

**Position Paper:
AFFIRMING LGBTQ YOUTH AND FAMILIES**

BACKGROUND

NYS PTA is committed to increasing diversity, ensuring a safe, inclusive school and community environment that provides access to age-appropriate, educationally sound resources and curricula that affirms Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning/Queer (LGBTQ) identities and supports the social, emotional and academic needs of LGBTQ children, youth and families.

All children and youth should be able to attend school and live in communities that are safe and inclusive; free from bullying, discrimination, harassment and intimidation.

Unfortunately, the lack of awareness and understanding of issues facing LGBTQ children, youth and families has contributed to a higher rate of bullying, isolation, depression, and suicidal thoughts or attempts at a rate four times higher than their non-LGBTQ peers.

Exclusion and lack of support create environments that are not affirming or safe, and can have negative impacts on LGBTQ youth, including: lower grade point averages, decreased school attendance, increased dropout rates, increased victimization, increased rates of drug, alcohol and tobacco use and abuse, poor self-esteem that can impede social emotional development, and deterrence from higher education or career goals.

Age-appropriate and educationally sound curricula, and current and relevant resources regarding LGBTQ issues increases understanding and cultivates acceptance of and respect for LGBTQ children, youth and families. When coupled with anti-harassment and anti-bullying policies that specifically protect sexual orientation and/or gender identity and gender expression, students experience lower levels of bullying, decreased incidents of harassment, increased teacher/staff intervention, and a greater reporting of incidents.

POSITIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

NYS PTA supports state and federal legislation and regulation that:

- specifically recognizes LGBTQ as a protected group; addressing discrimination based upon sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression; and
- creates a safe, supportive and accepting environment in schools; specifying periodic training for educators and other school related professionals in support of all students to increase sensitivity to LGBTQ students and their families.

NYS PTA supports:

- standards regarding age-appropriate, medically accurate, and culturally sensitive information on LGBTQ issues into existing health and other appropriate curricula; and
- local adoption of age-appropriate, educationally sound curricula and resources that affirms sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression within a safe and inclusive environment for all students; and
- access to age-appropriate library and media resources that increases LGBTQ inclusion.

NYS PTA encourages all units and councils, working in conjunction with school educators, school related professionals, administrators, and community members:

- to raise awareness of age-appropriate and educationally sound LGBTQ affirming resources and support among students, families, school employees and community members;
- to ensure necessary revisions and amendments to policy and curricula that specifically address the topics of sexual orientation and gender identification or expression as they relate to ensuring a safe and inclusive school environment for all students, free from harassment, intimidation and bullying; and
- to further policies and practices that are inclusive of LGBTQ students and families, and ensure that schools provide access to LGBTQ-affirming resources.

Examples of policies to review and amended as necessary include, but are not limited to: bullying and harassment policies, professional development and training related to LGBTQ issues and inclusiveness, curricula decisions and implementation (especially health curricula), school function and extra-curricular policies, allowance of school-sponsored LGBTQ clubs and activities, access to inclusive K-12 literature, inclusion of LGBTQ heritage events, and further policies and practices that are inclusive of LGBTQ students and families, and ensure that schools provide access to LGBTQ-affirming resources.

CONCLUSION

Every child is entitled to a healthy, safe, supportive and inclusive educational setting. Unfortunately, LGBTQ students can experience hostile, non-inclusive or unsupportive school environments. NYS PTA has a strong commitment to increasing diversity and inclusion in the educational system and our communities so all children and youth are appropriately supported.

We must work together, as an educational community, to support our LGBTQ students to ensure they are well prepared for the many challenges that may lie ahead.

Adopted November 2017