done so and include them in the report. Second, the survey questionnaire did not include questions that were

designed to address intersectional experiences of students. Unfortunately, this is recognizable only in hindsight, and we affirm the importance of developing these questions and including them in future research. It is vital to understanding the experiences of 2SLGBTQ students in schools to develop a full picture of the variation of 2SLGBTQ students across multiple marginalizing factors.

We also were not able to provide between-group analyses on disability/ableism or socioeconomic status (SES)/classism, as we did not ask students about disability or their family situation in regard to SES. One student's comment highlighted this limitation: "[Y]ou really should be asking about disability on this form. Almost every disabled person I know has been harassed including myself and for the school board to not include that is further reducing our visibility. I was heavily physically abused in elementary school because I'm disabled and harassed by teachers in high school. I can't stress enough how important is to include us on forms like this." Similarly, SES is often used as grounds for harassment and contributes to social marginalization in schools, as well as being linked to student academic outcomes (Assari et al., 2018; Jang, 2020). Both disability and SES are important factors that often negatively impact 2SLGBTQ students and contribute to negative school climates and experiences of marginalization in schools (Dykes & Thomas, 2015). Again, we affirm the importance of developing these questions, including them in future research and analyses, and implementing related anti-harassment measures in schools.

## Racialized Comparisons

Being 2SLGBTQ is not a monolithic experience. Examining particular student experiences at the intersection of a wide range of racialized social identities with 2SLGBTQ identities is a key part of the work to address inequities in school. While certainly not new, the systemic impact of racism has been poignantly highlighted recently in the Black Lives Matter social and political movement, which has gained traction in the wake of several high-profile murders and assaults of Black people by police officers and other law enforcement personnel in both Canada and the United States. Indigenous peoples have a similarly long history with police violence and discrimination, incidents of discrimination and neglect in health-care settings, and discriminatory child welfare policies enacted through settler colonialism. These experiences do not occur in a vacuum and they impact the social and institutional attitudes, behaviours, and systems of Canadian society—including education systems. For racialized 2SLGBTQ students, racism and homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia are interlocking systems of oppression that work to marginalize and tacitly sanction

discrimination in schools that is in urgent need of redress (Kumashiro, 2001; McCready, 2004b; Wilson, 2008). It is also worth noting the role that White supremacy plays in the privileging of White students and marginalization of BIPOC students—which again often serves to sideline conversations of race and treat experiences of 2SLGBTQ harassment as discrete from racism.

We unfortunately were unable to report on racialized comparisons as fully as we wanted. Similar to our limitation regarding intersectionality above, we were limited by our sample and the survey questionnaire in conducting intersectional analyses of racial, gender, and sexual identities. Except where noted, we did not have adequate sub-sample sizes to effectively, reliability, and robustly examine the effect that the various intersections of race, gender, and sexual identities have on school climate. For some items, there were no statistically significant differences between White and racialized groups or between racialized groups. However, this doesn't mean the results were not significant in a non-statistical sense. For example, we know that when groups already living with racism and poverty also experience just as much hostility based on gender and sexuality as groups not living with racism and poverty, the result can be a crushing level of discrimination. We would highlight the importance of this area for future research and for school system interventions.

## COVID-19

The data were partially collected during the COVID-19 pandemic when students across the country were participating in remote learning (specifically between March and June 2020); 25% of the respondents filled in the survey during this time. In order to test for differences pre- and during COVID-19, we compared the two samples across a variety of measures. There was little difference between the two samples with one notable exception – that of the positive mental health measures. Among CH students, the difference was negligible; 54% of respondents were determined to be "flourishing" in the pre-COVID participation versus 51% who completed the survey between March and June 2019. However, 2SLGBTQ students were less likely to be flourishing during the COVID-19 time period than prior to COVID-19 (21% flourishing pre-COVID versus 15% during COVID-19). This is in keeping with other research on the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on the emotional wellbeing of marginalized populations (Egale Human Rights Trust, 2020b).

