

An Open Letter of Support for LGBTQ+ Youth from Educational and Mental Health Professionals

On behalf of psychologists, counselors, social workers, educators, and parents throughout the state of Florida, we collectively write this memo in support of our LGBTQ+ youth and their families.

We stand in solidarity with LGBTQ+ youth and families who have endured significant challenges over the past couple of years and continue to show immense resiliency in the face of harmful and discriminatory legislation. We also support our colleagues in educational and community settings across the State who protect the rights of students to attend school free of discrimination, harassment, and bullying.

According to the [2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People](#), 90% of LGBTQ+ students reported that recent political events have negatively impacted their mental health, with 39% having seriously considered suicide in the previous year. Alarming, nearly half of all students who wanted counseling from a mental health professional were unable to access it. We urge parents to encourage their children to connect with trusted adults, including school staff, for support. Psychologists, counselors, and social workers remain dedicated to providing equitable and responsive mental health counseling that is inclusive of LGBTQ+ youth.

Importantly, research also shows that acceptance and support from parents, teachers, and school staff are significant protective factors that can dramatically improve the mental health and well-being of LGBTQ+ students. [According to the CDC](#), when schools implement supportive policies and practices for LGBTQ+ youth, **all** students experience less emotional distress, less violence and harassment, and fewer suicidal thoughts and behaviors. In fact, LGBTQ+ young people who report living in very accepting communities attempted suicide at less than half the rate of those who reported living in very unaccepting communities (Trevor Project, 2024). Rest assured, we are committed to the well-being of your children and strive to facilitate safe, healthy, and supportive conversations within families. We are also working to ensure that schools remain welcoming, safe, and inclusive environments for all youth and families who identify as LGBTQ+.

Rights of LGBTQ+ Youth

As educational and mental health professionals, we will work tirelessly to oppose legislation that contradicts our values, ethical standards, and the safety of youth. It is important to reiterate that LGBTQ+ youth are entitled to legal rights and protections that ensure they can learn and express themselves in a safe and supportive educational environment. Here are some key rights that protect LGBTQ+ students:

Title IX

Title IX prohibits sex-based discrimination and gender-based harassment, including harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Schools have an obligation to ensure LGBTQ+ students are able to attend school free from harassment and discrimination and parents have a right to use the process afforded to them through the Title IX regulations to ensure their child is given the safety and protections they deserve.

First Amendment

LGBTQ+ students have the right to be "out" and to express their opinions on LGBTQ+ issues. They are also entitled to organize and participate in peaceful protests. Additionally, students have the right to bring a same-gender date to prom and to dress and express themselves in ways that align with their gender identity.

Parental Rights and School Responsibilities

Parents and families have the right to request that their child's affirmed name and pronouns are used accurately at school. There is no law preventing teachers or other school-based staff from honoring this request.

Equal Access Act

If a school allows any extracurricular activities to form, it must also allow the formation of a GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) and cannot impose special rules or restrictions on the GSA that do not apply to other clubs.

Protection Against Bullying

There is no statute that prohibits intervention against anti-LGBTQ+ bullying. Schools are expected to protect all students, including LGBTQ+ youth, from bullying and harassment.

Safe Use of Facilities

LGBTQ+ individuals should never be forced to use facilities on a school campus, including restrooms, where they don't feel safe. Schools have a responsibility to ensure that everyone has access to safe facilities to ensure their basic needs can be met.

Educators and parents play a crucial role in supporting LGBTQ+ youth. Here are some ways educators and parents can support LGBTQ+ youth:

- *Listen and Affirm:* Validate their experiences and feelings. Let them know they are heard, seen, and valued.
- *Create Safe Spaces:* Ensure that school environments are inclusive and welcoming. Implement policies that protect LGBTQ+ students from discrimination and harassment and take bullying complaints seriously.
- *Educate Yourself and Others:* Learn about LGBTQ+ issues and advocate for inclusive education. Share knowledge with peers, students, and the community.
- *Be Visible Allies:* Show your support visibly through symbols, participation in LGBTQ+ events, and vocal advocacy against discriminatory practices.
- *Encourage Open Communication:* Foster an environment where LGBTQ+ youth feel comfortable discussing their identities and any issues they face.
- *Provide Resources:* Make information about LGBTQ+ support services and mental health resources readily available to students and families.

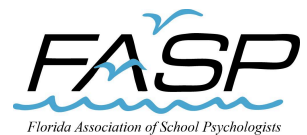
To LGBTQ+ youth, we see you, we value you, and we will make sure you are protected. Together, we can create a more inclusive, supportive, and affirming environment for all students, ensuring their safety, well-being, and academic success.



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