The 2017 Flemish School Climate Survey Report

Methods and Sample

Participants completed an online survey about their experiences in school during the 2016-2017 school year, including hearing biased remarks, feeling safe, being harassed, and feeling comfortable at school. They were also asked about their academic experiences, attitudes about school, involvement in school, and availability of supportive school resources. Youth were eligible to participate in the survey if they were between the ages of 13 and 20, attended a primary or secondary school in Belgium during the 2016-2017 school year, and identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or a sexual orientation other than heterosexual (e.g., pansexual, questioning) or described themselves as transgender or as having another gender identity that is not cisgender ("cisgender" describes a person whose gender identity is aligned with the sex/gender they were assigned at birth). Data collection occurred between June-August 2017 and ended before the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year.

The school climate survey was conducted online. The survey instrument was modeled after GLSEN's 2015 National School Climate Survey, and was appropriated and translated by Teachers College, GLSEN, and Cavaria into the Belgium context. In order to obtain a large and diverse sample of LGBT youth in Belgium, we used advertising and promotion on social networking sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The final sample consisted of a total of 484 students between the ages of 13 and 20. Three out of four students (75.1%) lived in a city or city edge, and over two thirds (68.6%) attended a Catholic school. Table 1.1 presents participants' demographic characteristics and Table 1.2 shows the characteristics of the schools attended by participants. Participants had an average age of 16.6 years old. Half of our sample (51.4%) are female, one third is male (37.4%) with other gender identities selected from there, as shown in Table 1.1. Around one third of our sample identifies as bisexual, gay, or lesbian (33.9%, 32.0% and 31.8% respectively) and one fifth identifies as pansexual, questioning, or queer (20.5%, 19.6%, and 22.1% respectively).

Table 1.1: Characteristics of Survey Participants		
Age (n=484)		
13	1.7%	n=8
14	7.4%	n=36
15	14.5%	n=70
16	24.0%	n=116
17	26.7%	n=129
18	15.7%	n=76
19	6.8%	n=33
20	3.3%	n=16
Average Age = 16.6 years (SD 1.51)		
Sexual Orientation (n=484)		
Gay	32.0%	n=155
Lesbian	31.8%	n=154
Straight/Heterosexual	4.5%	n=22
Bisexual	33.9%	n=164
Pansexual	20.5%	n=99

Questioning	19.6%	n=95
Queer	22.1%	n=107
Other Sexual Orientation	5.6%	n=27
Sex/Gender (n=484)		
Female	51.4%	n=249
Male	37.4%	n=181
Transgender	10.3%	n=50
Intersex	1.4%	n=7
Gender Non-Binary	14.9%	n=72
Other	5.0%	n=24

Table 1.2: Characteristics of Participants' Schools		
Community Type (n=474)		
City or City Edge	75.1%	n=356
Rural Area or Village	24.9%	n=118
School Level (n=476)		
BuSo	1.1%	n=5
ASO	58.0%	n=276
BSO	11.8%	n=56
KSO	6.3%	n=30
TSO	22.9%	n=109
School Type (n=459)		
GO! School	22.7%	n=104
Catholic School	68.6%	n=315
Urban School	5.5%	n=25
Provincial School	2.6%	n=12
Other	0.7%	n=3
School Size (n=476)		
Less Than 500 Students	26.1%	n=124
501 to 1000 Students	48.7%	n=232
1001 to 1500 Students	16.6%	n=79
Over 1500 Students	8.6%	n=41

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

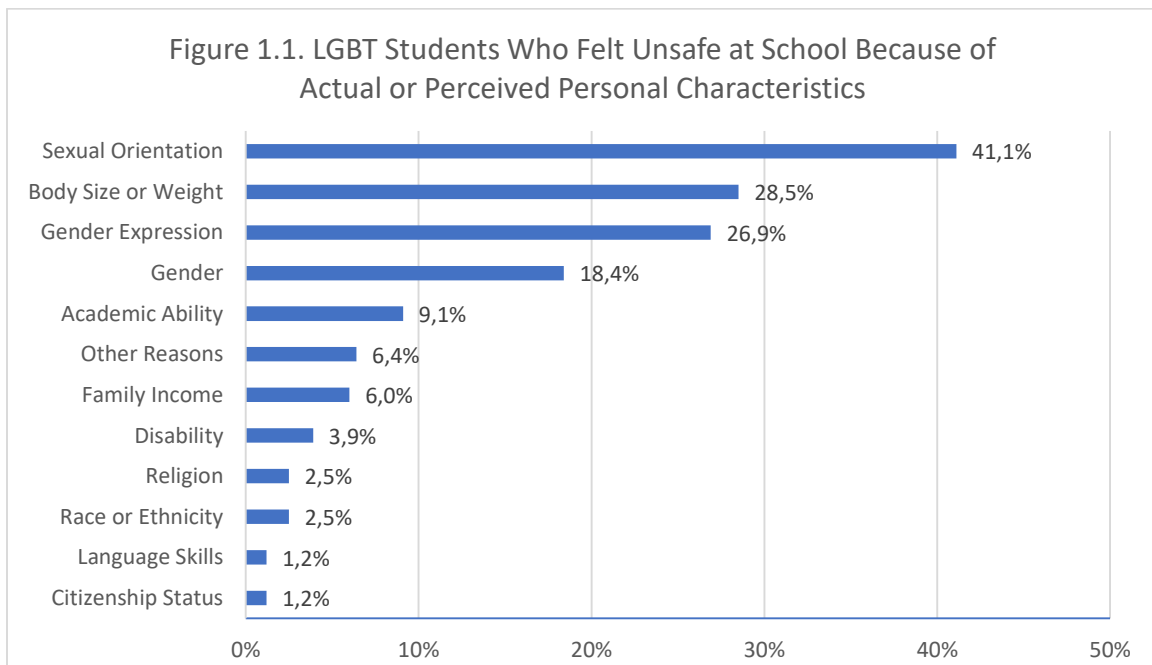# PART ONE: EXPERIENCES OF HOSTILE SCHOOL CLIMATE FOR LGBT STUDENTS

School Safety

Overall Safety at School

For LGBT youth, school can be an unsafe place for a variety of reasons. Students in our survey were asked whether they ever felt unsafe at school during the past year because of a personal characteristic, including: body size or weight, sexual orientation, gender, and gender expression (i.e., how traditionally "masculine" or "feminine" they were in appearance or behavior). As shown in Figure 1.1, LGBT students most commonly felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, body size or weight, and gender expression:
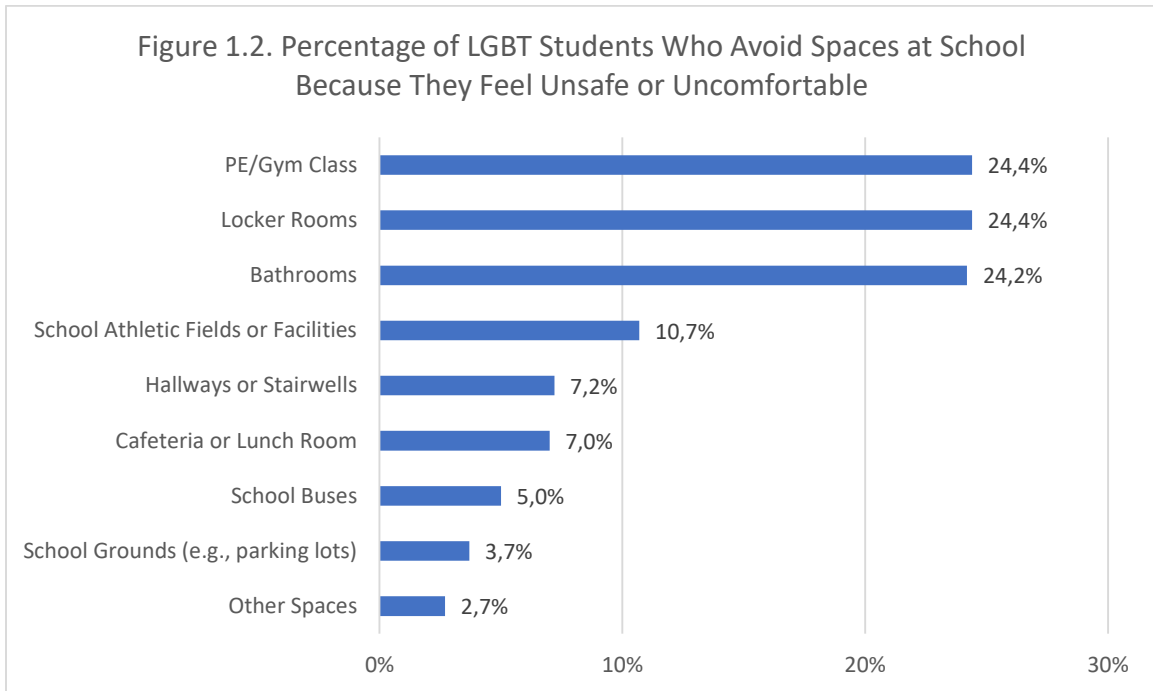
- Two fifths (41.1%) reported feeling unsafe at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation.
- More than a fourth (26.9%) of LGBT students felt unsafe because of how they expressed their gender.

LGBT students also commonly reported feeling unsafe in the past year because of their body size or weight (28.5%).

Figure 1.1. LGBT Students Who Felt Unsafe at School Because of Actual or Perceived Personal Characteristics

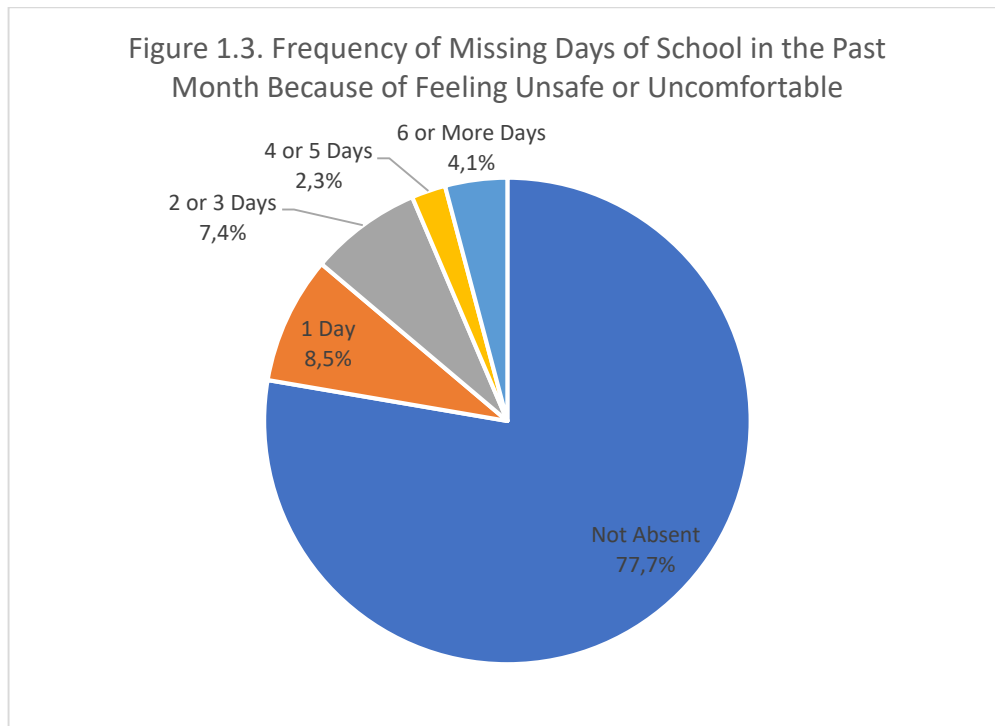| Characteristic	Percentage
Sexual Orientation	41,1%
Body Size or Weight	28,5%
Gender Expression	26,9%
Gender	18,4%
Academic Ability	9,1%
Other Reasons	6,4%
Family Income	6,0%
Disability	3,9%
Religion	2,5%
Race or Ethnicity	2,5%
Language Skills	1,2%
Citizenship Status	1,2%

When students feel unsafe or uncomfortable in school they may choose to avoid the particular areas or activities where they feel most unwelcome or may feel that they need to avoid attending school altogether. Thus, a hostile school climate can impact an LGBT student's ability to fully engage and participate with the school community. We asked LGBT students if there were particular spaces at school that they avoided specifically because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable. As shown in Figure 1.2, LGBT students most commonly avoided physical education/gym class, locker rooms, and bathrooms, with nearly one in four students avoiding each of these spaces because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (24.4%, 24.4% and 24.2%,

respectively). Over one in ten (10.7%) LGBT students said that they avoided school athletics fields or facilities.

