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# School Climate for LGBTQ Youth: Principals' Perceptions and Experiences

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# SCHOOL CLIMATE FOR LGBTQ YOUTH: PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

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## APPROVAL OF DISSERTATION

We, the faculty supervising the work of **Jessica George**, affirm that the dissertation, **School Climate for LGBTQ Youth: Principals' Perceptions and Experiences** meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the EdD Program in **Leadership Studies** and the College of Education and Professional Development. This work also conforms to the editorial standards of our discipline and the Graduate College of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the practices that can mitigate a hostile school climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth and the barriers that negatively affect implementation of those practices. LGBTQ youth are at higher risk for bullying, harassment, and other characteristics of a harsh learning environment, which can result in negative outcomes, both short- and long-term. Principals of West Virginia public high schools were surveyed to collect data on the frequency at which LGBTQ-supportive practices are implemented in their schools and the barriers, if any, they faced. A total of n = 29 ($\bar{x}$ = 27.6%) participants completed the survey instrument designed to collect data related to the research questions. Data were analyzed to determine which practice(s) LGBTQ youth in schools represented by the sample are most likely to have access to and which practice(s) they are least likely to encounter. Supportive school personnel was the practice most likely to be implemented and a GSA was the practice least likely to be implemented. The barriers reported by principals were most often in the form of stakeholder groups located outside of the school (external). Based on dependent *t*-tests, no statistically significant difference was observed in the frequency high school principals reported barriers both by type (stakeholder group and logistical component) and location (internal and external). Further research is needed to better understand how the barriers explored in this investigation affect school climate for LGBTQ youth.



*Keywords*: LGBTQ youth, school climate, principal, high school

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals make up a population with a historied past of facing disenfranchisement, discrimination, and criminalization. The acronym serves as an umbrella that encompasses a spectrum of sexual orientations and gender identities. As gender and sexual minorities, LGBTQ individuals have been perceived as a threat to the heteronormative ideology that permeates the domestic and international culture. "Heteronormative ideology refers to the belief that there are two separate and opposing genders with associated natural roles that match their assigned sex, and that heterosexuality is a given. It is pervasive and persistent" (van der Toorn et al., 2020, p. 160).

## Background of the Problem

This pervasive ideology yields harmful and potentially deadly outcomes in all societal institutions for those who identify or are merely perceived to be LGBTQ. Morgenroth and Ryan (2020) liken the impact of gender identity (though this could also be analogized to sexual orientation) to elements of theater. The elements of oneself are comprised of character (male or female), the script (one's behavior), and the costume (physical appearance). The stage represents the physical and social environments that comprise one's context. Finally, the elements of the outside world are represented by the audience, which Morgenroth and Ryan (2020) state that a character is both performing for and a member of at different points in time. Any deviation of the "performer" (i.e., in character, script, and/or costume) based on what is socially expected poses a threat to heteronormativity. As a result, van der Toorn et al. (2020) claim that "threat reactions contribute to the maintenance of the heteronormative belief system" (p. 162). A concrete example of this is the perceived personal threat to manhood posed by gay men, transgender

women, or even drag queens among heterosexual males. In an FBI (2020) report of hate crime statistics for 2019, nearly 20% were motivated by sexual orientation (16.7%) or gender identity (2.7%). It is important to also consider the intersectionality of race, sexuality, and gender identity in this discussion, as 57.6% of hate crimes in 2019 were motivated by race or ethnicity. Transgender individuals are being murdered at alarming rates: 27 victims in 2019 (Forestiere, 2020), 44 victims in 2020, and already 27 victims in 2021 (Human Rights Campaign [HRC], 2021). Year after year, most of these victims are transgender women of color.

The impacts of heteronormativity can also be subtle and systemic. A study by the Center for American Progress (Gruberg et al., 2020) revealed more than a third of LGBTQ Americans experienced discrimination in the past year (with significant mental and economic impacts for 1 in 2 respondents), 15% struggled to find medical care because of discrimination, and many experienced obstacles in accessing services such as housing, obtaining government IDs, etc. These systemic outcomes affect the wellbeing and quality of life of LGBTQ Americans and have been assisted by trusted people and agencies. From 1948 until 1990, the World Health Organization classified homosexuality as a mental disorder (Cochran et al., 2020). Until as recently as 2019, the World Health Organization (n.d.) also classified being transgender as a mental disorder. The perception of LGBTQ individuals having something "wrong" with them has made them more likely to "experience human rights violations including violence, torture, criminalization, forced sterilization (often in the case of intersex persons), discrimination and stigma because they are perceived to fall outside of social constructed sex and gender norms" (World Health Organization, 2016, p. 5).

Rights and legal protections have been hard-fought and slowly achieved, though largescale societal acceptance is still out of reach. At the federal and state levels, the application

of hate crime laws depends largely upon geography and the legal authority interpreting code or precedent. While marriage equality became the law of the land following the Supreme Court's ruling on *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), some states, like Florida and Indiana (Moreau, 2020), still have laws on the books that prohibit same-sex marriage. While these laws cannot be enforced, the failure of state legislators to amend or repeal them reveals the deep-seated resistance to anything other than heteronormativity in legal institutions.

