Affirming Students through Inclusive Staff Policies:

Policies For Trans & Gender Diverse Staff Belonging

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Endorsed by The Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide

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Rationale: The Need for Affirming Staff Policies

Purpose:

Every educational institution wants to see their students thrive, and is tasked with making sure they do. This takes into account the educational perspective of succeeding in their classes, the social wellness perspective of making sure they have healthy peer relationships, and the mental health wellness perspective of a healthy self-concept and mental stability. These perspectives need to be translated to supporting the staff at educational institutions as well, which has the benefits of supporting the staff directly and supporting the students indirectly. If we want to support our queer students and decrease suicidality we must also establish policies that support and protect our gender diverse staff.

Analysis:

Supportive and protective policies for queer educators decreases suicidality in queer students. 43.9% of trans students who reported to the Youth Risk Behavior Surveys 2017 that they "considered attempting suicide"; 39.3% of trans students reported they had "made a suicide plan"; 34.9% of trans students reported they had "attempted suicide"; and 16.5% of trans students reported they "had a suicide attempt treated by a doctor or nurse" (pg. 3). Currently the suicide rate for LGB youth is 3 times higher compared to their peers, with 50% of queer students reporting suicidal ideation in 2019 and 25% reporting attempted suicide (1, 2, 3). Research shows that schools as an affirming space has the strongest link to reduced suicide attempts (1). To ensure schools are affirming for gender diverse youth, we must have gender diverse staff participating in the school community (1, 2). However, queer educators perceive that they would be bullied, harassed, or fired if they were to be out at work, inhibiting their ability to support their students (1, 2, 3, 4). The hostile work environment creates a clear and preventable barrier to the retention of gender diverse staff. K-12 school districts must establish protective and supportive policies for gender diverse educators to reduce the queer youth suicide rate (1, 2).

Research shows that youth need supportive educators to feel safe at school; supporting educators who share similar identities to the students ensures that students feel seen and belong in school spaces (1, 2). This would help reduce up to 20% of queer students who report missing school due

to feeling unsafe and directly, positively respond to a population with a set of higher risk factors for suicidality (1, 2). Supporting educators who can identify with and affirm queer students would increase both educators' and students' well-being in educational spaces. Furthermore, the research states that the number of out queer personnel is a sign of a more accepting school climate (1). When educational spaces protect and affirm queer educators, students feel seen and know that their school space is safe and affirming which increases attendance, decreases suicidal ideation and suicide attempts.

In summary, when there is queer representation in positions of power within schools, it interrupts negative school climates for queer youth by bringing important conversations directly linked to school safety for queer youth. Queer staff are necessary to the retention of queer students in schools. This means that when queer staff are visible, out, and present in the educational setting it increases access to education, increases attendance and decreases suicide attempts. School as an affirming space has the strongest association with reduced suicide attempts for transgender and non-binary students, which is why we must create policies to protect queer educators (1, 2).

"Finally, the research indicates the need for greater efforts being made to achieve equity for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, etc, in schools in the U.S. In following the above suggested practices, those school leaders who consider themselves equity focused will have the opportunity to show that in their support of LGBT individuals" (p. 14)

Federal Guidelines and Model Policies

Federal & State Guidelines

This document, these policies, will help districts and other organizations support the federal and state civil rights protected class identities of sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation for school staff employees, protected through Executive Order ([1](#), [2](#)), [Supreme Court Ruling](#), and [Oregon law](#). Adopting and supporting these policies will help your agency follow the federal and state law and reduce risk of discrimination lawsuits and complaints.

Model Policies in Practice & Other Examples

- Chicago Public Schools [Guidelines Regarding the Support of Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Individuals](#).
- Los Angeles Unified School District [“Affirming Work Sites to Address Transgender Supports”](#).
- Toronto District School Board [has a statement](#) regarding their [Guidelines for the Accomodation of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Students and Staff](#).
- GLSEN [“Model Local Education Agency Policy on Transgender and Nonbinary Students”](#)
- Human Rights Campaign’s [Transgender Inclusion in the Workplace: Recommended Policies and Practices](#).

Affirming Staff Policy Template & Draft

In order to support Oregon school districts to adopt inclusive staff policies, we created a [Policy Template](#) & [Policy Draft](#) for districts to adapt to meet the needs of trans & gender diverse staff.