Figure 1.2. Percentage of LGBT Students Who Avoid Spaces at School Because They Feel Unsafe or Uncomfortable

Space	Percentage
PE/Gym Class	24,4%
Locker Rooms	24,4%
Bathrooms	24,2%
School Athletic Fields or Facilities	10,7%
Hallways or Stairwells	7,2%
Cafeteria or Lunch Room	7,0%
School Buses	5,0%
School Grounds (e.g., parking lots)	3,7%
Other Spaces	2,7%

Feeling unsafe uncomfortable at school can negatively affect the ability of students to succeed academically, particularly if it results in avoiding school or classes. When asked about absenteeism, nearly one in four LGBT students reported not attending school at least one day in the last month (22.3%) because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (see Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3. Frequency of Missing Days of School in the Past Month Because of Feeling Unsafe or Uncomfortable

- 6 or More Days 4,1%
- 4 or 5 Days 2,3%
- 2 or 3 Days 7,4%
- 1 Day 8,5%
- Not Absent 77,7%

Exposure to Biased Language

Homophobic, sexist, racist, and other types of biased language can create a hostile school environment for all students. We asked LGBT students about their experiences with hearing anti-LGBT and other types of biased remarks while at school. Because homophobic remarks and negative remarks about gender expression are specifically relevant to LGBT students, we asked students in our survey additional questions about school staff's use of and responses to hearing these types of anti-LGBT language.

Homophobic Remarks. We asked students about the frequency of hearing homophobic remarks (such as "janet", "homo", "lesbo", "manwijf", or "pot"). As shown in Figure 1.4, over half (54.2%) of LGBT students reported hearing other students make derogatory remarks often or frequently in school. Further, we asked students who heard homophobic remarks in school how pervasive this behavior was among the student population. As shown in Figure 1.5, four fifths (81.0%) of these types of remarks were made by "some" or "most" students. In addition, over two fifths (44.0%) of LGBT students report they heard homophobic remarks from teachers or staff (see Figure 1.6).

Figure 1.4. Frequency that LGBT Students Hear Anti-LGBT Remarks at School
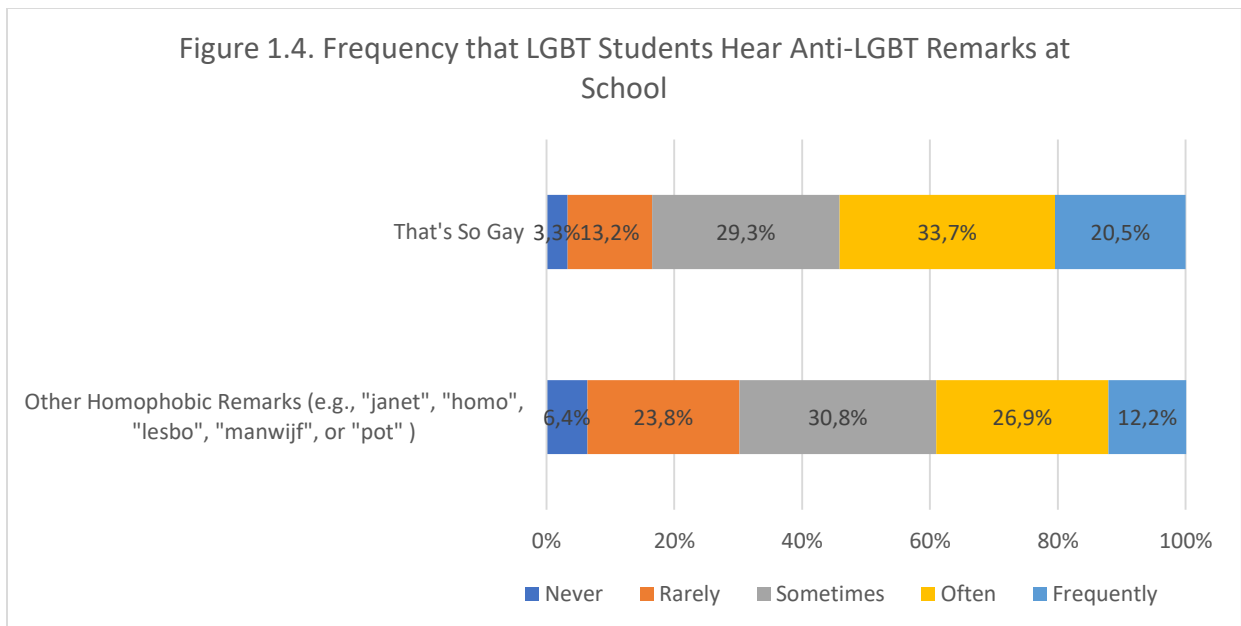
Figure 1.5. LGBT Students' Reports of How Many Students Make Homophobic Remarks

None; 5,2%

Most, 9,5%

A Few; 13,8%

Some; 71,5%
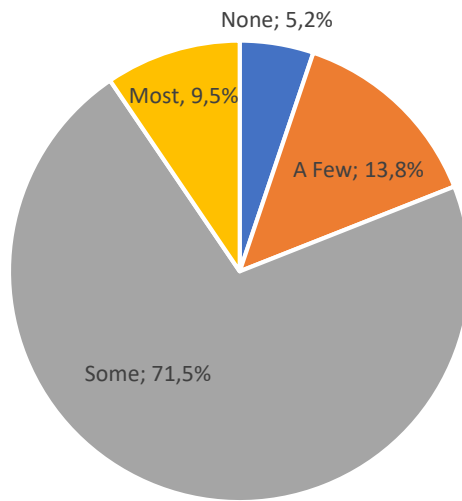
Figure 1.6. LGBT Students Hearing Homophobic Remarks from Teachers or Other School Staff

Often; 1,7% Frequently; 0,2%

Sometimes ; 10,8%

Rarely; 31,3%

Never; 56,1%
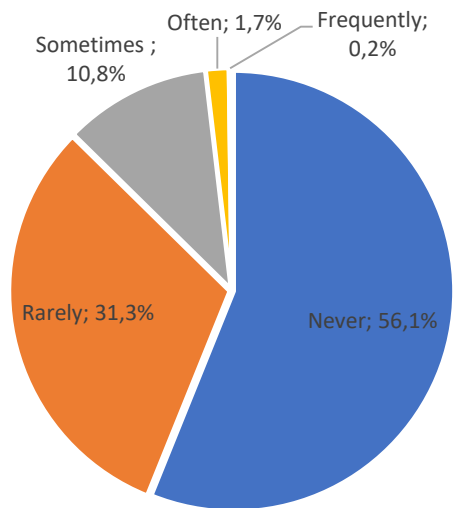
We asked students about frequency of hearing homophobic remarks from school staff. Fortunately, the majority of LGBT students reported that they heard homophobic remarks from teachers and school staff "Never" or "Rarely" (87.4%). However, one in five students (12.7%) said they heard these types of remarks from school staff "Sometimes," "Often," or "Frequently."

Hearing pejorative remarks in school can have negative effects on students. We asked the LGBT students in our survey how bothered or distressed they were by these remarks - and nearly two thirds reported that they were bothered "pretty much" or "extremely" (see Figure 1.7).

Figure 1.7. Degree that LGBT Students Were Bothered or Distressed as a Result of Hearing "Gay" Used in a Derogatory Way

Not At All, 8,1%

A Little, 28,1%

Pretty Much, 37,2%

Extremely, 26,6%
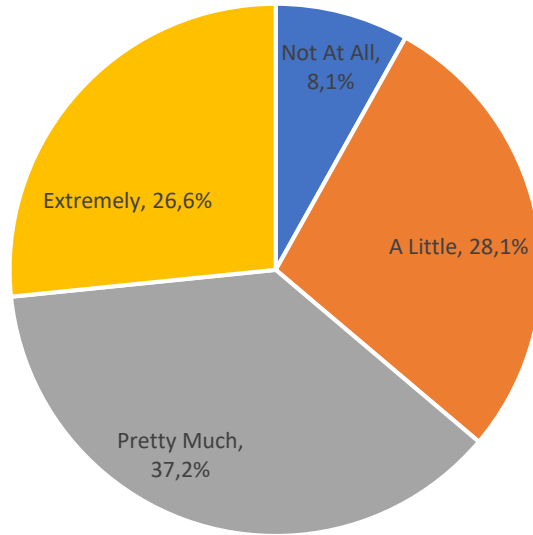
Students who reported hearing homophobic remarks at school were asked how often teachers or other school staff intervened if they were present. One sixth (18.4%) reported that these school personnel intervened "most of the time" or "always" when homophobic remarks were made in their presence, and nearly half (49.0%) reported that staff never intervened when present (see Figure 1.8).

Figure 1.8. LGBT Students Reports on School Staff and Student Intevention in Homophobic Remarks

Staff Intervention for Homophobic Remarks:
- 5,2%
- 13,2%
- 32,6%
- 49,0%

Student Intervention for Homophobic Remarks:
- 5,8%
- 11,6%
- 32,0%
- 50,6%

Legend:
- Always
- Most of the Time
- Some of the Time
- Never
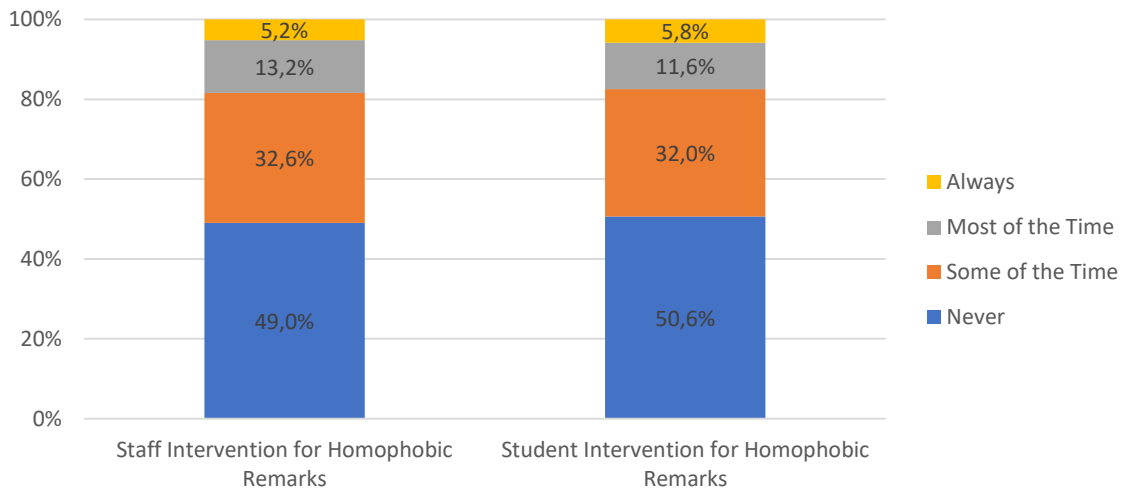
One would expect teachers and school staff to bear the responsibility for addressing problems of biased language in school. However, students may also intervene when hearing biased language, especially given that school personnel are often not present during such times. Thus, other students' willingness to intervene when hearing this language may be another important indicator of school climate. However, few students reported that their peers intervened "always" or "most of the time" when hearing homophobic remarks (17.4%), and half (50.6%) said that their peers never intervened (see Figure 1.8).

The majority of LGBT students report rampant use of homophobic remarks in their schools, and this behavior contributes to a hostile learning environment for this population. Infrequent intervention by school authorities when hearing biased language in school may send a message to students that homophobic language is tolerated. Furthermore, school staff may themselves be modeling poor behavior and legitimizing the use of homophobic language in that most students heard school staff make homophobic remarks at some time.