The previously discussed obstacles for LGBTQ individuals (e.g., mental health, housing, hate crimes, etc.) highlight what it is like for adults to live in a heteronormative society. It is only in recent decades that heightened attention has been turned to the experiences of LGBTQ youth. This is likely due to the increased visibility of LGBTQ millennials and Gen Z when compared to older generations. A 2020 Gallup poll (Jones, 2021) revealed that 15.9% of Generation Z and 9.1% of Millennials identify as LGBTQ. This is starkly different from 3.8% of Generation X and 2% of Baby Boomers. Conron (2020) estimates that nearly 2 million youth (age 13-17) identify as LGBTQ. "One of the main reasons LGBT identification has been increasing over time is that younger generations are far more likely to consider themselves to be something other than heterosexual" (Jones, 2021, para. 8). While there is increased visibility of LGBTQ individuals in media and a gradual increase of social acceptance, higher rates of youth (age 13-21) identifying as LGBTQ does not mean that people are more likely to be a gender or sexual minority, but those who identify as such are more likely to be open about their sexuality, gender identity, or gender expression.

While this generational shift is encouraging, today's youth are still subject to the pervasive heteronormative ideology that was established long before them but still yields a host of negative outcomes in their lives. LGBTQ youth are more likely to experience mental health

concerns including depression and anxiety, and nearly 40% reported seriously considering suicide in the past year (The Trevor Project, 2019). The Trevor Project (2019) also reported that the recent political climate had an impact on the mental health of 76% of LGBTQ youth. Morton et al. (2017) found that LGBTQ youth were 120% more likely to experience homelessness than their non-LGBTQ peers due to rejection from parents or caregivers. Because of these negative outcomes, LGBTQ youth are more likely to develop substance use disorders as a means of coping (Felner et al., 2020). These outcomes during youth and adolescence have the potential to change the trajectory of their lives to include legal issues, health issues, and possibly early death (Wagaman et al., 2020; Rhoades et al., 2018).

These outcomes resulting from a heteronormative ideology are also seen in the one place, regardless of background or geography, youth should be safe – school. Safety in school requires physical, social, and emotional wellbeing, all in the interest of creating an environment where students can engage in the learning process. This is not to imply that cisgender, heterosexual students are guaranteed a safe, positive learning environment by default; instead, their sexuality and/or gender identity or gender expression are not contributing factors to potential negative experiences at school. The same cannot be said for LGBTQ students. The 2019 National School Climate Survey (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020) revealed that LGBTQ students (age 13-21) experience high rates of anti-LGBTQ language from students and staff and harassment or assault because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This hostile climate often results in higher rates of absenteeism for these students, which can negatively affect their academic achievement. Learning cannot occur in an environment where students do not feel safe. The most recent findings from the 2019 survey administration were consistent with those from previous years.

LGBTQ students also experience the effects of heteronormativity through school policies

and procedures. Bringing a same-sex date to a school dance/function, being addressed by one's preferred name/pronouns, accessing the restroom/locker room that coincides with one's gender identity, and wearing clothes that reflect one's gender expression are all ways in which the heteronormative ideology complicates school-related experiences for LGBTQ youth (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020). These issues reflect systems that, in indirect ways, communicate a specific message to LGBTQ students: You are not welcome here. Making schools safe for LGBTQ students requires both changing behaviors of students and personnel and updating policies and procedures to be more inclusive of this population of students. Though that may sound like a daunting task, research points to practices that, at little to no cost to the school/district, can make the school climate safer for and more inclusive of LGBTQ students.

It is important to note that studies involving LGBTQ youth include participants from varying age ranges. Some include participants from 13 to 17 years of age; other studies include participants from 13 to 21 years of age. This is due, in part, to the scope of the respective studies. Conron (2020), for example, employed a literal interpretation of the word "youth" and stopped short of including individuals who, at the age of 18, are legally considered adults. Jones (2021) explored the topic from a generational perspective and, as such, reported data on participants beyond the age of 18. In both instances, these data are relevant to the current investigation, as high school populations can include individuals who are 18 years of age or older. This can be due to a student having a birthday that falls late in the school year, retention in a previous grade level, or special education status. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), individuals are entitled to special education services from age 3 to 21 years (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). This investigation will include an analysis of existing literature including samples of varying age ranges because high schools will have student populations with similar

varying age ranges.

**Statement of the Problem**

Youth (age 13-21) who identify as LGBTQ are a population at risk for negative social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes. A recent survey of educators conducted by Fairness West Virginia (2020) revealed that within the 22 school districts represented by participants, most schools are not implementing practices that support LGBTQ youth. While the existing literature shows the need for and benefits of supportive practices based on heteronormative and oftentimes hostile national and state climates, there is a need to better understand the obstacles that have affected or even prevented the implementation of such practices. This nonexperimental descriptive study investigated the perceptions and experiences of current principals in West Virginia public high schools (serving students in grades 9-12) where LGBTQ-supportive practices have been implemented to varying degrees. The investigation also explored the barriers that have negatively affected the implementation of these practices.

**Purpose of the Study**

The current investigation explored the practices that can mitigate the negative climate LGBTQ students can experience in school and the barriers that affect the implementation of these practices from the principal's perspective. As Hussain et al. (2016) stated, "Principals are charged with the responsibility of creating a building climate that is conducive to providing students with the best possible education" (p. 50). The reported levels of victimization, harassment, and discrimination reported by LGBTQ youth nationally and in West Virginia are linked to a variety of negative social, emotional, academic, and behavioral outcomes, as shown in the existing literature. These outcomes prevent LGBTQ youth from accessing the best possible education their school has to offer.