## Students with 2SLGBTQ parents

In the First National Climate Survey, we were able to provide more comprehensive analyses of the perceptions and experiences of students who identified as having one or more 2SLGBTQ parents. We were not able to

replicate such an analysis for the current study due to smaller than expected sub-sample sizes. We are unsure of why the sample was lower than expected for this group.

# Conclusion

Results from the Second National Climate Survey contribute to an established record of research on the presence, impact, and institutional responses to homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in schools. Similar to studies conducted in Britain (Bradlow et al., 2017) and the United States (Kosciw et al., 2020), our findings show that many school climates are governed by a deleterious discourse system toxic to the wellbeing of 2SLGBTQ students, who regard their schools as unsafe, experience various forms of harassment, are less attached, are more likely to skip school because they do not feel safe, feel isolated and alone, are less connected to their schools, and far too often, are languishing in their mental health and wellbeing.

All human experience is powerfully structured by value-laden discourse systems that perpetuate inequalities through social institutions such as schools.[2] Drawing on a social constructionist approach to educational research, "discourse" refers to how we think and communicate within a social context. Educational sociologists regard discourse as entrenched in, and embryonic of, relations of power and privilege, which are regulated and controlled within hierarchical systems that defines what is considered normal, "common sense," legitimate, and right. Those who do not fit within these dominant discourse systems are thereby stigmatized, and are considered to be abnormal, wrong, illegitimate, and sometimes even dangerous. For example, in the context of school climates, cisgender heteronormativity is maintained through language and practices that valorize some (e.g., CH students) and marginalize others (e.g., 2SLGBTQ students). A good illustration of the discursive impact of language is with the homonegative expression "that's so gay," which we found to be regularly used across Canadian schools. When such language is used, the idea of compulsory heterosexuality is reinforced because statements like "that's so gay" are analogous to "that's so stupid," and thereby imply that heterosexuality is the preferred, "not stupid," identity.

The discourse of cisgender heteronormativity, then, operates as a "regime of truth" that positions cisgender heterosexuality as not just the normal but also the rightful, desirable and required form of sexual and gender identity. Results from the Second National Climate Survey highlight the detrimental effects of

2 The argument we put forth in this conclusion is adapted from and reiterates our argument from the book chapter "Hidden rainbows in plain sight: Human rights discourse and gender and sexual minority youth (Peter & Taylor, 2017)."

cisgender heteronormative discourse systems operating within school culture, which include: HBTP language practices; unsafe spaces; direct victimization; and lack of school connectiveness and attachment. In essence, cisgender heteronormative discourses enforce the notion that 2SLGBTQ students are not welcome at school and that they must conceal their identities in order to attend safely.

Despite the collective impact cisgender heteronormativity has on all 2SLGBTQ individuals, it is insufficient to paint all 2SLGBTQ students with the same brush. The 2SLGBTQ community is vast, diverse, and far more nuanced than what popular culture would have us believe. As our results have shown, there is tremendous variability among 2SLGBTQ students, which also influences their experiences. It is thus vital that an intersectional framework be applied, which is explicitly linked to power and privilege – even within 2SLGBTQ identities.

As Michel Foucault argues, "where there is power, there is resistance." Thus, even though 2SLGBTQ and CH people are bound to dominant gender and sexuality discourses, it is possible to disrupt these systems by engaging in counter-discourses, such as supportive and inclusive school climates, that challenge what is accepted as "normal." This allows space for individual agency and opportunities for alternative ways of being that dominant discourses otherwise foreclose. As we found, many schools have implemented interventions and are incorporating 2SLGBTQ-inclusive practices – all of which send the message that 2SLGBTQ students are indeed entitled to the same rights as everyone else and that 2SLGBTQ students and those with 2SLGBTQ family members are fully welcome in their school community. These intervention and inclusive practices include GSAs, 2SLGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, increased 2SLGBTQ visibility, and anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia policies. Put together, they can be thought of as effective resistance strategies and counter-discourses in their own right, and are extremely encouraging moving forward, because our results show that when employed, school climates improve for 2SLGBTQ students.