Figure 1.9. Frequency of LGBT Students Hearing Differnet Types of Remarks about Students' Gender Expression
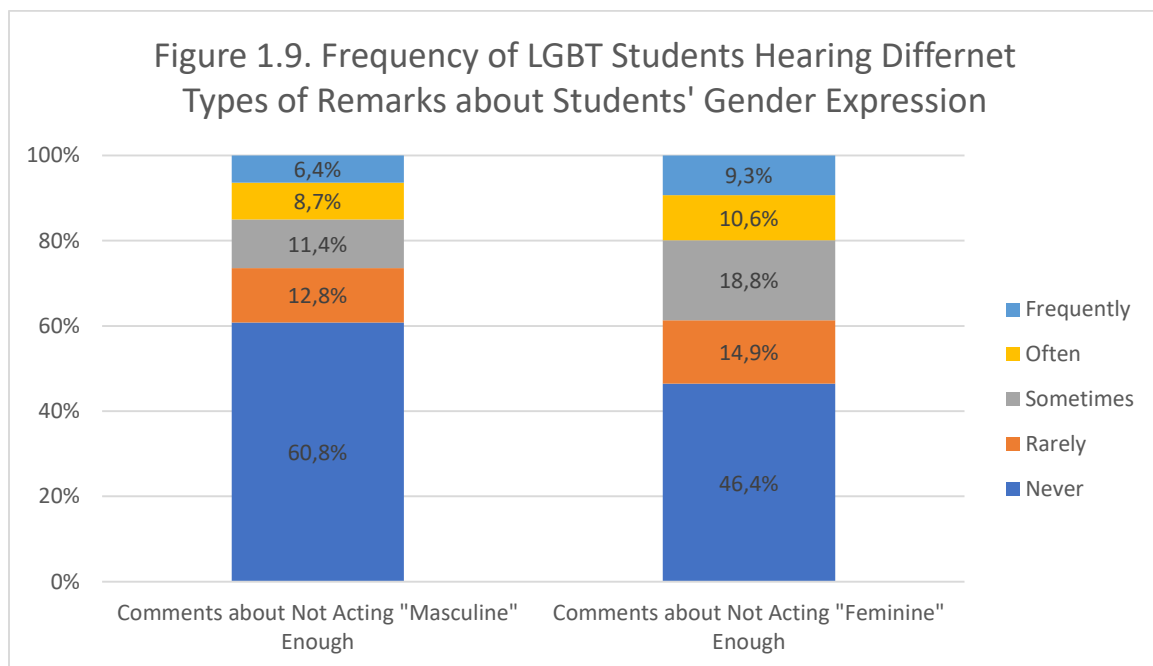
Negative Remarks about Gender Expression. Society often imposes norms for what is considered appropriate expression of one's gender. Those who express themselves in a manner considered to be atypical may experience criticism, harassment, and sometimes violence. Thus, we asked students two separate questions about hearing comments related to a student's gender expression — one question asked how often they heard remarks about someone not acting "masculine" enough, and another question asked how often they heard comments about someone not acting "feminine" enough.

Findings from this survey demonstrate that negative remarks about someone's gender expression were pervasive in schools. As shown in Figure 1.9, LGBT students reported hearing either type of remark about someone's gender expression often or frequently at school (15.1% and 19.9%, respectively). Remarks about students not acting "feminine" enough were more common than remarks about students not acting "masculine" enough.[i] When asked how much of the student population made these types of remarks, over half (55.6%) of students reported that most or some of their peers made negative remarks about someone's gender expression (see Figure 1.10). In addition, 9.0% of LGBT students reported that they heard these types of remarks from teachers and other school staff "Sometimes ", "Often", or "Frequently" (see Figure 1.11).

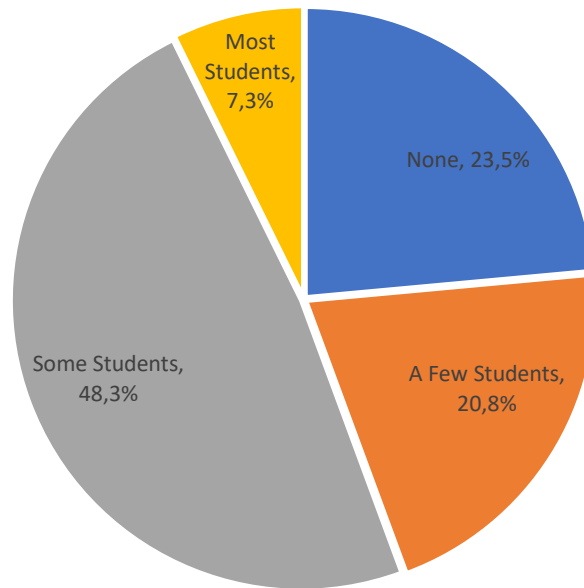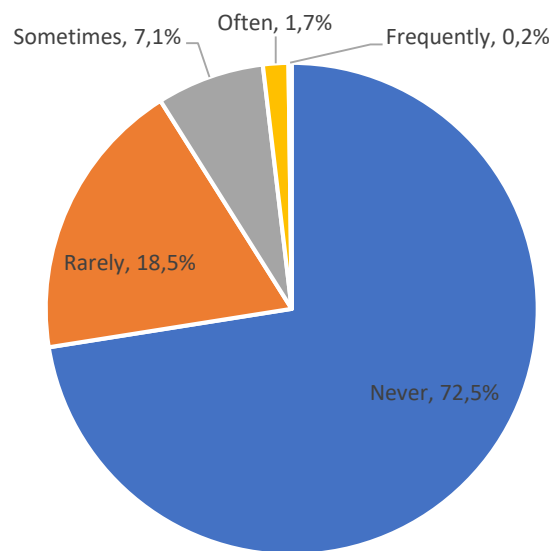Figure 1.10. LGBT Students' Reports on How Many Students Make Negative Remarks about Gender Expression

- Most Students, 7,3%
- None, 23,5%
- A Few Students, 20,8%
- Some Students, 48,3%

Figure 1.11. LGBT Students' Reports of School Staff for Remarks about Gender Expression

- Sometimes, 7,1%
- Often, 1,7%
- Frequently, 0,2%
- Rarely, 18,5%
- Never, 72,5%

Negative Remarks about Transgender People. Similar to negative comments about gender expression, people may make negative comments about transgender people because they can pose a challenge to "traditional" ideas about gender. Therefore, we asked students about how often they heard negative remarks specifically about transgender people. Over a third (29.1%) of LGBT students in our survey reported hearing these comments frequently or often (see Figure 1.12). The pervasiveness of anti-LGBT remarks is a concerning contribution to hostile school climates for all LGBT students. Any negative remark about sexual orientation, gender, or gender expression may signal to LGBT students that they are unwelcome in their school communities, even if a specific negative comment is not directly aligned to the individual sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression of the LGBT student who hears it. For example, negative comments about gender expression may disparage transgender or LGB people, even if transgender-specific or homophobic slurs are not used.

Other Types of Biased Remarks at School. In addition to hearing anti-LGBT remarks at school, hearing other types of biased language is an important indicator of school climate for LGBT students. We asked students about their experiences hearing racist or xenophobic remarks, and sexist remarks (such as someone being called "bitch", "slet" or "hoer"), As shown in Figure 1.12, the LGBT students in the survey reported that these types of comments were very common in their schools, although some were more prevalent than others. Nearly a majority of LGBT students heard racist and sexist remarks in their school "often" or "frequently" (49.4% and 70.3%, respectively).

Considering all of the types of pejorative remarks that students hear at school, racist or xenophobic, sexist remarks, body size/weight, ability, and homophobic are remarks were the most commonly heard by LGBT students in our survey. Pejorative remarks about ability were heard from 45.0% of students often or frequently.

Figure 1.12. Frequency that LGBT Students Hear Other Biased Remarks at School
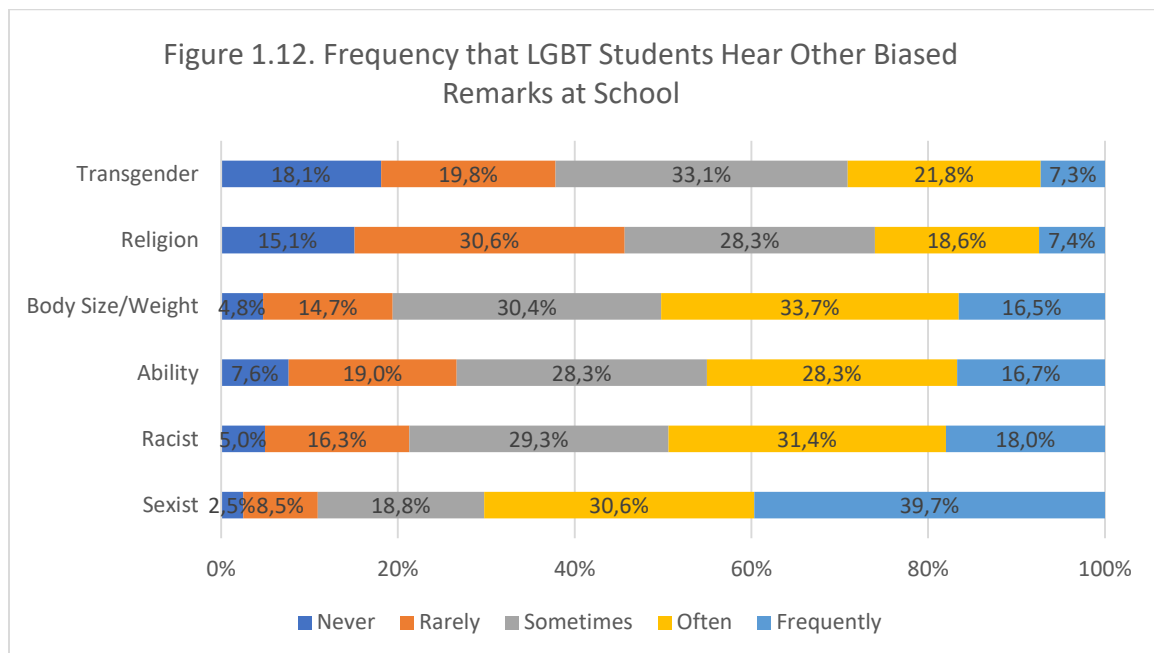
**Experiences of Harassment and Assault at School**

Hearing anti-LGBT remarks in school can contribute to feeling unsafe at school and create a negative learning environment. However, direct experiences with harassment and assault may have even more serious consequences on the lives of these students. We asked survey participants how often ("never," "rarely," "sometimes," "often," or "frequently") they had been verbally harassed, physically harassed, or physically assaulted at school during the past year specifically because of a personal characteristic, including sexual orientation, gender, gender expression (e.g., not acting "masculine" or "feminine" enough), and ethnic origin.

Verbal Harassment

Students in our survey were asked how often in the past year they had been verbally harassed (e.g., being called names or threatened) at school specifically because of personal characteristics. More than half (55.8%) reported being verbally harassed at some point in the past year based on any of these personal characteristics. LGBT students most commonly reported experiencing verbal harassment at school because of their sexual orientation or how they expressed their gender (see Figure 1.13):[ii]

- More than half of LGBT students (55.8%) had been verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation.
- Two thirds of LGBT students (44.6%) were verbally harassed at school because of their gender expression.

Many LGBT students were harassed in school because of their gender — about one third (31.3%) had been verbally harassed in the past year for this reason.


Figure 1.13. Frequency of Verbal Harassment Experienced by LGBT Students in the Past School Year
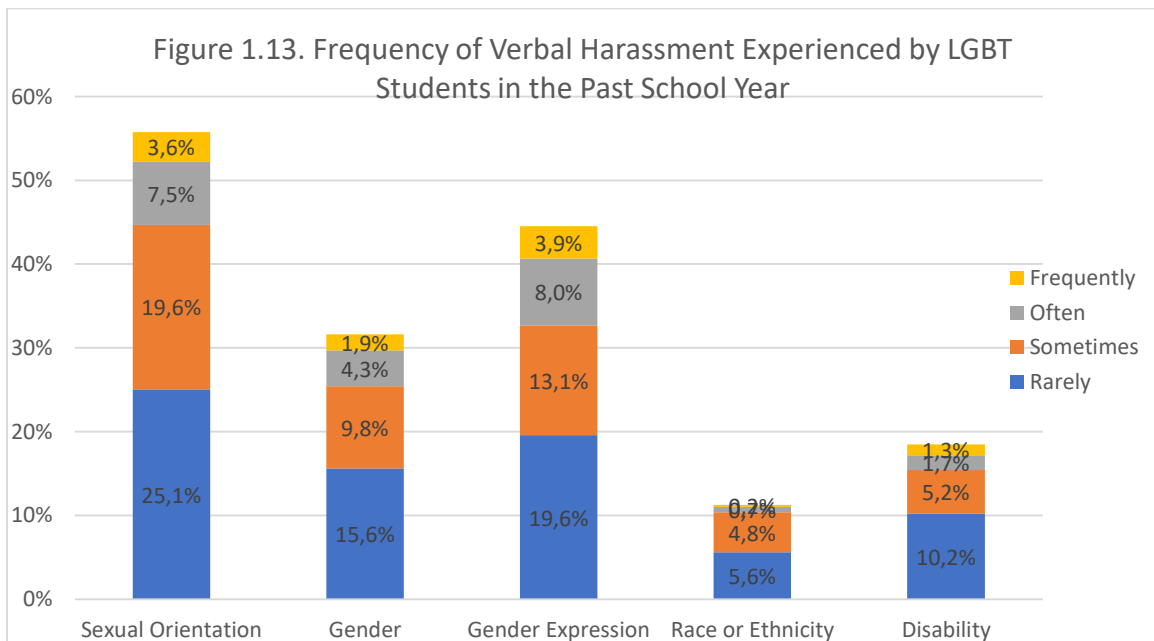
Physical Harassment

With regard to physical harassment, one in four (26.8%) LGBT students had been physically harassed (e.g., shoved or pushed) at some point at school during the past year based on any personal characteristic. Their experiences of physical harassment followed a pattern similar to verbal harassment — students most commonly reported being physically harassed at school because of their sexual orientation, gender, or gender expression (see Figure 1.14):[iii]

- 26.8% of LGBT students had been physically harassed at school because of their sexual orientation
- 14.5% had been physically harassed at school because of their gender, and 17.3% because of their gender expression.