Current principals of public high schools were surveyed to identify which practices are being implemented in West Virginia and the barriers to ensuring the school environment is one in which LGBTQ students can thrive. This is no easy feat, considering the pervasiveness of heteronormativity in school culture from dress codes to enforcement of policies related to public displays of affection (PDA) to accessible restrooms. School principals must be guided by what Fullan (2002) calls a moral purpose. "School leaders with moral purpose seek to make a difference in the lives of students" (Fullan, 2002, p. 17). By supporting LGBTQ youth through school-based practices, the principal can make a difference in the lives of these students.

In the interest of developing a more thorough understanding of the school climate for LGBTQ students, this study sought to explore why practices that, through existing literature, have demonstrated a positive impact on the school climate for LGBTQ students are not being implemented consistently. This study fills a gap in existing literature and practice, particularly in West Virginia public high schools, to demonstrate the obstacles school leaders face in modernizing the school climate to be safe for and inclusive of LGBTQ students. The target population for this study included current West Virginia principals at public high schools serving students in grades 9-12. As the target population and focus of this study, principals can influence the degree to which the school climate is welcoming and supportive of LGBTQ students.

Additionally, the researcher has both personal and professional purposes for investigating the study's topic. As a member of the LGBTQ community and a former employee of a West Virginia school district, the researcher has observed instances where LGBTQ-supportive practices were needed or, more notably, LGBTQ-supportive practices were in place but not implemented by employees (both teachers and administrators) with personal objections. This investigation sought to provide an understanding of what is happening across the state and

determine whether these limited firsthand experiences were an anomaly or the norm.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the investigation:

1. What LGBTQ-supportive practices are being implemented in West Virginia public high schools?
2. What barriers negatively impact implementation of these practices?

**Significance of the Study**

"Schools are often unsafe learning environments for LGBTQ students" (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020, p. 146). This study will contribute to the existing body of literature that elucidates the hostile school climate LGBTQ youth face and the practices that have been empirically shown to mitigate a negative or hostile climate. Two oversights in existing research will be addressed with this study: 1) Information specific to West Virginia will add much-needed breadth to the minimal amount of research focusing on this topic within this state; and 2) While existing literature is consistent in identifying and demonstrating the effectiveness of practices that can make the learning environment safe for and inclusive of LGBTQ students, sparse information has been published regarding why these measures are not consistent features in schools.

If existing research has established that certain practices mitigate a hostile school climate that can disenfranchise a population of students from experiencing a safe and supportive learning environment, why are those practices not standard across all schools? From school to school, the answer to this question will vary in complexity and nuance, but the possible barriers stem from the same groups of stakeholders (both within and outside of the school) and the same logistical concerns. This study may be used by current or future administrators to implement practices that make the school environment safe for and inclusive of LGBTQ students by identifying and

preparing to address barriers that arise along the way.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms and acronyms are used throughout this investigation and existing research. It is important to note that definitions of many of these terms continue to evolve, and iteration of these definitions can vary from person to person. Individuals have the autonomy and agency to choose their labels, if any, regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. For example, an individual who, by definition, would be labeled as a lesbian might prefer to be referred to as gay or queer. The following definitions are intended for the discussion of groups of people in the context of this investigation. When an individual's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression are concerned, it is best to follow the lead of that individual in terms of how they are referred to, what pronouns to use, etc.

**Table 1**

*Definitions of Terms*

| Term | Definition |
|---|---|
| Ally | The label claimed by individuals who typically are not part of the LGBTQ community but actively support those who are; the label can also be claimed by LGBTQ individuals who actively support other groups within the community (HRC, n.d.) |
| Anti-LGBTQ discrimination | Occurs when school policies, practices, or procedures result in inequitable treatment or experiences for LGBTQ students (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020) |
| Asexual | Sexual orientation label claimed by individuals who do not experience sexual attraction; this term is not synonymous with abstinence or celibacy (University of Florida, 2017) |
| Assault | Physical contact, such as kicking, hitting, or injuring with a weapon, with the intent to cause bodily harm; motivated by the victim's actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity/expression (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020) |
| Biased language | Undirected, general anti-LGBTQ language or terms, e.g., "that's gay," or "no homo" (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020) |
| Bisexual | Sexual orientation label claimed by individuals who are attracted to more than one sex, gender, or gender identity (HRC, n.d.) |

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| Cisgender | Gender identity label used to describe individuals whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth (HRC, n.d.) |
| Coming out | The process of voluntarily disclosing one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity publicly (University of California San Francisco, n.d.) |
| Discrimination | Prejudiced feelings or beliefs motivate behavior, resulting in treating others unfairly or unjustly; the behavior can be deliberate or unintentional; can occur on an individual or systemic level (University of Florida, 2017) |
| Drag King/Queen | An individual who performs masculinity (drag king) or femininity (drag queen) theatrically using gendered clothing or behaviors; does not imply sexual orientation or gender identity (National LGBT Health Education Center, 2016) |
| Gay | Sexual orientation label claimed by individuals attracted to others of the same gender; the term used to exclusively refer to men but has become an umbrella term for women and non-binary individuals (HRC, n.d.) |
| Gender | Identity constructed by social and cultural norms based on shared beliefs about masculinity, femininity, and androgyny (University of Florida, 2017); this term is not synonymous with sex |
| Gender binary | The belief, rooted in heteronormativity, that there are only two genders: male and female (National LGBT Health Education Center, 2016) |
| Gender expression | The manner in which an individual communicates their gender (i.e., masculinity, femininity, or androgyny), including physical appearance, mannerisms, hairstyles, etc. (University of Florida, 2017) |
| Gender identity | The gender an individual believes themselves to be (University of Florida, 2017); gender identity and sexual orientation are mutually exclusive (HRC, n.d.) |
| Gender non-conforming | Gender expression label claimed by those whose presentation of masculinity, femininity, and/or androgyny is different from social norms and expectations (National LGBT Health Education Center, 2016) |
| Gender or sexual minority | The acronym used to refer to individuals who are not heterosexual and/or cisgender (Safe Zone Project, n.d.) |
| GLSEN | Formerly the Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network; organization that conducts research and develops resources for educators to support LGBTQ students (Library of Congress, n.d.) |
| GSA | The acronym often used for a supportive student club geared toward LGBTQ students and their peer allies; the acronym has historically stood for Gay-Straight Alliance, but language is shifting to be more inclusive and now often stands for Gender and Sexuality Alliance (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020) |
| Harassment | Verbal or physical victimization of LGBTQ students, including |

