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# The Case for Comprehensive Sex Education: Appreciation of Sexual Diversity

School-based sex education plays a vital role in the sexual health and wellbeing of young people. The results of [Three Decades of Research: The Case for Comprehensive Sex Education](#) found that sex education has the potential to impact so much in addition to pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection (STI) prevention.

**Strong evidence for reducing homophobia and homophobic bullying and harassment, as well as other outcomes related to appreciation of sexual diversity.**

- Efforts to **reduce homophobic bullying and harassment** and to **increase appreciation for sexual diversity can improve the school climate for all students and create a safer environment that is more conducive to learning, and to better mental health** for sexual minority students.
- Evidence of success was found from **individual classroom efforts**, as well as from **inclusivity across the curriculum**, in promoting a **more accepting and welcoming environment for sexual minority youth**.

## Lower homophobia

- Curricula designed specifically to reduce homophobia have been found to be **successful across grade levels** using a variety of approaches both formally within sexuality education and throughout other areas of the curriculum.
- Programs that brought in **guest speakers from the LGB community** to share personal stories resulted in reduced homophobic attitudes.
- In a program in which a **gay man and a lesbian spoke in their classrooms**, students exhibited **increased normalization of lesbian and gay people, a reduction in stereotyping** about gender expression and norms for lesbian and gay women and men, **empathy** for those who come out, an **appreciation** for the positive aspects of being lesbian and gay, a **recognition** that sexual orientation does not have to correlate with sexual behavior, and **lower use of homophobic slurs**.
- Strategies that use **literature featuring gay and lesbian characters** have also resulted in **lowered homophobia and homophobic behaviors** both at the elementary school level and in high school.
- Research supports approaches that use literature to study LGBTQ rights and **break down stereotyped beliefs** using a social justice lens. Establishing a **safe climate** in which to discuss sensitive and controversial issues **was essential to the positive outcomes**.

## Reduced homophobic bullying

- Curricula that are **inclusive of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions, across areas of study**, and most strongly within comprehensive sex education, **reduce homophobic bullying and harassment, and increase safety for LGBTQ students**.
- LGBTQ-supportive curricula were also related to students **feeling safer at school** and more aware of bullying at both the school and individual levels.
- **LGBTQ-inclusive sex education and health classes had the greatest impact on school climate**.
- **Inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity** that was extensive in both content and frequency **predicted decreased name-calling and, among girls, increased willingness to intervene when witnessing name-calling by others, leading to an improved school climate**.

- LGBTQ-inclusive sex education is related to **lower reports of adverse mental health** (suicidal thoughts and suicide plans) among all youth **and of experiences of bullying among sexual minority youth**.
- LGBTQ-inclusive sex education is related to **better health outcomes among LGB students**, including **fewer sex partners, less use of drugs or alcohol before sex, and less pregnancy, in addition to the outcome of better school attendance**.

### **Recommendations for Schools and Educators**

- Schedule LGBTQ speakers in your classroom to share their life experiences around coming out, dealing with bullying and homophobia, overcoming stereotypes and lifting up LGBTQ role models.
- Don't just do one lesson on sexual orientation and gender identity expression but include sexual orientation and gender identity and expression as a part of all the lessons you teach throughout the year.
- Be intentional to include people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions in all content areas.
- **The Professional Learning Standards for Sex Education** can help educators to identify areas where they may need professional development to successfully teach this content. Links to professional development programs can be found at <https://sexeducationcollaborative.org/offerings>.

### **Reference**

Goldfarb E. and Lieberman L. Three Decades of Research: The Case for Comprehensive Sex Education. Journal of Adolescent Health. 2021; 68, 1: 13--27. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.07.036>