Although reported as rarely, many LGBT students were physically harassed in school in the past year because of their race or ethnicity (3.5%) or a disability (5.4%)


Figure 1.14. Frequency of Physical Harrassment Experienced by LGBT Students in the Past School Year
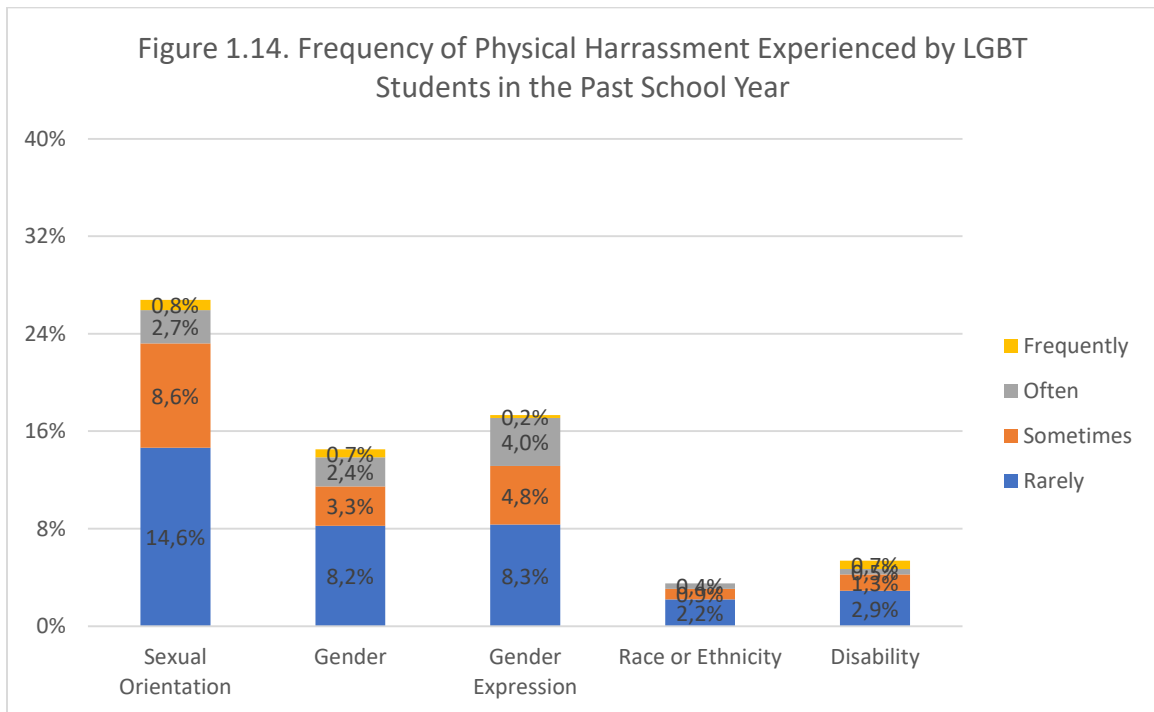
Physical Assault

LGBT students were less likely to report experiencing physical assault (e.g., punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon) at school than verbal or physical harassment, which is not surprising given the more severe nature of assault. Nonetheless, 8.0% of LGBT students in our survey were assaulted at school during the past year for any personal characteristic (see Figure 1.15):

- 8.0% of LGBT students were assaulted at school because of their sexual orientation;
- 5.3% were assaulted at school because of how they expressed their gender; and
- 6.2% of LGBT students were assaulted at school because of their gender expression

Physical assault based on sexual orientation and gender expression more common than physical assault based on other personal characteristics. 2.4% of LGBT students were assaulted at school because of a disability, and 1.3% report being assaulted because of their race or ethnicity (see also Figure 1.15).[iv]

Figure 1.15. Frequency of Physical Assault Experienced by LGBT Students in the Past School Year
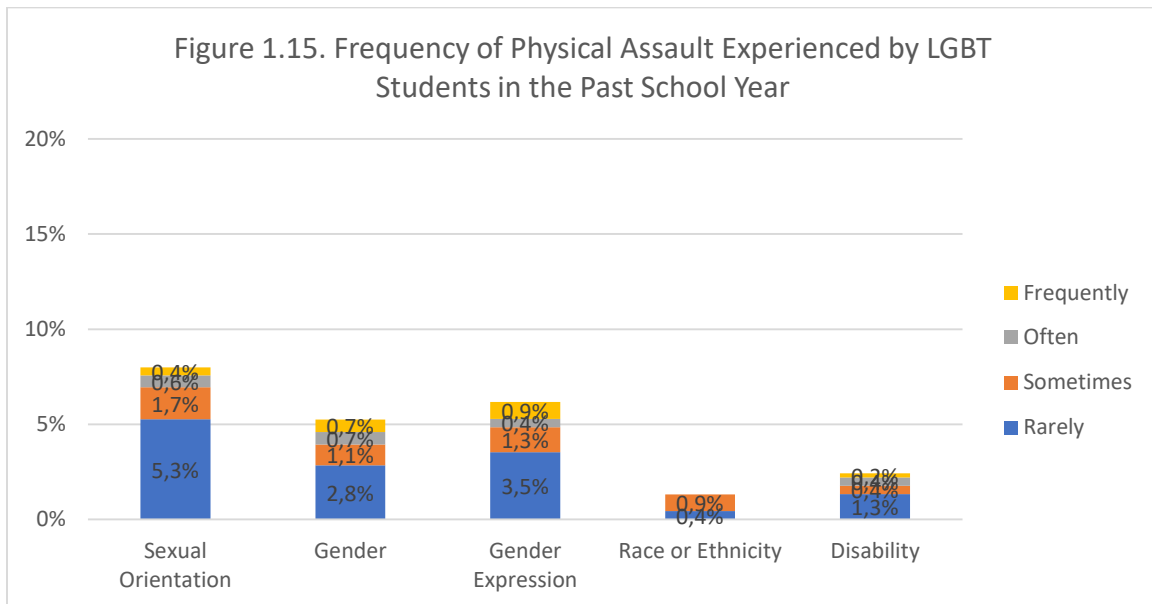
Experiences of Other Types of Harassment and Negative Events
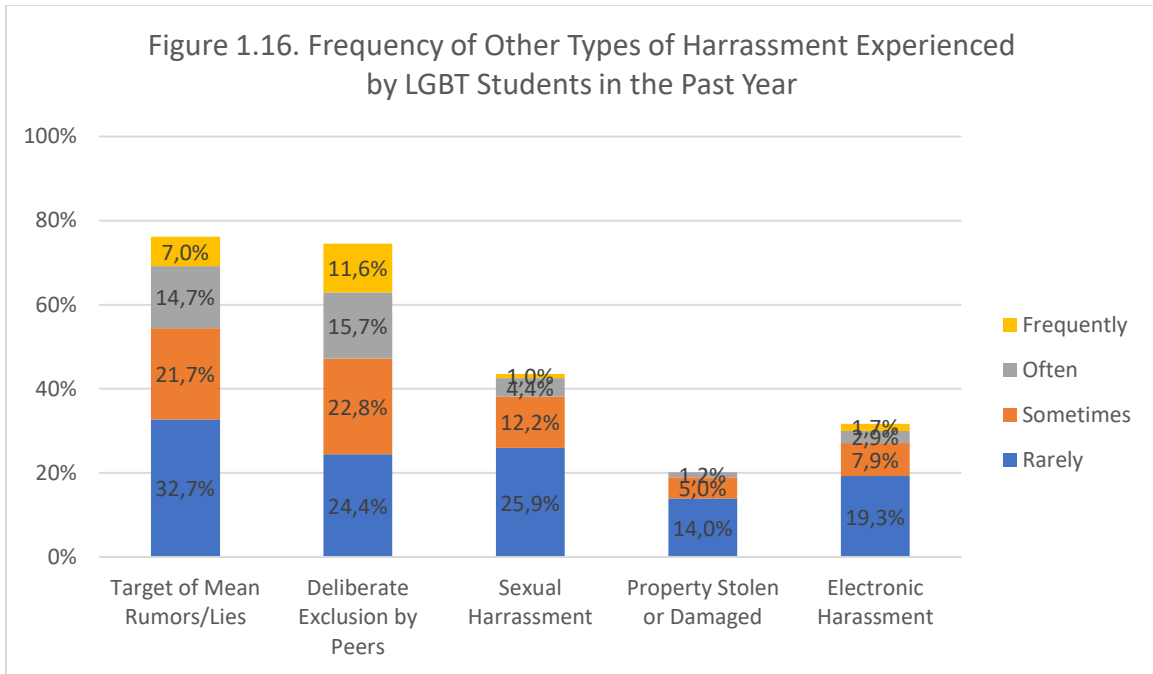
LGBT students may be harassed or experience other negative events at school for reasons that are not clearly related to sexual orientation, gender expression, or another personal characteristic. In our survey, we also asked students how often they experienced these other types of events in the past year, such as being sexually harassed or deliberately excluded by their peers.

Relational Aggression. Research on school-based bullying and harassment often focuses on physical or overt acts of aggressive behavior; however, it is also important to examine relational forms of aggression that can damage peer relationships, such as spreading rumors or excluding students from peer activities. We asked participants how often they experience two common forms of relational aggression: being purposefully excluded by peers and being the target of mean rumors or lies. As illustrated in Figure 1.16, the vast majority of LGBT students (74.5%) in our survey reported that they had felt deliberately excluded or "left out" by other students, and nearly one fourth (27.3%) experienced this often or frequently. Three quarters of students (76.2%) had mean rumors or lies told about them at school, and about one in five (21.7%) experienced this often or frequently.

Sexual Harassment. Harassment experienced by LGBT students in school can often be sexual in nature. Survey participants were asked how often they had experienced sexual harassment at school, such as unwanted touching or sexual remarks directed at them. As shown in Figure 1.16, over two fifths (43.6%) of LGBT students had been sexually harassed at school, and about one in twenty students (5.4%) report that such events occurred often or frequently.

Electronic Harassment or "Cyberbullying." Electronic harassment (often called "cyberbullying") is using an electronic medium, such as a mobile phone or Internet communications, to threaten or harm others. In recent years there has been much attention given to this type of harassment, as access to the Internet, mobile phones, and other electronic forms of communication has increased for many youth. We asked students in our survey how often they were harassed or threatened by students at their school via electronic mediums (telefoon, internet, sms, e-mails, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or Snapchat?), nearly a third (31.7%) of LGBT students reported experiencing this type of harassment in the past year. 4.6% had experienced it often or frequently (see also Figure 1.16).

Property Theft or Damage at School. Having one's personal property damaged or stolen is yet another dimension of a hostile school climate for students. About one in five (20.2%) LGBT students reported that their property had been stolen or purposefully damaged by other students at school in the past year (see Figure 1.16).

Figure 1.16. Frequency of Other Types of Harrassment Experienced by LGBT Students in the Past Year

Type	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Frequently
Target of Mean Rumors/Lies	32,7%	21,7%	14,7%	7,0%
Deliberate Exclusion by Peers	24,4%	22,8%	15,7%	11,6%
Sexual Harrassment	25,9%	12,2%	4,4%	1,0%
Property Stolen or Damaged	14,0%	5,0%	1,6%	1,3%
Electronic Harrassment	19,3%	7,9%	2,9%	1,7%

Reporting of School-Based Harassment and Assault

When harassment and assault occurs in school, we expect the teachers and school personnel to address the problems effectively. However, students may not always feel comfortable reporting these events to staff. In our survey, we asked those students who had experienced harassment or assault in the past school year how often they had reported the incidents to school staff. As shown in Figure 1.17, a little over half of these students ever reported incidents to staff (56.9%), and only one in eight indicated that they regularly reported incidents of harassment or assault (28.4% reporting "most of the time" or "always" to staff). Students in our survey who said that they had reported incidents of victimization to school staff were also asked how effective staff members were in addressing the problem. As shown in Figure 1.18, only a third (38.7%) of students believed that staff responded effectively ("Somewhat Effective" or "Very Effective") to their reports of victimization.