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| | directed biased language (e.g., calling a student a faggot or dyke), bullying, aggression, etc. (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020) |
| Heterosexual | Sexual orientation label claimed by those who are attracted to members of a different gender (i.e., men attracted to women; women attracted to men); also known as *straight* (National LGBT Health Education Center, 2016) |
| Heteronormative ideology | The belief, either conscious or unconscious, that heterosexuality is the only natural, normal, and preferable sexual orientation; this can be reflected in individuals, cultures, and systems (University of Florida, 2017) |
| Homophobia | Negative perceptions of those in (or perceived to be in) the LGBTQ community, leading to behaviors ranging from aversion to hatred and aggression; this can be reflected in individuals, cultures, and systems (University of Florida, 2017) |
| Homosexual | Historically, a term that referred to individuals who were attracted to members of the same sex; this term has become outdated, and its use is no longer recommended (Safe Zone Project, n.d.) |
| HRC | Acronym for Human Rights Campaign, a political advocacy organization seeking to instill equality for and eliminate discrimination of the LGBTQ community (America's Charities, n.d.) |
| Inclusive curricular resources | Refers to a spectrum of practices including access to LGBTQ-inclusive instruction, materials and resources, and sex education (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020) |
| Inclusive and supportive school policies | School policies that 1) address bullying, harassment, and assault of LGBTQ students, and 2) ensure equitable experiences for gender and sexual minority students (e.g., use of preferred name/pronouns, use of appropriate school restroom, etc.) (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020) |
| Intersectionality | The way in which an individual's various identities (i.e., race, class, religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc.) affect their lives and the degree to which they experience discrimination (Dastagir, 2017) |
| Intersex | Individuals born with sex characteristics or anatomy that developed differently than "typical" males or females (National LGBT Health Education Center, 2016) |
| Lesbian | Sexual orientation label claimed by women who are attracted to other women; this term may be used by non-binary individuals, as well (HRC, n.d.) |
| LGBTQ | The acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (HRC, n.d.) and is used as the umbrella term for these communities; the acronym has expanded over the years, as earlier literature might refer to the LGB or LGBT community (the terms remain the same), some individuals and organizations have further expanded the acronym to include intersex, asexual, and other gender and sexual minority communities by using the acronym |

| | LGBTQIA+ |
|---|---|
| LGBTQ-supportive practices | School-based practices implemented to make the learning environment safe for and inclusive of LGBTQ students, including supportive student clubs, inclusive curricular resources, supportive school personnel, and inclusive and supportive school policies (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020) |
| LGBTQ youth | Individuals aged 13-21 years; for the purposes of this investigation, this is the age range served by public schools with students in grades 9-12 |
| Misgender | Referring to an individual (in their presence or otherwise) using incorrect gender identity labels or incorrect pronouns (Dastagir, 2017) |
| Non-binary | Gender identity label claimed by those who do not exclusively identify as a man or woman, whether they identify as both, somewhere in between the two, or neither (HRC, n.d.) |
| Outing/outed | The non-voluntary revealing of an individual's sexual orientation and/or gender identity by another person (HRC, n.d.) |
| Pronouns | The gendered or non-binary terms an individual uses and prefers others use to refer to them (e.g., he/him, she/her, they/theirs) (Dastagir, 2017) |
| Queer | Historically used as a slur, this term has been reclaimed by many in the LGBTQ community as an umbrella term for those who are not exclusively straight or cisgender (HRC, n.d.) |
| Transgender | Gender identity or gender expression label claimed by individuals who identify or express their gender in a way that is different from their sex assigned at birth (HRC, n.d.); also known as *trans* |
| Sex | Refers to the sex assigned at birth; the biological descriptor assigned to infants based on anatomical characteristics (male, female, or intersex) (HRC, n.d.); this term is not synonymous with gender |
| Sexual orientation | The identification and labeling of one's attraction – sexually, romantically, and emotionally – to others; sexual orientation and gender identity are mutually exclusive (HRC, n.d.) |
| Supportive school personnel | Visible and accessible adults (e.g., teachers, administrators, counselors, etc.) with whom LGBTQ students feel safe confiding and seeking support or resources (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020) |
| Supportive student clubs | Student organizations (like GSAs) that provide safe spaces for LGBTQ students and their peer allies to congregate, make friends, and advocate for change in their school (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020) |
| Transphobia | Negative perceptions of those who are (or perceived to be) trans, leading to behaviors ranging from aversion to hatred and aggression; this can be reflected in individuals, cultures, and systems (University of Florida, 2017) |

**Limitations**

This study includes several limitations. Beginning with internal validity, the method, non-experimental research, is not conducive for making claims about causal relationships (Reio, 2016). While the data revealed different frequencies in the implementation of the four practices and the barriers school principals faced, causation cannot be determined. Additionally, the use of a self-report anonymous online survey created limitations for internal validity. Participants could have been influenced by factors such as social desirability or the halo effect (Dodd-McCue & Tartaglia, 2010) when completing the instrument. There is potential for participants to answer items based on what they assume they are "supposed" to say or do (in their peers' or society's eyes, for example).

