



Still In Every Class In Every School

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



Key Takeaways



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.

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Introduction

The Second National Climate Survey on Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia in Canadian Schools, conducted by researchers from the University of Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba in partnership with Egale Canada, provides decision-makers across Canada with the statistical evidence they need to develop and implement 2SLGBTQ-specific policies. The study's focus is on middle schools and secondary schools, specifically on grades 8 through 12. It follows the [First National Climate Survey](#), which launched in 2008 and is an invaluable tool for educators, school administrators, students and parents, government officials, and academics.

Like its predecessor, the Second National Climate Survey is designed to assess school climate (grades 8 through 12) through students' self-reported school experiences of hostility, inclusion, and support. The study aims to contribute to the growing body of advocacy and scholarship both nationally and internationally on school-based experiences of school climate in order to advance human rights and social justice for 2SLGBTQ students and their families. In total, over 4000 individuals in Grade 8 or higher across Canada participated in the survey. Approximately 39% of these students identified as 2SLGBTQ. (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.)

Findings

64% of all participants reported hearing homophobic comments daily or weekly at school.

30% of 2SLGBTQ respondents had been the victims of cyberbullying, compared to 8% of cisgender heterosexual respondents.

57% of trans respondents had been targets of mean rumours or lies.

Many of the study's findings are deeply troubling. Homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia remain rampant in Canadian schools. Students reported hearing homophobic, biphobic, and/or transphobic (HBTP) language at least weekly and that it was used by most students. 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 cisgender heterosexual peers. The situation is particularly challenging for students who are trans and/or non-binary, as trans and/or non-binary 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).

A large proportion of 2SLGBTQ students reported that they were unlikely to report the harassment they experienced to adults in their lives. Those who did report bullying and harassment to school staff indicated that school staff were not effective in addressing transphobic harassment.

79% of trans students who had been the victims of physical harassment reported that teachers and staff were ineffective in addressing transphobic harassment.

Despite some common trends, there was considerable variability, especially between school type and location. For instance, 2SLGBTQ students attending Catholic schools reported greater 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. Similarly, the usage of HBTP 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.

35% of students who attend Catholic schools reported experiencing harassment based on their perceived sexual orientation.

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 homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic remarks were made.

The multifaceted nature of harassment and bullying must also be understood within an intersectional framework, as social marginalization occurs in multiple and compounding ways. 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.

2x 2SLGBTQ Indigenous students were twice as likely (35%) to experience harassment based on their racialized identity than cisgender heterosexual Indigenous students (14%).

77% of 2SLGBTQ Indigenous students had been harassed at school in the year leading up to the survey, the highest percentage of any group.

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. Not surprisingly, when it comes to actual feelings of safety, 2SLGBTQ students are significantly less likely to indicate feeling safe at school than cisgender heterosexual 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.

62% of 2SLGBTQ respondents feel unsafe at school, compared to 11% of cisgender heterosexual students.

This second survey also includes a new measure of mental health and wellbeing: a three-step scale of 'languishing', 'moderate', or 'flourishing' mental health. The disparity between cisgender heterosexual and 2SLGBTQ participants cannot be ignored, especially in regard to the extremely low number of cisgender LGBTQ girls and trans students who classified as very mentally well. 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.

11% of cisgender heterosexual respondents reported languishing mental health, compared to 20% of GBQ boys, 25% of LGBTQ girls, and a full 40% of trans respondents.

One encouraging finding is that schools can cultivate positive outcomes for 2SLGBTQ students by seeking to create supportive school environments, in addition to guarding against known risk factors such as HBTP harassment. 2SLGBTQ-focused policy in schools acts as a protective factor for 2SLGBTQ



students. We asked students what they wanted their teachers to know about supporting 2SLGBTQ people, and their responses were inspiring and constructive. They are asking their teachers to understand why silence around 2SLGBTQ topics is harmful, to stop making assumptions about their gender and/or sexual identities, to use the correct pronouns for them, to include 2SLGBTQ people in classroom examples, to appreciate the importance of teacher support, and to acknowledge the barriers that many of them face. 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 exactly what every student in every school wants and is entitled to expect.**

Recommendations

The study also includes recommendations for actions and policies to advance 2SLGBTQ issues in Canadian secondary schools. The recommendations are geared toward Ministries of Education; school districts and school boards; school administrators; teachers, educators, and school staff; and students, respectively.

Some principles reflected throughout the recommendations are:

- ▶ **Include** 2SLGBTQ students and their families in all decision-making.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ **Recognize** the importance of compounding oppression, including racism, classism, and ableism. Do not assume that trans students' needs will be met by programs intended to support LGBTQ students.
- ▶ Meaningfully **include, consult,** and **engage** individuals and organizations with established expertise in intersectionality and 2SLGBTQ-inclusive education .

Given how much time young people in their formative years spend in school, it is no surprise that school climate and safety is a major factor in students' wellbeing and development. 2SLGBTQ students, racialized students, disabled students, and all other students deserve to feel safe and included in their schools. The Second National Climate Survey is an important tool in supporting students, families, administrators, and educators in the ongoing fight against homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in schools.

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