Action Items: How to Get Involved

Action Items by Role

If you work in a school district or educational service district:	• Adopt a policy that is similar to the above examples and includes the below "Policy Requirements" items to support your trans and gender diverse staff and students.
If you work in an education union:	• Send this to your appropriate school district. • Require it as part of contract bargaining if other negotiations don't work. • Adopt a policy that is similar to the above examples and includes the below "Policy Requirements" items to support your trans and gender diverse staff. • Support districts in their policy adoption process and require them to adopt protection policies.
If you work in an educational agency:	• Adopt a policy that is similar to the above examples and includes the below "Policy Requirements" items to support your trans and gender diverse staff. • Support districts in their policy adoption process and encourage/require them to adopt protection policies.
If you are an active or retired educator:	• Contact your administration of your building, superintendent's office, school board, and union and let them know you want them to support the adoption of these policies.
If you are a gender diverse educator (active or retired):	• If you'd like to be involved in a gender diverse educator network and/or anonymously participate in relevant research on the experience of gender diverse educators please email Lake Director@QueerEugene.org or Siche Green-Mitchell siche@lclark.edu
If you work in a health-related agency:	• Adopt a policy that is similar to the above examples and includes the below "Policy Requirements" items to support your trans and gender diverse staff. • Support districts in their policy adoption process and encourage/require them to adopt protection policies.
If you are a community organization or person in the community:	• Contact the superintendent's office of your local school districts and let them know you want them to support the adoption of these policies. • Contact state agencies (e.g. Oregon Department of Education, Oregon Health Authority, Oregon School Boards Association) and let them know you want them to support the adoption of these policies.

Policy Requirements

These rights are not listed in a manner of hierarchy- all are equally important. The policies written in the above examples are great to use, the below items are being specifically stated as needs to be attended to, supported, and protected.

1. Inclusion of an **equity lens** question when dealing with queer-related matters: "The status quo of the system is not worth more than individual dignity and personhood."

2. Access to **inclusive restrooms** for gender diverse staff

3. **Inclusive gender dynamics** for classrooms, events, field trips: what staff are working with what students? What responsibilities are being asked of them? (For example, asking someone to check in on a restroom/locker room, how are overnight room stays structured- check assumptions made based on how a person looks)

4. Require annual **Professional Development** related to queer identities and pronouns

5. Support **name changes**, have options for legal name and social name in systems

6. Inclusive clothing requirements/**dress code** for staff (gender neutral)

7. Access to/creation of a **queer affinity group**/similar to support queer educators

8. Adopt **inclusive and equitable systems** (individuals shouldn't need to change to fit a payroll system/similar, the systems we use should be equitable and inclusive in nature)

9. Increase protections from gender-based discrimination during **hiring & promotions**

10. **Adopt policies** supporting staff based on the civil rights protected classes of sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation to support all trans, gender diverse, and queer staff

11. **Offer training for co-workers** who consistently miss the mark on being inclusive

12. Create a **support and safety plan** for gender diverse employees and what steps need to happen (HR, IT, management; who does what and when)

Future

Blog

We have created a blog that will be updated with further endorsements and policy adoptions. Please check in with this blog to see how organizations around Oregon are responding to this document and let the voices around the state help share the tremendous need that exists.

Updated Document

As this Document will be disseminated as a PDF for ease of use, we will also include this link with view-only permissions, so that folks can continue to access the further endorsements and newly adopted policies that we will continue to add into the document.

Research

"A recent study (4) that pooled local YRBS data during 2009–2017 to examine trends in suicide risk found that reports among LGB youths of suicide risk might be decreasing but that LGB students still are as much as three times more likely to have attempted suicide than heterosexual students" (pg. 2).

"One half of LGBT+ youth expressed they considered suicide during 2019" (pg. 1).

"One quarter of LGBT+ youth expressed they attempted suicide during 2019" (pg. 1).

"The presence of LGBTQ school personnel who are out or open at school about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity may provide another source of support for LGBTQ students. In addition, the number of out LGBTQ personnel may provide a sign of a more supportive and accepting school climate" (pg. 61).