Given that family members may be able to advocate on behalf of the student with school personnel, we also asked students if they reported harassment or assault to a family member (i.e., to their parent or guardian or to another family member), and only half of the students (50.0%) said that they had ever told a family member (see also Figure 1.17). Students who had reported incidents to a family member were asked how often a family member had talked to school staff about the incident, and a third of students (39.1%) said that the family member never addressed the issue with school staff (see Figure 1.19).

Figure 1.17. Frequency of LGBT Students Reporting Incidents of Harassment and Assault
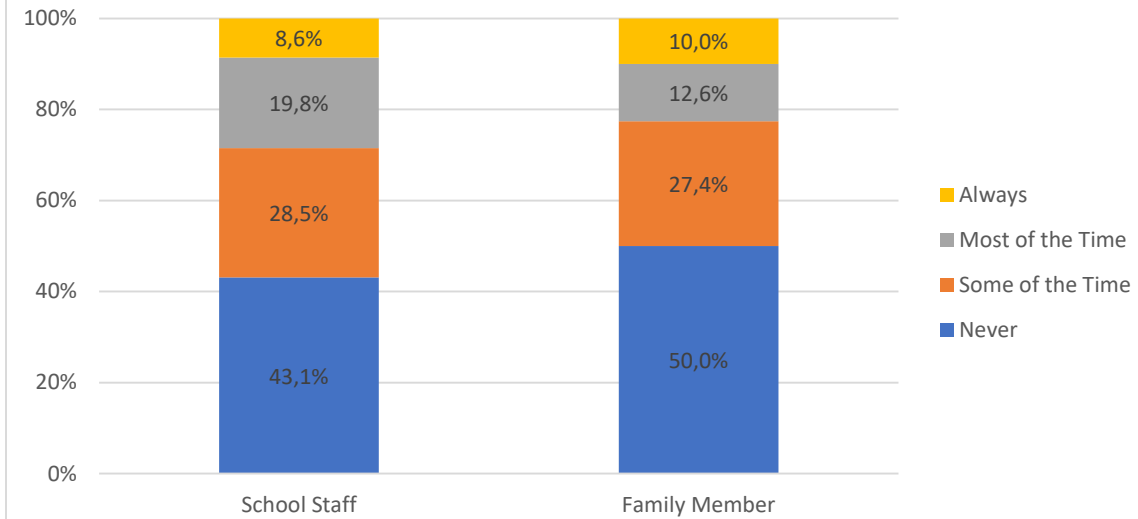

Figure 1.18. LGBT Students' Perceptions of Effectiveness of Reporting Incidences of Harassment and Assault to Shool Staff
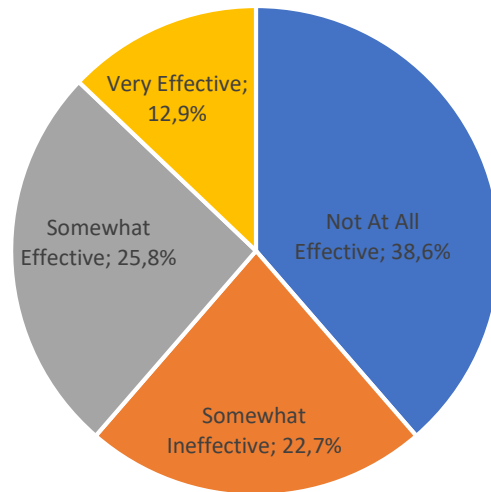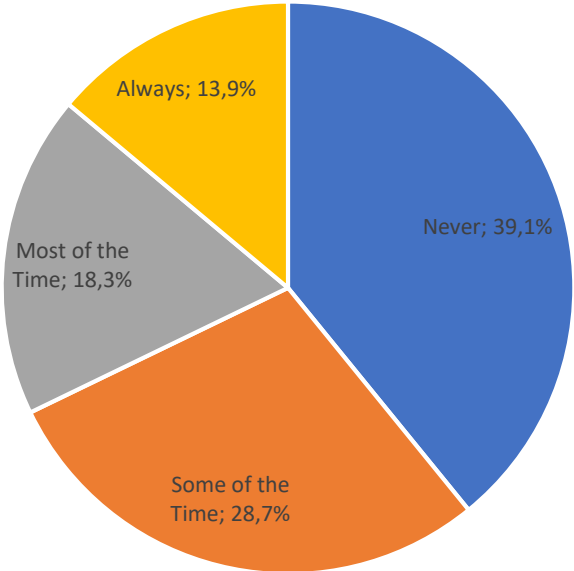
Figure 1.19. Frequency of Intervention by LGBT Students' Family Members

Never; 39,1%

Some of the Time; 28,7%

Most of the Time; 18,3%

Always; 13,9%

Hostile School Climate and Educational Outcomes

Although all students deserve equal access to education, LGBT students can face a variety of obstacles to academic success and opportunity. Given the hostile climates encountered by LGBT students, it is understandable that some students could have poorer outcomes in school. In this section, we examine in closer detail the educational experiences of LGBT students, particularly how they might be affected by hostile school climate.

Educational Aspirations and Future Plans

In order to examine the relationship between school climate and educational outcomes, we asked students about their aspirations with regard to post-secondary education, including plans to graduate versus dropping out of school, as well as their highest level of expected educational attainment and intended field of study beyond high school.

Educational Aspirations. When asked about their aspirations with regard to post-secondary education, one in ten (11.9%) LGBT students indicated that they did not plan to pursue any type of post-secondary education (i.e, that they only planned to obtain a high school diploma, did not plan to finish high school, or were unsure of their plans). Half of students (55.1%) reported that they planned to finish university, and one in ten (11.3%) said that they planned to obtain a graduate (see Figure 1.20). It is important to note that the survey only included students who were in school during the 2016-2017 school year. Thus, the percentage of LGBT students not pursuing post-secondary education would be higher with the inclusion of students who had already left high school without finishing.

Figure 1.20. Educational Aspirations of LGBT Students
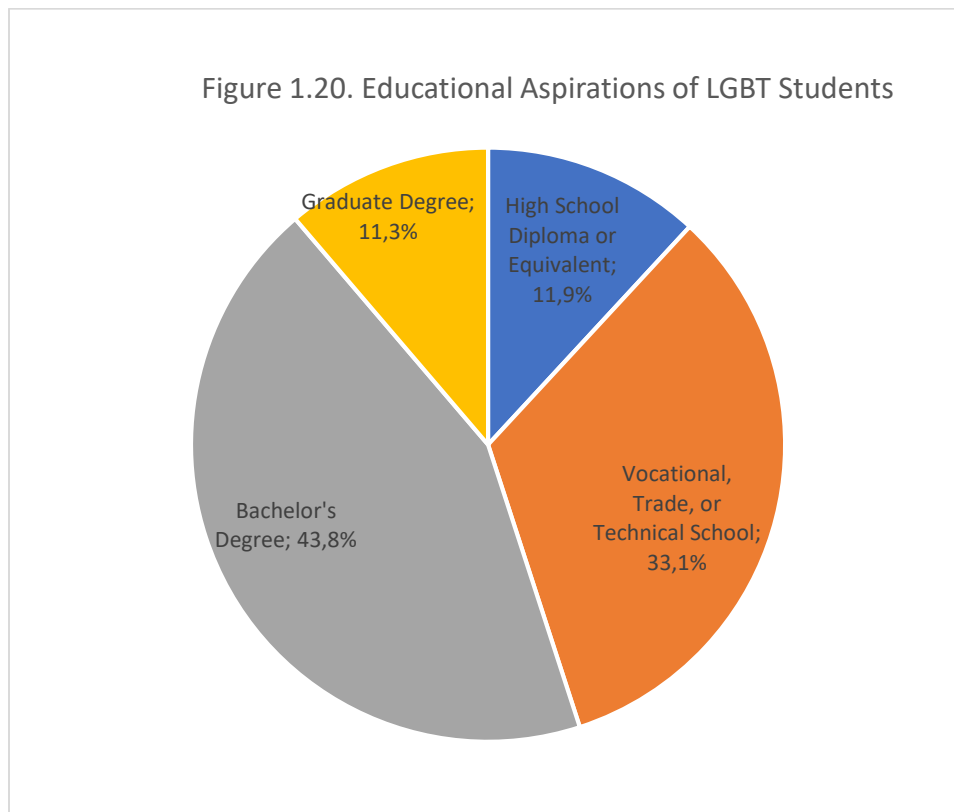
Although most students planned on finishing secondary, students who said they did not plan on finishing or were not sure were much more likely to have experienced victimization. As shown in Figure 1.21, 91.0% of these students reported being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation, compared to the 86.0% of students who planned on finishing higher education.[5] Figure 1.21 also shows the same relationship between verbal harassment based on gender expression and academic aspirations.

Absenteeism. Students who are regularly harassed or assaulted in school may attempt to avoid these hurtful experiences by not attending school and, accordingly, may be more likely to miss school than students who do not experience such victimization. We found that experiences of harassment and assault were, in fact, related to missing days of school.[6] As shown in Figure 1.22 students were twice as likely to have missed school in the past month if they had experienced higher levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation (31.1% versus 11.3%) or gender expression (32.4% vs. 14.0%).

Sense of School Belonging. The degree to which students feel accepted by and a part of their school community is another important indicator of school climate and is related to a number of educational outcomes. Students who experience victimization or discrimination at school may feel excluded and disconnected from their school community. In order to assess LGBT students' sense of belonging to their school community, survey participants were given a series of statements about feeling like a part of their school and were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with the statements.[7]

As illustrated in Figure 1.23, students who experienced victimization based on sexual orientation or gender expression had lower levels of school belonging than students who experienced did not experience victimization in school.[8] For example, more than two thirds (71.6%) of students who did not experience victimization based on their sexual orientation reported a positive sense of connection to their school, compared to two fifths (43.1%) of students who experienced victimization based on sexual orientation.

Overall, these findings illustrate that direct victimization may lead to less welcoming schools and more negative educational outcomes for LGBT students. In order to ensure that LGBT students are afforded a supportive learning environment and educational opportunities, community and school advocates should work to prevent and respond to in-school victimization. In Part 2 of this report, we will examine the availability of supports in school that may benefit the educational experience for LGBT students.

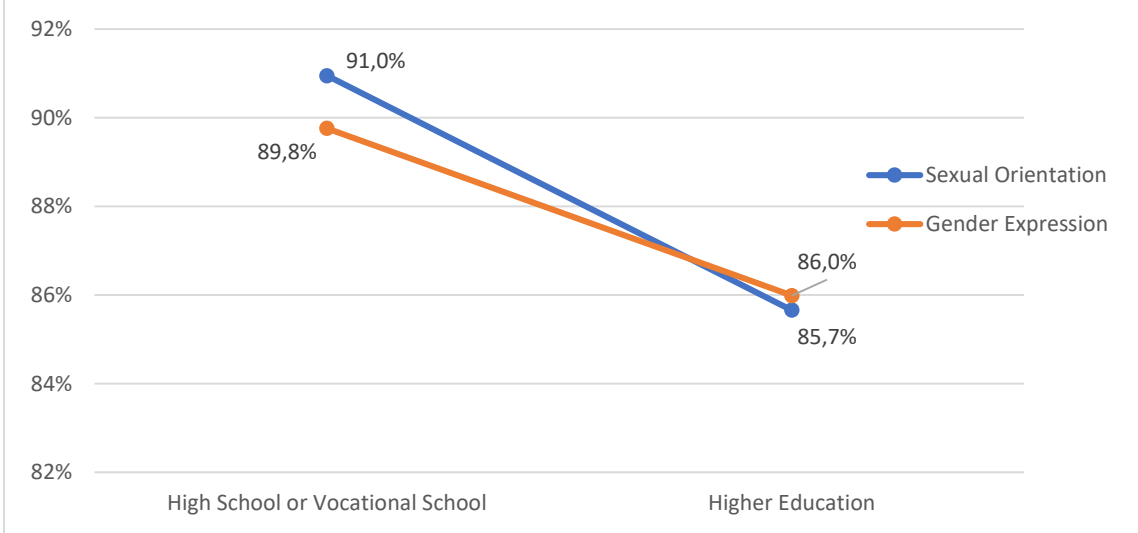Figure 1.21. Educational Aspiration by Experiences of Victimization and Discrimination