In terms of external validity, the sample size posed the biggest limitation. Out of the n = 105 population, n = 29 participants made up the sample. This equates to a 27.6% response rate. As such, generalization of the data or analysis is not appropriate. Additionally, the sample included little diversity in terms of school population size and community type. Most participants (n = 13, $\overline{x}$ = 52%) reported working at a school with 500-999 students, and most participants (n = 16, $\overline{x}$ = 64%) reported working in a rural community. This further limits the ability to determine whether the data collected is representative of public high schools across West Virginia, including those of smaller or larger population size and in suburban or urban communities (McMillan, 2016).

Additionally, it is important to note that the survey was conducted from August to October of 2021. During these months, particularly in West Virginia, evolving precautions, guidelines, and other effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were occupying a large share of school principals' time and energy. While the survey was short, these circumstances likely had a marked

impact on the population's willingness to give up time to take a survey.

## Methods

This descriptive, non-experimental study used survey instrumentation to collect data related to the two research questions. All principals of West Virginia traditional public high schools (n = 105), those serving students in grades 9-12, were invited to participate in this investigation. Data were sorted into three separate groups (those implementing the practices, those who are not implementing the practices but have tried, and those who are not implementing the practices and have not tried) and analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to generate a description of the phenomenon under investigation. Comparisons among groups were made to observe the degree to which LGBTQ-supportive practices are implemented in West Virginia public high schools and whether the obstacles vary from group to group.

## Summary

The increased rate at which youth are being open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity or gender expression creates concern as they are compelled to obtain an education in a school climate that has not experienced the same generational shift. While it is encouraging that some youth continue to express their identities openly despite a hostile school climate, their "otherness" through the lens of a heteronormative ideology puts them at risk for a variety of negative outcomes at higher rates than their non-LGBTQ peers, both in school and throughout the trajectory of their lives. This study aims to fill a gap in existing literature and practice, particularly in West Virginia public high schools, to demonstrate the obstacles school leaders face in modernizing the school climate to be safe for and inclusive of LGBTQ students.

# CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Introduction

The following literature review begins with an exploration of the national climate and protections in place for LGBTQ individuals followed by a review of state-specific climate characteristics and protections for the population. The review will examine the need for and benefits of LGBTQ-inclusive practices in schools to mitigate hostile national and state climates. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the administrator's role in making the school climate safe for LGBTQ students by exploring the duality of influence – both held by and experienced by the administrator.

## School Climate for LGBTQ Youth

### *National Characteristics*

GLSEN (formerly, the Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network; now known only by the acronym and pronounced "glisten") conducts a robust National School Climate Survey every two years focusing on experiences and issues related to LGBTQ youth in schools. Conducted in 2019, the most recent study explored youths' experiences at school related to hearing derogatory remarks, feeling unsafe, missing classes/full days of school, experiencing harassment or assault, and experiencing systemic discrimination in the form of school policies and practices. Participants in the 2019 survey included a total of 16,713 students (age 13-21) enrolled in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and other American territories. The data revealed "hostile environments for a distressing number of LGBTQ students, the overwhelming majority of whom routinely heard anti-LGBTQ language and experience victimization or discrimination in school" (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020, p. xvii), all of which contributed to increased absentee rates among

LGBTQ youth. A hostile climate paired with high absentee rates, the survey showed, contributes to negative academic and psychological outcomes. These negative outcomes can be mitigated by supports and practices put in place that improve the school climate along with the educational and behavioral outcomes of LGBTQ youth.

A smaller study conducted by Kosciw, Palmer, et al. (2013) shows that the concerns revealed by the 2019 National School Climate Survey are not new. This study focused on the academic impacts of a negative school for LGBTQ youth and how supportive practices mitigate those impacts. A total of 7,261 youth (age 13-21) enrolled in all 50 states and the District of Columbia participated in a survey that included ranking the severity of victimization, the number of full school days missed, and grade-point average (GPA). The latter two indicators served as measures of academic outcomes. Types of inclusive and supportive practices in place were tallied or rated. Finally, researchers used the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1989) to measure psychological wellbeing. The results suggested the cumulative effect of a hostile school environment: victimization can lead to low self-esteem; low self-esteem can increase absenteeism; absenteeism can be negatively associated with educational outcomes (in this instance, in the form of GPA and attendance rates).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducts a biennial survey of school administrators and educators known as the School Health Profile. Every two years, the agency publishes a report detailing the results of this nationwide survey. While the survey explores issues related to health spanning diet, physical education/activity, health services, and sex education, there is a specific section dedicated to supports in place for LGBTQ youth. Demissie et al. (2018) tracked the trends in the data from the survey's launch in 2008 through 2014 (a total of 4 nationwide survey administrations). To be included in this meta-analysis, states

must have participated in at least three of the four survey administrations. This stipulation reduced the sample to 37 states. The results over time were mixed. “Most states experienced some mix of increases, decreases, and no changes over time. However, 2 states (Massachusetts and New Hampshire) experienced significant linear increases across all [LGBTQ-supportive practices], whereas 1 state (Hawaii) experienced significant linear decreases across all [LGBTQ-supportive practices]” (Demissie et al., 2018, p. 560).