We also found, similar to the First National Climate Survey, that 59%, or roughly 1,280 of the 2,170 CH students as well as 93% of 2SLGBTQ students (1,291 of 1,388 participants), found it upsetting to hear homophobic remarks. Yet, if so many students are upset by such degradation, why do so few intervene when HBTP comments are made, or they witness incidents of HBTP harassment and abuse, or they witness or even engage in these practices as well? As we have argued elsewhere, we suspect that many students are afraid to act because they are all too aware, even if not consciously or in a way they can articulate, that challenging cisgender heteronormative discourse puts them in danger

of being perceived to be 2SLGBTQ and therefore risk becoming the targets of name-calling and degradation themselves. For them, the costs of speaking up outweigh the benefits, especially because fitting in during adolescence is one of the most important elements of wellbeing and survival. Students using such language may not like these phrases, but the thought of leaving the "group" and finding themselves in the uninhabitable zone of schoolyard discourse is also inconceivable.

This is not to suggest that students are unquestioning followers with no agency or ability to engage in transformative social change on issues pertaining to social justice or human rights. Indeed, in some schools, students have led the way on this and other social justice issues, lobbying the school administration to implement GSAs, organizing 2SLGBTQ-inclusive events, participating in Pride marches, and speaking up in class to critique homophobia and transphobia or to address the absence of 2SLGBTQ content. It is simply to remind us that young people learn life lessons not only when adults exhibit apparent hypocrisy, but when they demonstrate the courage of their convictions as well.

It is unrealistic to always expect students to carry the heavy intervention load when incidents of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia take place in school culture. Teachers and other educational personnel need to step up to the plate, because their silence not only helps to validate homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia, it helps to ensure the recirculation of fear by teaching young people that they are on their own on these issues and that adults will not help them. If all teachers, administrators, and school districts/boards spoke respectfully of 2SLGBTQ people (literally and through specific interventions both at the school and district levels), the silent majority of students – the 59% of CH students and the 93% of 2SLGBTQ students – would feel more empowered. Young people might learn new ways to say "that's stupid," without insulting categories of people, and they may come to understand that most of their peers are not committed to HBTP behaviour either. 2SLGBTQ youth and the 59% of young CH people who quietly wish for something better would have a solid group of allies, backed by numerous human rights legislations, that could alter the discourse systems of students across Canada.

If 2SLGBTQ students are experiencing disproportionate amounts of discrimination and harassment, yet the majority of CH students are distressed by this, where do we go from here to change the landscape across Canadian schools? There is a clear disconnect between Canada's official human rights discourse, endorsed broadly in society, and the HBTP discourse of Canadian schools. On one hand, public opinion polls (Akin, 2019; McElroy, 2016) consistently show that the majority of Canadians believe homophobia,

biphobia, and transphobia is wrong; they support same-sex marriage; and they believe identifying as 2SLGBTQ is simply what one is – like being Jewish, Indigenous, or a woman – not a moral issue or lifestyle choice that can be turned on and off. Yet, on the other hand, many Canadian school systems and other social institutions, remain frozen in time, often fearful of backlash from extreme right-wing religious organizations and political dogmatism. The end result is that schools are too often failing the children and youth they are professionally obligated to protect and respect, and as a result too many 2SLGBTQ students are going through school being abused and disrespected. Collectively, however, we can make it better, but change must be enacted. It is in this spirit that our recommendations are made.

# Recommendations

If they have not already, school system officials at all levels of the educational system from Ministries of Education to school principals should mandate the development of 2SLGBTQ-inclusive interventions in the form of thoroughly implemented policy and resource development. Results from the Second National Climate Survey can be used as empirical evidence to illustrate that when such strategies are employed, it can make a difference.

School system policies cannot in themselves produce respectful school climates for 2SLGBTQ students or for students with 2SLGBTQ family members, any more than declaring the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* has suddenly produced a discrimination-free society across Canada. However, what anti-HBTP harassment as well as 2SLGBTQ diversity policies can do, apart from their general symbolic value of conferring institutional legitimacy, is support the efforts of people working at the forefront of change. Students need to know they have the support of their teachers. Teachers need to know they have the support of their school administrators. School administrators need to know they have the support of their school district and school boards. School districts and school boards need to know they have support from their Ministries of Education. To this end, leadership must start at the top.