- Sexual Orientation
- Gender Expression

91,0%
89,8%
86,0%
85,7%

High School or Vocational School
Higher Education

Figure 1.22. Absenteeism by Experiences of Victimization and Discrimination

- Sexual Orientation
- Gender Expression

32,4%
31,1%
14,0%
11,3%

No Reported Victimization
Victimization (Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Frequently)
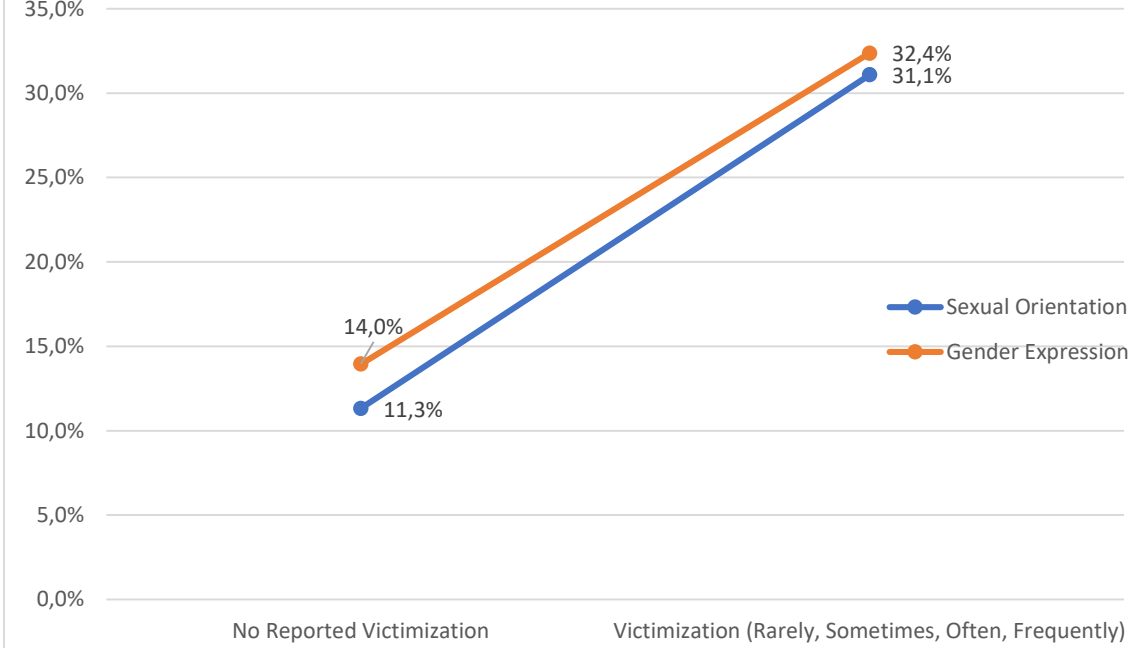
Figure 1.23. School Belonging by Experiences of Victimization and Discrimination

- 80,0%
- 60,0%
- 40,0%
- 20,0%
- 0,0%

71,6%
67,3%
43,1%
42,0%

No Reported Victimization
Victimization (Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Frequently)

Sexual Orientation
Gender Expression
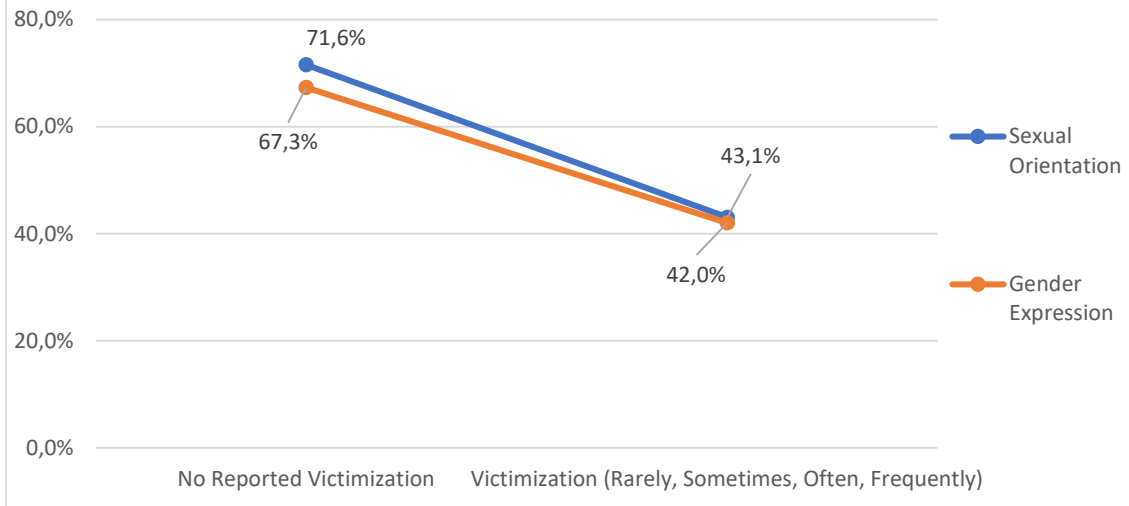
PART 2: SCHOOL-BASED RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

Availability of School-Based Resources and Supports

LGBT students may not have the same types of support from peers at their schools and in their communities. As shown in Figure 2.1, over half (52.9%) of LGBT students in Belgium reported that other students at school were accepting of LGBT people ("very accepting" or "somewhat accepting") with nearly one in five students (21.0%) reporting that other students at school were not very accepting or not at all accepting of LGBT people. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 2.3, three fourths of LGBT students report having never attended programs or groups for LGBT youth outside of school. Yet over 74.6% of students reported that there are numerous LGBT students in their school (see Figure 2.2.) Thus, the availability of resources and supports in school for LGBT students can be extremely important for this population of youth. There are several key resources that may help to promote a safer climate and more positive school experiences for students: school personnel who are supportive of LGBT students, LGBT-inclusive curricular materials, and school policies for addressing incidents of harassment and assault. Thus, we examined the availability of these resources and supports among LGBT students.
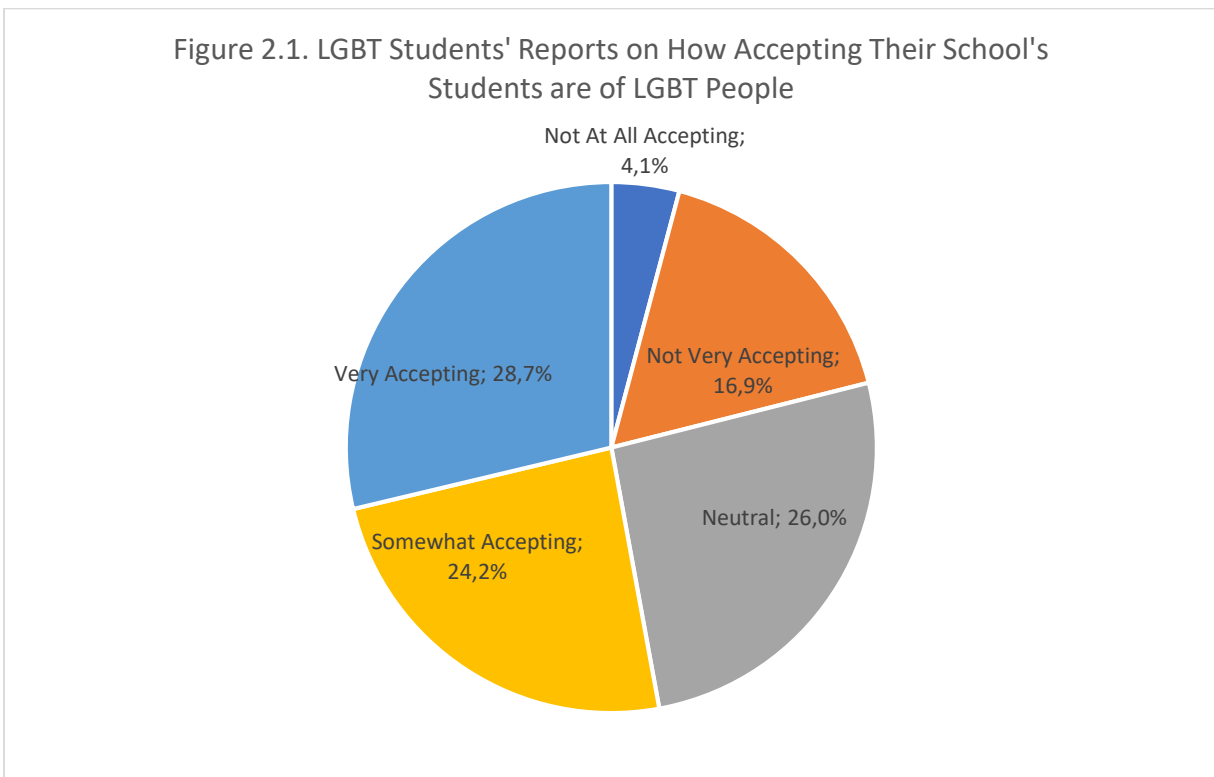

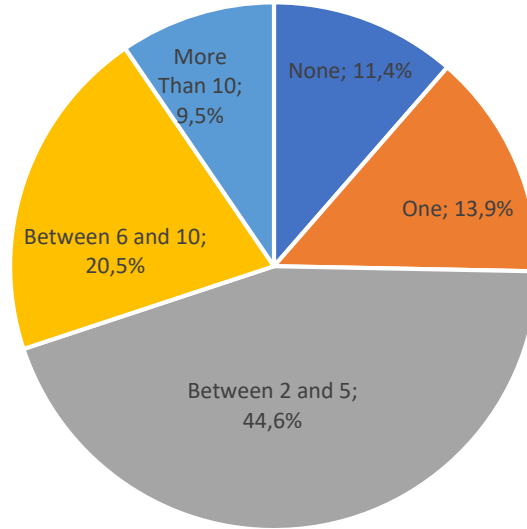Figure 2.1. LGBT Students' Reports on How Accepting Their School's Students are of LGBT People

Not At All Accepting; 4,1%

Not Very Accepting; 16,9%

Neutral; 26,0%

Somewhat Accepting; 24,2%

Very Accepting; 28,7%

Figure 2.2. LGBT Students' Reports on the Number of LGBT Students at their School

- None; 11,4%
- One; 13,9%
- Between 2 and 5; 44,6%
- Between 6 and 10; 20,5%
- More Than 10; 9,5%

Figure 2.3. Frequency of Attending a Program or Group for LGBT Youth Outside Their School

- Often ; 2,1%
- Frequently; 3,7%
- Sometimes; 7,0%
- Rarely; 9,9%
- Never; 77,3%
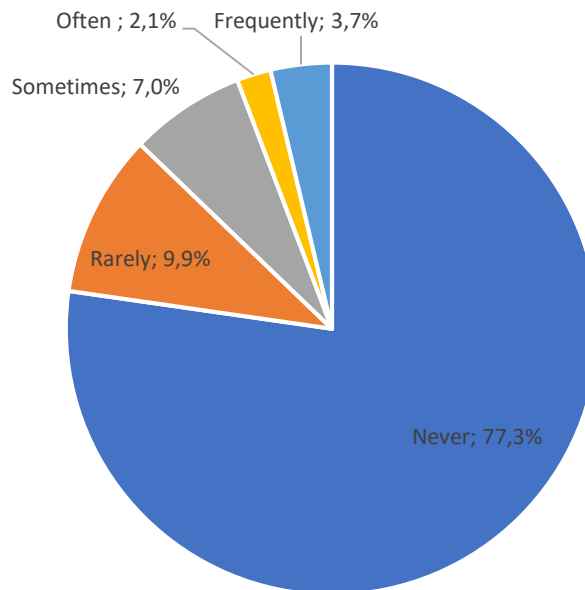
Supportive School Personnel

