



Even Here, LGBTQ+ Youth Face Bullying



As anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination has [amped up](#) over the past half decade, [California](#) remains a relatively hospitable environment for the [9%](#) of Americans who identify as sexual and gender minorities.

Yet even in this state, LGBTQ+ youth face significantly higher rates of bullying in high school than do their cisgender heterosexual peers, according to a [new analysis](#) by [Christina Sun](#), [Alexandria Hurtt](#), and NEPC Fellow [Michal Kurlaender](#), all of the University of California Davis. This reality follows them as they transition to college, leading to elevated concerns that they will face discrimination on campus, the study found.

Despite these concerns, LGBTQ+ youth were more likely to say they planned to pursue four-year rather than two-year degrees. These results are from a large-scale survey conducted by the research team, held even after researchers accounted for demographic factors, such as parental levels of education.

“While these results differ from prior research, the schooling experiences of LGBTQ+ students in our sample may include supports (wheth-

er at school or at home) potentially absent to students documented in other studies,” Sun, Hurtt, and Kurlaender say of their finding that LGBTQ+ students have higher postsecondary aspirations than do their non-LGBTQ+ peers. “For example, students may have had access to resources that can promote the well-being of trans and gender expansive students, such as social support from peers, family, and the community; school-inclusive policies; and extracurricular activities, among others.”

In addition to identifying differences in levels of educational aspiration, the researchers found that trans and gender-expansive youth were more likely than their cisgender counterparts to report plans to major in certain areas, including engineering, natural sciences, and humanities and the arts.

Nonetheless, responses to the survey’s open-ended questions indicated they worry discrimination and transphobia could follow them to college. As one student wrote: “I could die from hate crimes.”

The researchers conclude:

While California’s Seth’s Law (AB 9, 2012) already requires schools to adopt anti-bullying policies that enumerate sexual orientation and gender identity as protected categories, these findings indicate that substantial identity-based victimization persists, suggesting school districts may benefit from additional resources and accountability mechanisms to ensure policies are actively implemented.

...

Our results suggest that, even within California’s comparatively protective policy environment, LGBTQ+ students experienced significant disparities in high school climate and identity-based victimization at the time of survey administration. As federal protections for LGBTQ+ students are rolled back, the role of state and local policy in addressing these disparities becomes even more critical.

The analysis was based on a survey of 10,221 California students who were high school seniors in 2023 and who submitted applications for

financial aid. It was released in May, as part of a massive study, [Getting Down to Facts III](#), which produced 55 technical reports and 22 research briefs reviewing California's public education system. The influential project is the subject of May's *NEPC Talks Education* [podcast interview](#) of Stanford Professor [Susanna Loeb](#), who led the initiative. Multiple NEPC Fellows contributed to this effort. Other studies have been highlighted in [past newsletters](#), and additional work will be described in future installments.

NEPC Resources on LGBTQ Issues

This newsletter is made possible in part by support provided by the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice: <http://www.greatlakescenter.org>

The National Education Policy Center (NEPC), a university research center housed at the University of Colorado Boulder School of Education, sponsors research, produces policy briefs, and publishes expert third-party reviews of think tank reports. NEPC publications are written in accessible language and are intended for a broad audience that includes academic experts, policymakers, the media, and the general public. Our mission is to provide high-quality information in support of democratic deliberation about education policy. We are guided by the belief that the democratic governance of public education is strengthened when policies are based on sound evidence and support a multiracial society that is inclusive, kind, and just. Visit us at: <http://nepc.colorado.edu>