

## Chapter 6

# School Counselor Advocacy Recommendations for Policy and Practice for and With LGBTQ+ Youth

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### ABSTRACT

*LGBTQ+ youth experience increased levels of bullying, harassment, and discrimination in schools. Many states in the United States have state and local policies that are designed to protect both the sexual orientation and gender identity of students, however there are still a handful of states without these protections in place. School counselors are in a unique position to advocate for safe and inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ youth.*

### RATIONALE

“Regardless of the particular setting in which she or he works, each counselor is confronted again and again with issues that cannot be resolved simply through change within the individual” (Lewis & Bradley, 2000, p. 3). This truth is at the heart of school counselor **advocacy**. In their roles as change agents and advocates, school counselors recognize that to meet students’ needs, they must address larger systemic issues. Students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (**LGBTQ+**) specifically require advocacy across multiple systems. **LGBTQ+** youth describe schools as hostile environments due

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to bullying, **harassment**, and discrimination (Kosciw et al., 2018). Approximately 62% of **LGBTQ+** students report experiencing discriminatory policies and practices in their schools (Kosciw et al., 2018). A school counselor's first thought may be to address issues of building climate and school culture. While school culture and climate are perhaps some of the most immediate areas to investigate, school counselors also know that climate and culture are informed and influenced by a host of factors outside the school. One of those factors is policy. As part of the leadership team, school counselors should be actively involved in how building policy is crafted and implemented. When school counselors engage in this important work, they have the potential to create safe and supportive environments that are welcoming. Supportive school environments in turn lessen student victimization and improve the academic and psychosocial outcomes for **LGBTQ+** youth (Goodrich et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2018; Ratts, 2013).

In this chapter, the authors use a case scenario to examine school counselor **advocacy** for **LGBTQ+** youth. We examine the differences between policy and law as well as the role of educational initiatives and school counselor ethics. Second, we provide an overview of pertinent laws and policies regarding **LGBTQ+** youth that can have direct implications for schools today. Last, through the lens of the American Counseling Association's (ACA) **advocacy** levels (Lewis et al., 2003), we suggest different advocacy behaviors for which school counselors can use for and with their **LGBTQ+** students. Specific recommendations are made for school counselors who feel caught in the middle of state-level law and how that law is articulated in local-level policies and procedures.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Policies and School Climate

Policies are frameworks and guidelines that speak to the day-to-day processes and operation of the school system and directly impact students' academic, personal/social, and college and career success. Administrators at individual buildings and larger district levels set the expectations and procedures for teachers and other educators to follow and intervene to keep all students safe. These expectations and procedures come in the form of written policy statements. Examples may include attendance, discipline, dress code, and crises. Policies are designed to create safe and inclusive schools, therefore anti-bullying and **harassment** policies that specifically mention **LGBTQ+** youth can help to create environments that are free from **harassment**, bullying, and discrimination. According to the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN, 2018), "State law and policy play a critical role in the U.S. education system and can influence not only how schools are funded and governed, but also the climate of the school itself and the students' experiences" (p.1).

Local district policies that are designed to protect K-12 youth are often informed by state laws. For example, state laws require attendance at school, therefore districts create policies to ensure that parents/guardians and students are aware of the specific guidelines and procedures. Many states have laws that impact anti-bullying and discrimination policies based on sexual orientation and gender identity. As of June 2019, the GLSEN policy maps show that 21 states and Washington D.C. have state laws that were designed to protect both sexual orientation and gender identity of students. While it is encouraging that almost half the states are designing laws and policies to protect transgender students, there are still states with "no promo homo" (GLSEN, 2019) laws that restrict and deny positive representations of homosexuality. Specifically, Missouri and South Dakota, prohibit local school districts from having

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