Recommendations are organized by the role individuals and systems have in the advancement of 2SLGBTQ issues in Canadian schools. We also provide governing principles that should applied across all recommendation groupings.

## Governing Principles

▶ **Include 2SLGBTQ students,** families/households, and parents/guardians in all policies, programs, and strategies.

▶ Pay attention to supporting the **safety and wellbeing** of trans students and do not assume that their needs are adequately addressed by attention to sexual diversity. Sexual diversity and gender diversity should be considered through aligned, distinct interventions throughout recommendations.

▶ Recognize the **impact of compounding oppressions**—such as heterosexism, cissexism, racism, classism, or ableism—experienced by multiply marginalized students and recognize the fluidity of privilege and marginalization. Approach recommendations with an intersectional understanding that multiple, interconnected forms of oppression need to be addressed within 2SLGBTQ inclusion efforts in schools.

▶ Meaningfully **include**, **consult**, and **engage** individuals and organizations with established expertise in intersectionality and 2SLGBTQ-inclusive education.

## Ministries of Education

▶ **Legislate the inclusion** of anti-HBTP harassment and discrimination measures in safe school policies, including steps for the effective implementation of such policies as well as requirements that school districts provide an annual inventory of 2SLGBTQ-inclusive efforts and annual evidence of meaningful implementation.

▶ Require all schools to include **respectful representations** of 2SLGBTQ people, and provide curricular guidelines and resources for mainstreaming 2SLGBTQ-inclusive teaching as well as transparent mechanisms for annual progress report guidelines in order to hold

school districts/boards and individual schools accountable for such implementation.

▶ **Legislate mandatory** 2SLGBTQ-inclusive sexual health and family life education.

## School Districts and School Boards

▶ **Adopt anti-2SLGBTQ discrimination and harassment policies** that explicitly include and define sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression and that provide clear language prohibiting discrimination and harassment on these grounds.

▶ Ensure that schools promptly and effectively **respond** to 2SLGBTQ harassment and discrimination and implement **clear reporting systems**.

▶ Implement policies and practices to ensure all students, especially 2SLGBQ students and trans students, have access to **inclusive facilities** (e.g., gender neutral washrooms, single-user change rooms, signage on multi-user spaces).

▶ **Provide resource support** in order to assist schools in the implementation of 2SLGBTQ-inclusive curricula.

▶ Actively promote the integration of 2SLGBTQ diversity **within regular professional development opportunities**.

## School Administrators

▶ **Provide professional development** and training opportunities designed to improve intervention strategies and build skills to enhance the number of supportive educators on 2SLGBTQ issues—including interventions that are grounded in **intersectional and anti-oppressive frameworks** to meaningfully address the experiences of multiple marginalizations faced

by many 2SLGBTQ students and explicitly connect with other equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives.

▶ Make explicit **anti-discriminatory school-based policies and practices** that protect and support 2SLGBTQ students (e.g., school dances and events, and dress codes), and ensure that teachers know how to implement them and respond effectively to incidents of HBTP harassment.

▶ **Provide student-centred interventions** for those who experience harassment and discrimination to ensure that students' needs and safety are addressed.

▶ **Issue proclamations of support** for 2SLGBTQ people and visible indicators of 2SLGBTQ inclusion that welcome and affirm 2SLGBTQ people.

▶ **Support student groups and clubs**, such as GSAs or similar 2SLGBTQ-inclusive student-led clubs, by providing material resources and staff supports; in schools where students have not come forward to start such clubs, **take initiative** by working with teachers to offer support for students to establish them.

▶ Take steps to **recruit and retain 2SLGBTQ educators and school staff**, including 2SLGBTQ BIPOC educators and school staff. These staffing efforts may be supported within schools through professional development on 2SLGBTQ inclusive schools, developing strategies on creating safer and affirming workplaces, and examining the barriers 2SLGBTQ educators or staff face.