Supportive teachers, principals, and other school staff serve as another important resource for LGBT students. Being able to speak with a caring adult in school may have a significant positive impact on the school experiences for students, particularly those who feel marginalized or experience harassment. In our survey, the overwhelming majority of students (98.1%) could identify at least one school staff member whom they believed was supportive of LGBT students at their school, and two thirds (70.9%) could identify six or more supportive school staff (see Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4 LGBT Students' Reports on Number of Teachers and Other School Staff Who are Supportive of LGBT Students
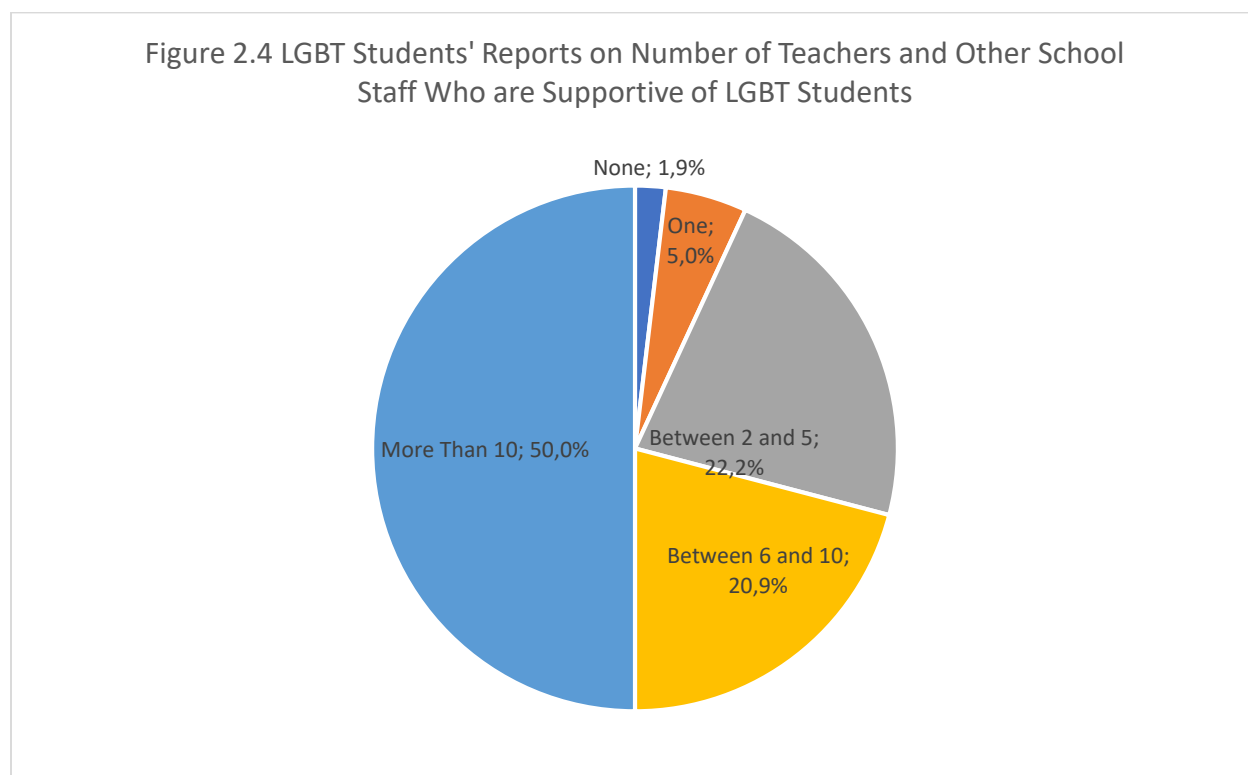
To understand whether certain types of school personnel were more likely to be seen as supportive, we asked LGBT students how comfortable they would feel talking one-on-one with various school personnel about LGBT-related issues. As shown in Figure 2.5, students reported that they would feel most comfortable talking CLB Employees or Trust Leadership. 47.5% said they would be somewhat or very comfortable talking with a teacher and 34.6% would be somewhat or very comfortable talking about LGBT issues to a coordinator (see Figure 2.5). Fewer students in our survey said they would feel comfortable talking one-one-one with an athletics coach or P.E. Teacher or the principal.[47]

Figure 2.5. Comfort Talking with School Personnel about LGBT Issues

CLB Employee — 47,7%
Teacher — 47,5%
Coordinator — 34,6%
Athletics Coach or P.E. Teacher — 27,0%
Principal — 21,5%
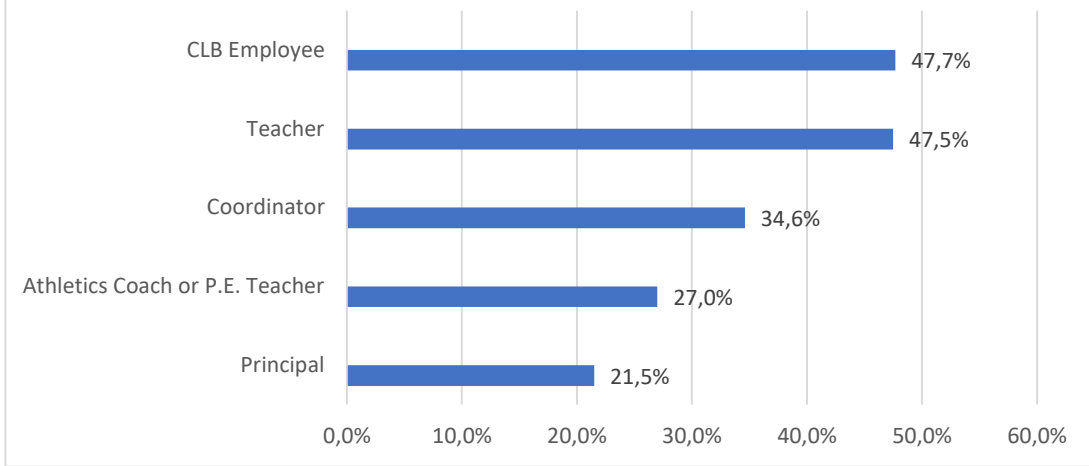
Inclusive Curricular Resources

LGBT student experiences may also be shaped by inclusion of LGBT-related information in the curriculum. Learning about LGBT historical events and positive role models may enhance their engagement with the school community and provide valuable information about the LGBT community. Students in our survey were asked whether they had been exposed to positive representations of LGBT people, history, or events in lessons at school, and nearly two thirds (62.5%) of respondents said that their classes did not include these topics (see Figure 2.6). Of the students who said they had been taught about LGBT topics. Among the students who had been taught positive things about LGBT-related topics in class, Religion, Zedenleer, History, Dutch, and English were the classes most often mentioned as being inclusive of these topics (see Table 2.1).

Figure 2.6. Percentage of LGBT Students Taught Postive Things about LGBT Topics in the Classroom Curriculum
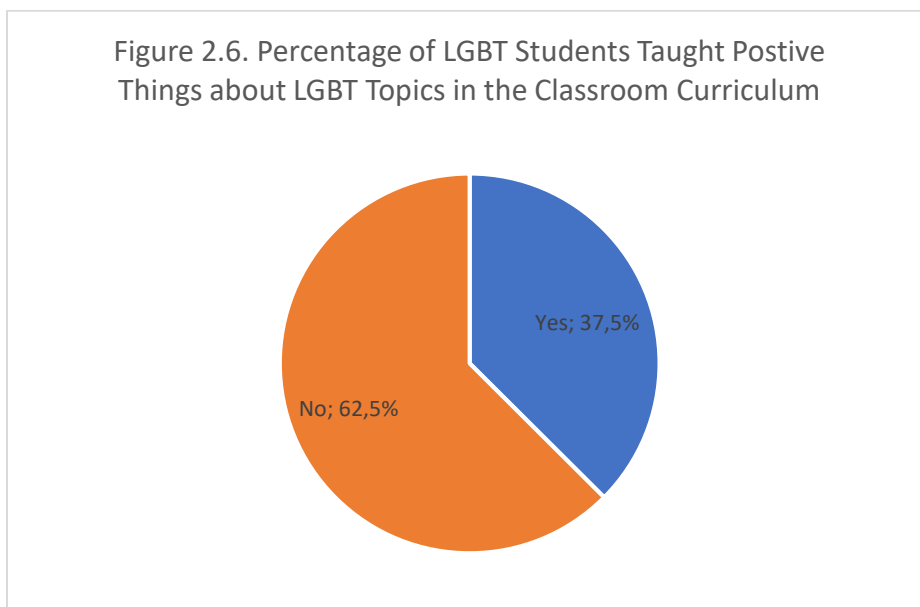
Yes; 37,5%
No; 62,5%

Table 2.1. Positive Representations of LGBT-Related Topics Taught in Class*		
	% among Students Taught Positive Rep of LGBT-Related Topics	% of all Students in Survey
Religion	45.3%	16.9%
Other Class	32.6%	12.2%
Zedenleer	27.6%	10.3%
History	21.5%	8.1%
Dutch	21.0%	7.9%
English	17.7%	6.6%
Biology	8.3%	3.1%
French	5.5%	2.1%
Mathematics	1.7%	0.6%
Geography	1.1%	0.4%
Physical Education	1.1%	0.4%
Physics	1.1%	0.4%
Economy	0.6%	0.2%

*Because respondents could select multiple responses, the categories are not mutually exclusive. The percentages do not add up to 100%.

Schools often have programs specifically about bullying, harassment and violence. But these programs may not specifically include information about victimization directed toward students who are often commonly targeted, such as LGBT students. We asked students if they had ever been taught about harassment and violence and whether it included information about LGBT-related victimization.

As shown in Figure 2.7, most LGBT students reported being taught about violence, but only 35.5% said that it included information about sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

We also asked students about their ability to access information about LGBT issues that teachers may not be covering in class, such as additional reading materials featuring information about LGBT issues. These types of LGBT-related curricular resources were available for only a third of the LGBT students in our survey, as shown in Figure 2.8.

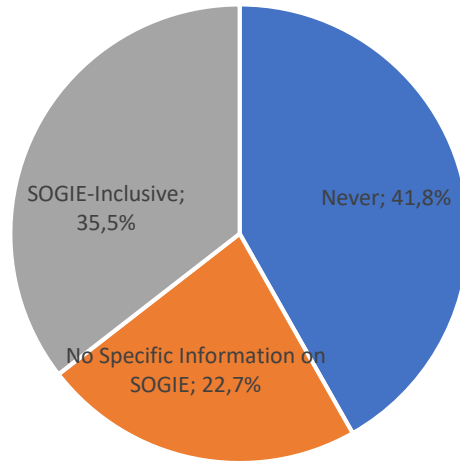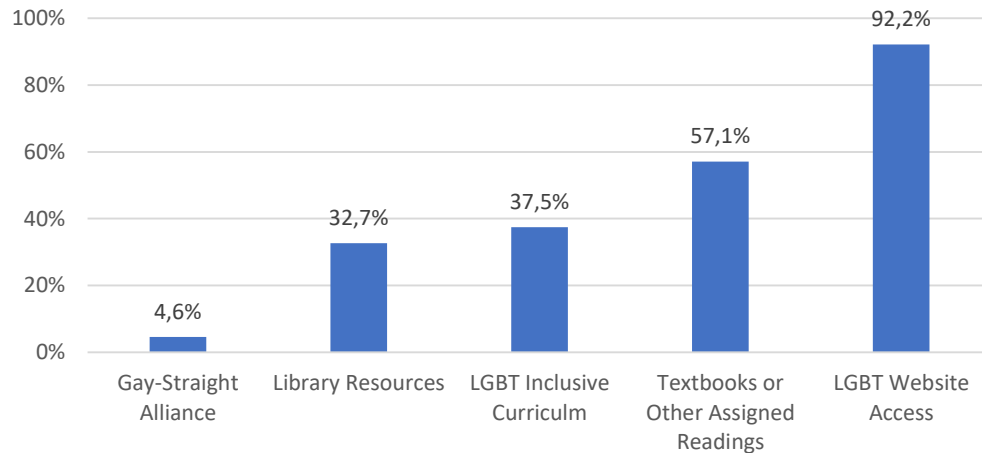Figure 2.7. Percentage of LGBT Students Taught Bullying in School

- Never; 41,8%
- No Specific Information on SOGIE; 22,7%
- SOGIE-Inclusive; 35,5%

Figure 2.8. Availability of LGBT-Related Curricular Resources

- Gay-Straight Alliance: 4,6%
- Library Resources: 32,7%
- LGBT Inclusive Curriculm: 37,5%
- Textbooks or Other Assigned Readings: 57,1%
- LGBT Website Access: 92,2%

*Among LGBT students able to access the Internet on school computers

School Policies for Addressing Bullying, Harassment, and Assault

School policies that address in-school bullying, harassment, and assault are powerful tools for creating school environments where students feel safe. These types of policies can explicitly state protections based on personal characteristics, such as sexual orientation and gender identity/ expression, among others. In this report, we refer to a "comprehensive" policy as one that explicitly enumerates protections based on personal characteristics, including both sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. When a school has and enforces a comprehensive policy, especially one which also includes procedures for reporting incidents to school authorities, it can send a message that bullying, harassment, and assault are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Comprehensive school policies may also provide students with greater protection against victimization because they make clear the various forms of bullying, harassment, and assault that will not be tolerated. It may also demonstrate that student safety, including the safety of LGBT students, is taken seriously by school administrators.

Students were asked whether their school had a policy about in-school bullying, harassment, or assault, and if that policy explicitly included sexual orientation and gender expression. As shown in Table 2.3, the majority of students (50.3%) did not have any policy in their school or did not know about one. And of the students who did report that their school had a policy, very few students said that it mentioned sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

| Table 2.3 LGBT Students' Reports of Bullying, Harassment, and Assault Policies	
No Policy/Don't Know	50.3%
Any Policy	49.7%
General Policy	44.7%
Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity/Expression mentioned	5.0%

Utility of School-Based Resources and Supports

School-based resources, such as supportive school personnel, LGBT-inclusive curricula, and enumerated policies for reporting bullying, harassment and assault, may help create a more positive school environment for LGBT students. In this section, we examine the relationship between school-based institutional supports and school climate, as well as educational indicators such as absenteeism, academic achievement, and educational aspirations.