Results from the 2018 School Health Profiles are the most recent. A total of 43 states, 21 large urban school districts, and two U.S. territories participated in the 2018 survey. The national results over time have been moving in a positive direction. Since 2008, the percentage of schools with an LGBTQ-focused student organization has almost doubled from 2008 (22.7%) to 2018 (40.3%) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). The rates of staff being encouraged to attend professional development on creating a safe environment for all students have consistently increased across states, as well. Since the survey’s inception in 2008, these results indicate slow but consistent national progress in establishing school environments that are safe for and inclusive of LGBTQ students.

There are more than just numbers behind the notion that schools could and should do more to make the environment inclusive of and safe for LGBTQ students. Those numbers represent the experiences of real people. In her essay entitled “The Psychological & Emotional Effects of Discrimination within the LGBTQ, Transgender, & Non-Binary Communities,” Pamuela Halliwell, a licensed marriage and family therapist who identifies as a transgender woman, stated, “I was frequently suspended, which negatively affected my grades. After being expelled from one school to the next due to acting out behaviors and feeling completely alone, medication was prescribed that was supposed to ‘fix me,’ but it didn’t. I didn’t need to be

'fixed'" (2019, p. 225). On April 6, 2009, Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover, an eleven-year-old who did not identify as gay but was perceived as gay by his classmates and bullied because of this perception, died by suicide (Graff & Stufft, 2011). Adelman and Woods (2006) asked students to identify something or someone that made dealing with homophobia difficult; one student who identifies as straight responded, "'The [head administrator] of our school made it quite clear that LGBT people are wrong & shall burn in hell'" (p. 15). These experiences are important to keep in mind when contemplating the gravity of the numbers related to the national climate in schools for LGBTQ youth.

*National Protections*

To understand the changing nature of school climate for LGBTQ students nationally, one must also understand how interpretations of federal documents and laws are also changing to include protections for the LGBTQ community at large. One such document is the United States Constitution. Section 1 of the 14th Amendment states that all citizens of the United States have equal protection under the law (U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 1). This amendment is often used to label legislation or policies as discriminatory, and in the case of the LGBTQ population, this argument has been made successfully in some instances. Such was the case in the Supreme Court decision for three lawsuits that related to an employee being fired for being gay or transgender. In the opinion on *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020) delivered by Justice Gorsuch, the Court reasoned that nondiscrimination protections found in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 "[work] to protect individuals of both sexes from discrimination, and [do] so equally" (pp. 8-9). If, for example, Bostock had been open about a relationship with a woman, he would not have been fired. His firing, the Court reasoned, was directly related to his sex (in comparison to the

sex of his partner). In violating Title VII, these employers also violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment.

Protections that could be interpreted as specific to LGBTQ youth are found in Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 (2018). Section 1681 states that no person "shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (Education Amendments Act of 1972, 2018). The United States Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit cited Title IX, the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020) in its ruling on *Adams v. School Board of St. Johns County* (2020). Adams, a student who identifies as transgender, had been denied access to the appropriate restroom based on his gender identity. The opinion stated that the school district's restroom policy lacked constitutional merit in three ways: The policy was arbitrarily administered, the school board provided no factual basis for privacy concerns in letting Adams use the appropriate restroom, and the policy "subjects Mr. Adams to unfavorable treatment simply because he defies gender stereotypes as a transgender person" (*Adams v. School Board of St. Johns County*, 2020, p. 15). The third reason encapsulates why the school board's policy, in trying to force a transgender male student to use the women's restroom, was discriminatory on the basis of sex.

One piece of federal legislation is particularly applicable to student clubs and organizations. The Equal Access Act of 1984 bars schools that receive federal funding from preventing or prohibiting student organizations to form and function on school property. The act states that public schools can offer a limited open forum to student groups, meaning they can meet on school grounds outside of instructional time. Groups must be voluntary, initiated by students, include no sponsorship or promotion from school employees, cause no disruptions to

the learning environment/process, and are not open to individuals outside of the school (Cornell Law School, n.d.). Relying on this act, courts have maintained that if a school allows one student group or organization to function on school grounds, all student groups meeting the criteria listed above must be permitted to do the same (American Civil Liberties Union of Washington, n.d.). Again, when the previously listed criteria have been met, this means student groups cannot be prohibited based on the nature of their focus, content, etc.