▶ **Create teacher-based support groups** where they can collectively collaborate on how to address HBTP language, discrimination, and harassment in addition to ill treatment of other marginalized and stigmatized groups.

- ▶ Ensure that washrooms and change rooms are **accessible and inclusive** regardless of gender identity or gender expression.

- ▶ Provide 2SLGBTQ-inclusive **sexual health** and family life education.

## Teachers, Educators, and Other School Staff

- ▶ Educate students on all **anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies** protecting 2SLGBTQ students and students with 2SLGBTQ families, and **communicate clear support** for 2SLGBTQ students and encourage them to talk to you about any harassment or discrimination they experience.

- ▶ Ensure that there is **2SLGBTQ visibility** in classrooms (e.g., positive or affirming space stickers, posters, 2SLGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, etc.).

- ▶ Provide students access to accurate information regarding 2SLGBTQ individuals through **inclusive curricula and resources**, and work to ensure representation and inclusion of 2SLGBTQ people from a multitude of marginalized identities (e.g., racialized, SES, ability, etc.).

- ▶ Ensure 2SLGBTQ curricular content is a **regular feature** of classroom teaching (e.g., regularly use gender neutral pronouns, include same-sex relationships in examples, etc.). Ensure curricula across content areas **meaningfully includes and reflects** a wide range of 2SLGBTQ identities, experiences, and perspectives at the intersection of topics and identities.

- ▶ **Demonstrate allyship** through your actions by doing any or all of the following, especially teachers who identify as CH:
  - → **Educate yourself** by deepening your understanding of 2SLGBTQ-related issues, including basic terms and concepts, as it will go a long way in supporting 2SLGBTQ students and students with 2SLGBTQ family members.

→ **Actively and visibly enact your allyship** as you may not always know which members of your school community are 2SLGBTQ or have 2SLGBTQ loved ones.

→ **Engage in active listening** with 2SLGBTQ students and recognize that they are the experts of their own experiences; a good ally understands that they have a vital, active role to play but do not have all the answers, that they are "in, but out."

→ **Get involved** in school initiatives that promote 2SLGBTQ issues.

## Students

▶ **Be kind,** and reflect on the words of Amelia Earhart: "No kind action ever stops with itself. One kind action leads to another. Good example is followed. A single act of kindness throws out roots in all directions, and the roots spring up and make new trees. The greatest work that kindness does to others is that it makes them kind themselves."

▶ To CH students, work to **practice allyship** for 2SLGBTQ classmates by learning about 2SLGBTQ-related issues, be open and clear about your support for your 2SLGBTQ peers, **get involved** by joining GSAs and participating in school-wide events, and **be vocal** in opposing HBTP harassment by standing up for harassed students and in showing your support for 2SLGBTQ people.

▶ To 2SLGBTQ students especially, **be proud of who you are**. In the words of Chris Colfer, "There's nothing wrong with you. There's a lot wrong with the world you live in." Know that there are people in this world that honour, respect, value, and love you. We will keep working to make it better. Whether or not you feel safe to be out in your school and with your classmates, remember:

→ **Your safety is important**, and your life is yours to live. Don't feel pressured to come out until you are ready. Stand in your own space, and get to know yourself and your 2SLGBTQ community.

→ Find people who love and support you for who you are. **These people exist**.

→ 2SLGBTQ communities are **resilient** and bring such **joy** and **beauty** to the world – and **there's a place for you** in that community and this (just) world.

→ There is help available if you need it:

★ **Kids Help Phone**
https://kidshelpphone.ca/
1-800-668-6868

★ **Trans Lifeline**
https://translifeline.org/
1-877-330-6366

★ **Youthspace.ca**
http://www.youthspace.ca
778-783-0177

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## Related Research Publications

The following are selected publications from the research team on 2SLGBTQ education research. Further publications can be found on the RISE Research Program.