Supportive School Personnel

Having supportive teachers and school staff can have a positive effect on the educational experiences of any student, increasing student motivation to learn and positive engagement in school. Given that LGBT students often feel unsafe and unwelcome in school, having access to school personnel who provide support may be critical for creating better learning environments for LGBT students. Therefore, we examined the relationships between the presence of supportive staff and several indicators of school climate, finding that the presence of school staff supportive of LGBT students is one critical piece in improving the school climate.

School Safety and Absenteeism. Having staff supportive of LGBT students was directly related to LGBT students reporting more positive feelings about their school and their education. As shown in Figure 2.9, students who reported having a higher number of teachers and school staff who support LGBT students were:
- More likely to report that the general student body is more accepting of LGBT people (64.0% vs. 27.3%).
- More likely to feel like they belong in their school (64.4% vs. 34.5%); and
- Less likely to miss days of school because of feeling unsafe (17.7% vs. 33.1%).[x]

Figure 2.9. The Number of Teacher and School Personnel Who Support LGBT Students and the LGBT Student Experience
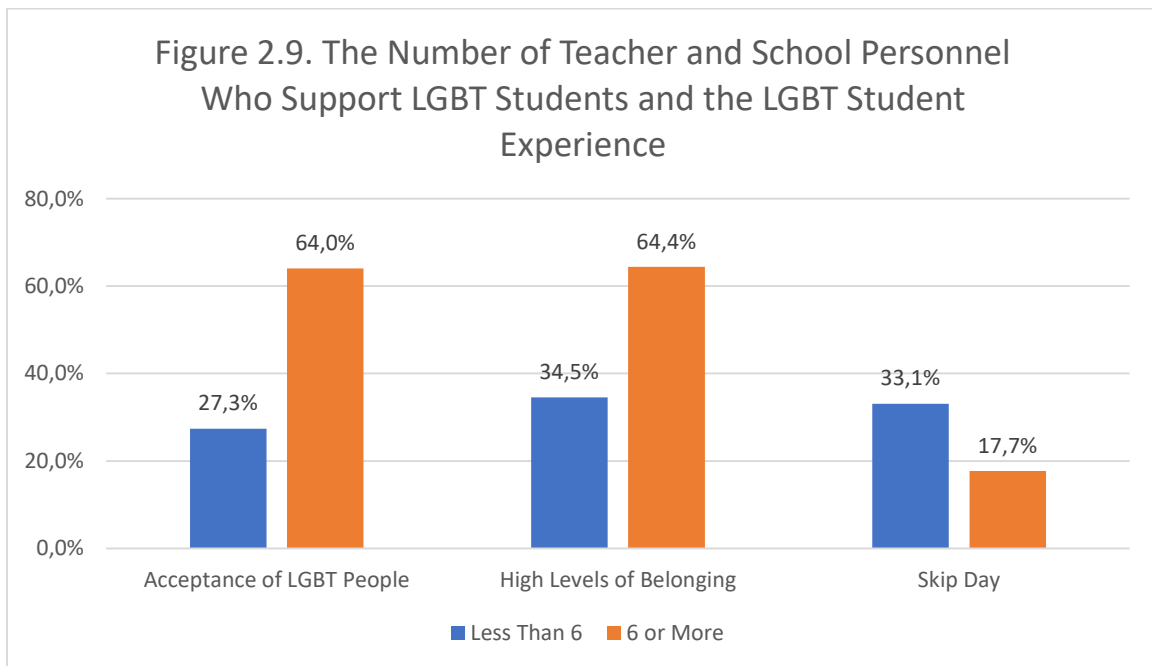
School staff members serve a vital role in ensuring a safe learning environment for all students, and as such, should respond to biased language and bias-based victimization. When staff members intervened in homophobic remarks, LGBT students reported more positive feelings about their school and education. As shown in Figure 2.10, when students said that teachers and school staff intervened more often, they also were:

- More likely to report that the general student body is more accepting of LGBT people (48.7% vs. 46.1%);
- More likely to feel like they belong in their school (55.1% vs. 42.4%); and
- Less likely to miss days of school because of feeling unsafe (18.4% vs. 33.5%).[xi]

Figure 2.10. Staff Intervention on Homophobic Comments and The Experience of LGBT Students
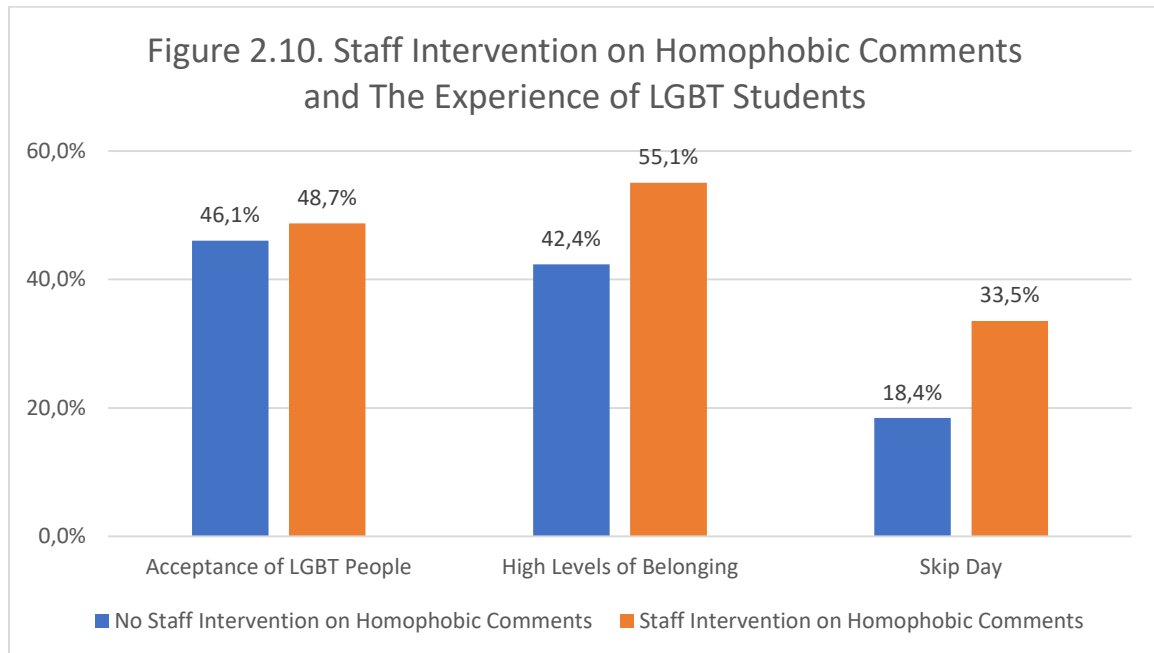
Inclusive Curriculum

Including LGBT-related issues in the curriculum in a positive manner may make LGBT students feel like more valued members of the school community, and it may also promote more positive feelings about LGBT issues and persons among their peers, thereby resulting in a more positive school climate. In fact, as shown in Figure 2.11, LGBT students who were taught positive information about LGBT people, history and events were:

- More likely to report that the general student body is more accepting of LGBT people (63.5% vs. 46.7%);
- More likely to feel like they belong in their school (69.4% vs. 47.0%); and
- Less likely to miss days of school because of feeling unsafe (18.8% vs. 24.5%).[xii]

Figure 2.11. Inclusive Curriculum and The Experience of LGBT Students
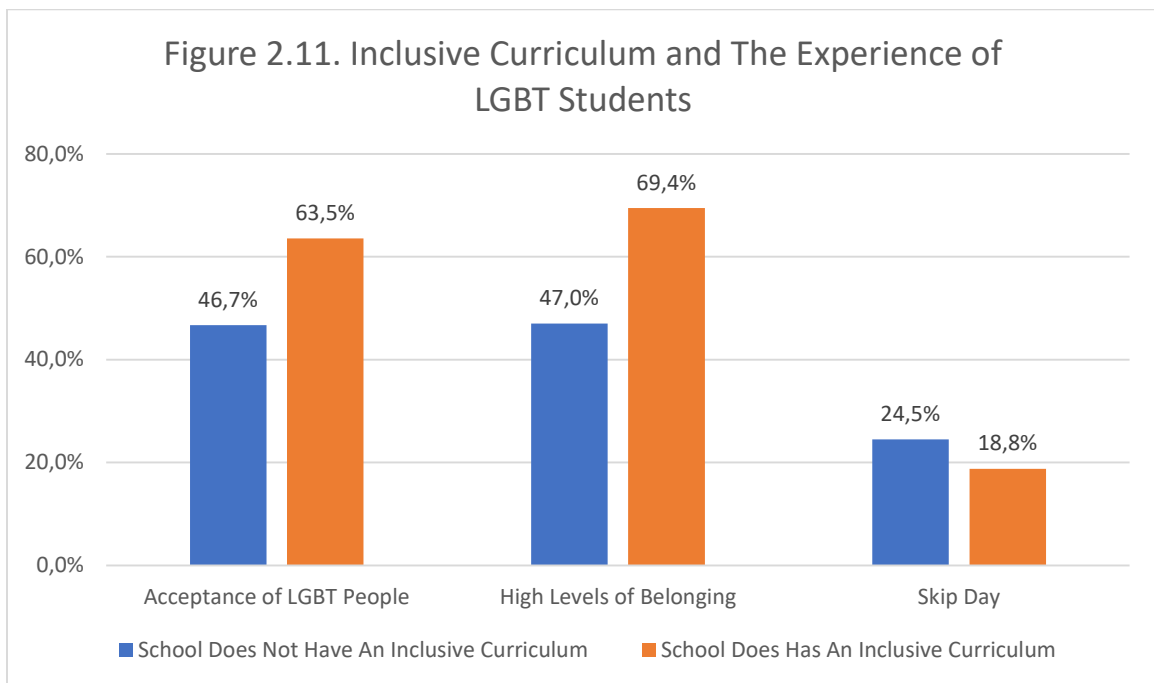
[i] Mean differences in the frequencies between types of biased remarks based on gender expression were examined using a repeated measures t-test and percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The effect was significant, $t(777) = 2.33$, $p<.05$.

[4] Mean differences in the frequencies of verbal harassment across types were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance: Pillai's Trace = .41, $F(3, 743) = 175.21$, $p<.001$. Univariate effects were considered at $p<.05$.

[5] Mean differences in the frequencies of physical harassment across types were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance: Pillai's Trace = .18, $F(3, 728) = 53.97$, $p<.001$. Univariate effects were considered at $p<.05$. Levels of physical harassment based on sexual orientation and gender expression were not significantly different; percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

[6] Mean differences in the frequencies of physical assault across types were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance: Pillai's Trace = .06, $F(3, 719) = 14.70$, $p<.001$. Univariate effects were considered at $p<.01$. Levels of physical assault based on race and based on disability were not significantly different; percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

[5] Differences by the three groups was tested through Chi-square analyses: verbal harassment based on sexual orientation: $\chi^2 = 7.64$, $df = 2$, $p<.05$, Cramer's V = .10; verbal harassment based on gender expression: $\chi^2 = 14.15$, $df = 2$, $p<.001$, Cramer's V = .14.

[6] The relationship between missing school and severity of victimization was examined through Pearson correlations. *Victimization based on sexual orientation*: r = .36, $p<.001$; *victimization based on gender expression*: r = .31, $p<.001$. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

[7] Items assessing school belonging were taken from the 2012 survey of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment.

[8] The relationship between school belonging and severity of victimization was examined through Pearson correlations. *Victimization based on sexual orientation*: r = -.39, $p<.001$; *victimization based on gender expression*: r = -.29, $p<.001$. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

[47] Mean differences in comfort level talking to school staff across type of school staff member were examined using repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance and percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's Trace = .48, $F(7, 717) = 92.78$, $p<.001$. Univariate analyses were considered significant at $p<.01$.

[x] The relationships between number of supportive staff and the school-related outcomes were tested through Peason correlations. *Student acceptance of LGBT people*: r = .36, p<.001; *School belonging*: r = .35, $p<.001$; *Missing* school: r = -.11, p<.01. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

[xi] The relationships between staff intervention and the school-related outcomes were tested with Peason correlations. *Student acceptance of LGBT people*: r =.20, p<.001; *School belonging*: r = .27, p<.001; *Missing school*: r = -.15, p<.01. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

[xii] The relationships between inclusive curriculum and the school-related outcomes were tested with Peason correlations. *Student acceptance of LGBT people*: r =.26, p<.001; *School belonging*: r = .25, p<.001; *Missing school*: r = -.13, p<.001. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.