The American Civil Liberties Union (n.d.) maintains that LGBTQ youth have protections under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution regarding the "right to free expression [as it relates to] school dress codes [and the] right to express yourself in public schools. That includes bringing a same-sex date to the prom or any school event" ("Are LGBTQ people protected from discrimination in schools?" section, paras. 2-4). This organization also claims that LGBTQ youth have a constitutional right to privacy that protects them from being "outed" (i.e., identified to others as LGBTQ without their permission). This, like previously explored issues related to Title VII, Title IX, and the 14th Amendment, depends upon the person (or the court) interpreting law and precedent. Following the *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020) decision, the United States Department of Education's Office of the General Counsel, under the Trump administration, released a memorandum that stated, "[W]e note no reason to believe the Court's logic necessarily leads to the conclusion that all forms of sexual orientation are covered by Title VII" (Rubenstein, 2021, p. 2). Following an executive order signed by President Biden shortly after his inauguration, Deputy Assistant Attorney General Gregory Friel (2021) issued a memo withdrawing the previous memo that limited the application of the *Bostock* decision. In March of the same year, Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Pamela S. Karlan (2021) issued a memo stating that protections for sexual orientation and gender identity are included in

Title IX. While this is encouraging, the interpretation of established law changes with administrations in the absence of language explicitly including sexual orientation and gender identity as protected factors in federal legislation.

Federal legislation with explicit protections for the LGBTQ community is currently being considered by lawmakers. The Equality Act (2021), also known as H.R. 5, would federally "prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation" (p. I). The United States House of Representatives passed this act on February 25, 2021. "This Act makes explicit that existing Federal statutes prohibiting sex discrimination in employment (including in access to benefits), healthcare, housing, education, credit, and jury service also prohibit sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination" (Equality Act, 2021, p. 8). If this bill passes the Senate and is signed into law, it will amend the 1964 Civil Rights Act and end the inconsistent manner in which Title VII, Title IX, and the 14th Amendment to the Constitution have been interpreted in cases related to discrimination against LGBTQ individuals. This legislation includes explicit language that has been missing from existing non-discrimination protections.

*West Virginia Characteristics*

Research on LGBTQ youth that specifically focuses on West Virginia is limited. From the existing literature, the characteristics of the climate in West Virginia schools for LGBTQ youth can be explored through feedback from three different stakeholder groups: students, educators, and administrators. While there is a need for more state-specific information in the literature, data collected from state and national agencies from individuals in West Virginia paint a picture of what life is like for LGBTQ youth and what disconnects exist among these three groups.

After conducting the National School Climate Survey, GLSEN recently began breaking the data down by state, known as the State Snapshots. The survey results for West Virginia for the 2017 and 2019 administrations reinforced the literature related to the national climate for LGBTQ youth in schools. GLSEN (2019; 2021) reported the same findings during the past two survey years: LGBTQ students often heard derogatory remarks, regularly experienced victimization, and reported discriminatory practices (e.g., dress code, public displays of affection, bathroom use, preferred pronoun use, etc.). A noticeable difference in these state-level findings compared to the literature exploring the national climate in schools for LGBTQ youth is the absence of in-school supports, such as student organizations (e.g., Gay-Straight Alliances), anti-bullying policies, and inclusive curricula (GLSEN 2019; 2021). The West Virginia participation rate on the National School Climate Survey is a concern; in 2017, 130 students participated and in 2019, 103 students participated. There are many possible reasons for this low participation rate, including the degree of access to the survey and fear of being identified as part of the LGBTQ community for wanting to participate. Low numbers aside, though, the results have remained consistent.

The feedback from students about the state climate for LGBTQ youth is echoed in the feedback provided by teachers. Fairness West Virginia, a civil rights advocacy group, surveyed more than 100 West Virginia educators from 22 school districts. More than 57% of the educators reported hearing anti-LGBTQ slurs from other students, and nearly 83% reported hearing negative comments about LGBTQ individuals (Fairness West Virginia, 2020). Around 43% of educators reported witnessing the bullying of LGBTQ students. This brings up the notion that the school climate is hostile to anything other than heterosexuality even when there is no specific person to whom the hostility is directed. Environments of this nature make the coming out

process a dangerous one to navigate as, according to GLSEN (2021), "being out about one's LGBTQ identity at school relates to greater peer victimization" (p. 88). LGBTQ youth in an environment rife with anti-LGBTQ rhetoric may be understandably hesitant to identify themselves and, as a result, become a target of the rhetoric. Additionally, it is important to note that nearly 70% of teachers reported never having received training on how to support LGBTQ youth and less than half reported working in a school with an LGBTQ-focused student organization (e.g., Gay-Straight Alliance) (Fairness West Virginia, 2020).

Feedback from administrators at times reinforces responses from students and educators, but at times, this feedback is also contradictory to what students and educators have reported. The 2018 School Health Profile (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019) included responses from 173 West Virginia principals. This biennial survey includes a section where administrators report which LGBTQ-supportive practices are implemented in their respective schools.

In this study, fewer principals (35%) reported having an LGBTQ-focused student organization than educators (46%) on the Fairness West Virginia (2020) survey. The results from administrators closely resemble the responses from students (38%) on this practice (GLSEN, 2021). The most striking difference in responses between these three stakeholder groups relates to professional development. Almost 80% of West Virginia administrators reported staff are "[encouraged] to attend professional development on establishing safe and supportive environments for all students" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019, p. 41). The wording of this survey item is key and likely the cause of the vast differences in responses. Nearly 70% of West Virginia teachers reported never having received training on how to support LGBTQ students specifically (Fairness West Virginia, 2020). There is a disconnect here. While

training on safe and supportive environments is generally a standard feature in professional development offered at the school level, how to do this for LGBTQ students specifically is not addressed as often. This notion is reflected in 38% of West Virginia youth (GLSEN, 2021) reporting having six or more supportive educators in their building in 2019.