## *Research Reports*

Taylor, C., Peter, T., Campbell, C., Meyer, E., Ristock, J., & Short, D. (2015). The Every Teacher Project on LGBTQ-inclusive education in Canada's K-12 schools: Final report. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Teachers' Society.

Campbell, C. & Taylor, C. (2017). The Every Teacher Project Recommendations Toolkit. Winnipeg, MB: The Manitoba Teachers' Society.

Taylor C., Peter T., Edkins T., Campbell C., Émond G., & Saewyc E. (2016). The National Inventory of School District Interventions in Support of LGBTQ Student Wellbeing: Final Report. Vancouver, BC: Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre, University of British Columbia.

Taylor, C. & Peter, T., with McMinn, T.L., Elliott, T., Beldom, S., Ferry, A., Gross, Z., Paquin, S., & Schachter, K. (2011). Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final report. Toronto, ON: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust

## The First National Climate Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia in Canadian Schools

Peter, T., Taylor, C., & Edkins, T. (2017). A call for "trans-action": The role of enacted stigma in mediating the relationship between school climate and school attachment among gender minority students. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 63 (4), 328–343.

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Meyer, E., Taylor, C., & Peter. T. (2015). Perspectives on Gender and Sexual Diversity (GSD) inclusive education: Comparisons between gay/ lesbian/bisexual and straight educators. *Sex Education: Sexuality, Society, and Learning*, 15, 3, 221–234.

## Other related scholarly publications

Peter, T. (2018). Mind the gap: Examining the positive mental health of sexual minority Canadians. *Health Promotion International*, 33, 665–675.

Peter, T. (2018). More than a feeling? An empirical analysis of the dual-continua model on a national sample of lesbian, gay, and bisexual identified Canadians. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 65 (6), 814–831.

Peter, T., Edkins, T., Watson, R.J., Adgei, J., Homma, Y., & Saewyc, E. (2017). Trends in suicidality among sexual minority and heterosexual students in a Canadian population-based cohort study. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 4, 1, 115–123.

Veale, J.F., Peter, T., Travers, R., & Saewyc, E. (2017). Enacted stigma, mental health, and protective factors among transgender youth in Canada. *Transgender Health*, 2 (1), 207–216.

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# Resources

## Help Lines

- **Kids Help Phone**
  https://kidshelpphone.ca/
  1-800-668-6868

- **Trans Lifeline**
  https://translifeline.org/
  1-877-330-6366

- **Youthspace.ca**
  http://www.youthspace.ca
  778-783-0177

## Egale Resources

- Pronoun Usage Guide – Featuring Sophie Labelle

- Supporting your Gender Diverse Child

- Anti-2SLGBTQI Cyberbullying: A Resource for Educators

- A Guide to Virtual GSA's

- Affirming Adults in the School Community

- 50 years later: Sex, Sin & 69 – Documentary Trailer and Learning Resources

- Practicing 2SLGBTQI Allyship

- Inclusive Washrooms Resource

- Draw The Line – Against Transphobic Violence In Schools

- Specific Egale Training and Workshops

## Supporting BIPOC 2SLGBTQI youth

- Black and LGBTQ: Approaching Intersectional Conversations - The Trevor Project (US resource)
  - ▶ Guide to approaching conversations about identities, and specifically conversations about the nuances at the intersection of anti-Black racism and homophobia/biphobia/transphobia, modeling respect, care, accountability and safety.

- [Becoming queerly responsive: Culturally responsive pedagogy for Black and Latino urban queer youth](#) – YouthRex Research Summary (Brockenbrough, 2016)
  - ▶ Research Summary created by youth discussing Brockenbrough's 2016 research, specifically highlighting culturally responsive approaches to community education.

- [Erasure and Resilience: The Experiences of LGBTQ Students of Color - GLSEN](#) (US resource)
  - ▶ A series of four reports exploring the experience of QTBIPOC youth in schools, offering resources in how to support students of colour.

- [Safe and Caring Schools for Two Spirit Youth: A Guide for Teachers and Students](#) – The Society for Safe and Caring Schools & Communities
  - ▶ A resource guide providing insights into the challenges that many Two Spirit students face in education, including suggestions for teachers working to address these challenges.