"Youth Insight #1: Supportive educators are crucial for students to feel safe and included" (pg. 9).

"The study found that LGBTQ youth who reported having at least 1 LGBTQ-affirming space–specifically a school–were 35% less likely to report a suicide attempt in the past year" (Source).

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"The negative consequences they perceive for being out as teacher or student are disrespect demonstrated through such behaviors as bullying, harassment and knowing they would be fired. Many are not out due to fear of negative consequences. In one sense the comparison to the 2007 data indicates a positive shift, but the climate is still quite difficult and, in many cases, hostile" (pg. 13).

"Having staff supportive of LGBTQ students was related to feeling safer in school and missing fewer days of school. As shown in Figure 2.18, students with more supportive staff at their schools were less likely to feel unsafe due to their sexual orientation or gender expression, as well as less likely to miss school because of feeling unsafe or uncomfortable" (pg. 72).

"With the recent concerns cited in GLSEN's 2017 study, it is paramount for the climate for LGBT educators to be more conducive to outness in order for these educators to support their students (Kosciw, 2018; Leithwood & McAdie, 2007)" (pg. 13).

"The teacher who ran the GSA was so kind, fun, and accepting to everyone in the group and was excited about the ways we might express it to the whole school. That club made me feel a lot better about myself and made me more comfortable about sharing myself with others" (pg. 68).

"Educators needs to feel safe and accepted to provide the best education for their Students" (pg. 3).

"While the overall school climate in 2007 was perceived by teachers as problematic and one-third in 2011 listed negative consequences for being out, in 2017 many more report positive consequences for being out such as being a role model for LGBT students and a resource to colleagues. The school climate is not perceived as hostile for all LGBT teachers, but LGBT teachers still perceive a strong need for change" (pg. 13).

"LGBTQ representation within schools, particularly in positions of power, interrupts negative, often stagnant school climates by bringing LGBTQ individuals into important conversations that direct school policy, curriculum, and other important functions that are directly linked to safe, supportive school climates for LGBTQ youth. Furthermore, when LGBTQ people are present in the daily functions of the school they will begin to develop a critical mass that sustains student and staff retention" (pg. 8).

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"One key element present in research grounded in CRT is the discussion of diversity representation, specifically the importance of having persons of color in positions of power and in positions where representation of power matters" (pg. 7-8).

"Among these LGBT+ student groups, 2 of every 10 students reported to have stayed home for safety reasons within a month of the survey" (pg. 6).

"The 2019 Oregon Health Authority Survey found LGBTQ students to be at greater risk of adverse mental health conditions, particularly related to suicide and suicide ideation. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Oregonians aged 10 to 2411, and the Oregon Health Authority survey found that about half of gender diverse or LGB 8 th grade students considered suicide (compared to 20% of all 8 th graders). Nearly 1 in 3 of them had actually attempted suicide" (pg. 18).

"In a 2017 survey done by GLSEN among Oregon LGBTQ students, nearly 3 out of 5 students reported that their educational institution subjected them to at least one form of discriminatory policy or practice related to their sexual orientation or gender expression" (pg. 20).

"More than half of transgender employees say they are not comfortable being out at work. Two-thirds remain in the closet in professional interactions outside their own companies" (Source).

"At the school level, many administrators still exhibited reluctance to implement professional development related to LGBT issues, also indicating potential levels of discomfort (Payne & Smith, 2018)" (pg. 2).

"Narrow focus on protections cancels out meaningful inclusion of LGBTQ voices and prevents healthy, positive inclusion of all LGBTQ students within schools" (pg. 8).

"The most recent research, conducted also in 2017, from GLSEN (Kosciw et al., 2018) revealed that the progress in reducing level of victimization for LGBTQ students has slowed for the first time in ten years. Furthermore, many students reported more hostile environments for transgender students than in 2015" (pg. 13).

Frequently Asked Questions

Question: We already have policies, why do we need this?

Answer: The policies that have been adopted currently protect from harassment and discrimination (in most cases). This misses out on a huge experience of being trans & gender diverse in the workplace where we don't fit in. This document will help organizations adopt procedures that will take a policy's protections and turn it into actionable workflow to make daily work-life better.

Contact

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Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide

https://oregonalliancetopreventsuicide.org/contact-us/

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