- [QTBIPOC Youth Road Map](#) – QMUNITY
  - ▶ A visual resource created from a 2017 Urban Native Youth Association Forum in partnership with QMUNITY, displaying shared services, issues, and what supports are lacking in their communities.

## School-wide interventions & Staff Development

- [Model School District Policy on Transgender and Gender Non-conforming Students - GLSEN](#) (US resource)
  - ▶ Use this document to assess and then take action toward supporting transgender and gender non-conforming students in your schools.

- [Trans youth and the Right to Access Public Washrooms – YouthRex](#)
  - ▶ This community research explores some of the challenges, fears, anxieties and issues that trans and other 2SLGBQI youth face when seeking access to public washrooms.

- [LGBTQ Inclusive School Assessment – GLSEN](#) (US resource)
  - ▶ This document can be used as a checklist to assess the areas in which your schools can ensure safe and inclusive environments are fostered in your schools.

- [Disclosure – Netflix](#)
  - ▶ This landmark documentary takes viewers through the history of transgender representation in the media, investigating the harmful

tropes and stereotypes embedded into our societies that have a direct and often violent impact on how transgender and gender nonconforming people move through the world.

- [Sex Ed Beyond the Basics - Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights](#)
  - ▶ This resource is a tool for educators on sexuality and sexual health, approaching sexuality education across all genders and sexualities from a sex positive, human rights perspective.

- [LGBTQ Materials in school libraries – National School Library Standards](#) (US Resource)
  - ▶ Collection highlighting resources and information about how to address challenges in censorship and protecting student privacy around affirming library content.

- [The Pride Collection – 2SLGBTQI Affirming Books – Toronto Public Library](#)
  - ▶ Showcases books, movies, and magazines specifically curated around 2SLGBTQI community needs.

- [Gender Affirming and Inclusive Athletics Participation - GLSEN](#) (US resource)
  - ▶ Guide featuring recommendations toward 2SLGBTQI inclusive sports and athletics policies.

## Days of Significance

- [International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHOBIT)](#)
  - ▶ Provides informational posters and publications for schools and other organizations to participate in the activities on May 17 and year-round.

- [Pink T-Shirt Day](#)
  - ▶ International day against bullying, discrimination, and homophobia in schools and communities that invites everyone to celebrate diversity by wearing a pink shirt and organizing activities in their schools and communities. February.

- [Day of Silence](#)
  - ▶ A non-confrontational, yet empowering way to highlight issues of LGBTQ name-calling. Free resources to help student groups organize this event in their school communities. April.

- [Trans Day of Remembrance](#)

- ▶ International day mobilizing to counter transphobic violence faced by transgender communities, specifically taking the time to honour the trans people lost due to violence or exclusion. November 20th.
- Trans Day of Visibility
  - ▶ International annual event on March 31st dedicated to creating the space for visibility and recognition for transgender people, while also recognizing and spreading awareness about transphobic discrimination.
- Solidarity Week – GLSEN
  - ▶ An event held every October to end anti-LGBTQ bullying and harassment in K-12 schools by building ties with allies.

## K-12 Classrooms

- Developing LGBTQ-Inclusive Classroom Curriculum - GLSEN (US Resource)
  - ▶ Guide to providing affirming and inclusive curriculum for students, including positive representation and insights about how to address harmful language and behaviour.

- Gender Galaxy Exercise - Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights
  - ▶ A visual teaching resource & exercise prompting expansive discussions about our unique relationships to all of the ways individuals navigate gender and sexuality.
- Creating Community in your Classrooms: "I am Me" Poem Lesson Plan - HRC (US resource)
  - ▶ Short exercise aimed at the grades 3-5 aimed to help students share and explore their identities.

## National Web Resources

- Gender Creative Kids
- PFLAG Canada
- Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity
- The Arquives – Canada's LGBTQI2 Archives
- Arc Foundation
- Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre (SARAVYC)

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