*West Virginia Protections*

The 2021 West Virginia legislative session featured several bills related to the LGBTQ community. Many of the bills aimed to add sexual orientation and gender identity to non-discrimination laws or add hate crime protections based on sexual orientation and gender. House Bills (H. B.) 2538 and 2697 along with Senate Bills (S. B.) 252 and 254 (2021) all sought to add sexual orientation and gender identity to non-discrimination protections found in the Human Rights Act and Fair Housing Act. House Bill 2114 and Senate Bills 109 and 230 (2021) addressed hate crime protections in different ways. H. B. 2114 included sexual orientation and gender identity to groups with protected status; S. B. 109 and 230 only included sexual orientation. Similar versions of these bills had been put forth in previous legislative sessions; all previous versions failed. It should be noted that H. B. 2655 (2021) also included hate crime protections for individuals based on perceived or actual sexual orientation or gender identity, but this bill made the targeting of these groups in and of itself a felony, as opposed to the former bills which added aggravated status to the committed crime. The American Civil Liberties Union of West Virginia (n.d.) opposes this specific bill because of this difference. No bills attempting to add protections for either sexual orientation or gender identity passed during the 2021 legislative session.

Two bills would result in negative effects for the LGBTQ community in general. H. B. 2202 (2021) would have amended the West Virginia Intrastate Commerce Improvement Act but

included a provision that “No county, municipality or other political subdivision may adopt or enforce a local law, ordinance, resolution, rule or policy that creates a protected classification or prohibits discrimination on a basis not contained in state law” (p. 1). The wording of this provides the basis for invalidating local nondiscrimination ordinances that include the LGBTQ community, a population that is not currently protected by any state laws. Fourteen cities in West Virginia have adopted such ordinances inclusive of the LGBTQ community. H. B. 2520 (2021) would have required that individuals claiming discrimination must demonstrate the intent of the person who engaged in the allegedly discriminatory behavior. This kind of intent is difficult to prove since it “would require the prosecution to prove that the defendant intended to bring about a specific consequence through his or her actions, or that he or she [performed] the action with a wrongful purpose” (Cornell Law School, 2020, para. 3). Discriminatory actions against the LGBTQ community could go unaddressed due to failure to prove not that the action was discriminatory but that the intent behind the action was discriminatory. Neither bill passed during the 2021 legislative session.

One bill that would have had a direct impact on LGBTQ youth was H. B. 2157 (2021). This bill would “prohibit persons from putting up displays relating to sexuality in public school facilities and shall forbid the teaching of sexuality in public schools” (p. 1). This bill would bar students from advertising about LGBTQ-focused student organizations, would forbid teachers from including explicit references to LGBTQ individuals in lessons and materials, and would prohibit health educators from addressing sexual health topics related to LGBTQ youth – all of which have been identified by national organizations as practices that make the school environment more inclusive of and safer for LGBTQ students. Delegate Cody Thompson (D-Randolph), an openly gay member of the West Virginia legislature and educator, stated, “‘The

bill will actually prohibit displays from student-led organizations to proclaim acceptance for all. […] Many schools around our state have GSA organizations that promote the unification of all students regardless of how they identify'" (as cited in Baume, 2021, para. 5). The bill stalled in committee.

Another bill with specific implications for LGBTQ youth was H. B. 3293 (2021). This bill aimed to prevent transgender students from participating in school sports on teams that match their gender identity. Proponents of this legislation insisted it was meant to keep the playing field fair and often invoked religion to justify targeting transgender youth in West Virginia. Delegate Roger Conley (R-Wood) stated, "'My God does not make a mistake. […] If you are born a boy, you're a male until you die. If you're born a female, you're a female until you die'" (as cited in McElhinny, 2021, para. 36). Opponents claimed the bill legalized discrimination and attempted to solve a nonexistent problem. Further, transgender youth would become even more disenfranchised were the legislation signed into law. Delegate Joey Garcia, D-Marion, called the bill a "'psychological attack, emotional attack on some of our most vulnerable people in the state of West Virginia'" (as cited in McElhinny, 2021, para. 30). The bill was signed into law by Governor Jim Justice on April 28, 2021.

In response to the lack of statewide legislation offering protections to LGBTQ individuals, fifteen municipalities in West Virginia have established non-discrimination ordinances that apply to employment, housing, and access to public accommodations (e.g., restaurants, transportation, stores, etc.) (Movement Advancement Project, 2021). The fifteen municipalities – Athens, Beckley, Charles Town, Charleston, Harpers Ferry, Huntington, Keyser, Lewisburg, Martinsburg, Morgantown, Shepherdstown, South Charleston, Sutton, Thurmond,

and Wheeling – are spread out across the state and encompass populations with a wide variety of demographics (e.g., population size, median age, etc.).

While these pockets of explicit protections for the LGBTQ community are encouraging, these local non-discrimination ordinances only protect 11% of the state's LGBTQ population (Movement Advancement Project, 2021). Using sources such as the U. S. Census and the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBS), Conron and Goldberg (2020) estimate there are 68,000 LGBTQ individuals aged 13 and up in West Virginia. This is not an insignificant number, especially considering West Virginia has the highest percentage of youth (age 13-17) who identify as transgender. According to research conducted by Herman et al. (2017), 1.04% of West Virginia youth identify as transgender. The lack of protections and highly publicized legislation that can negatively affect LGBTQ youth and adults in West Virginia make the state a particularly hostile place for this population.

**Benefits of LGBTQ-Supportive Practices**

The existing literature that sheds light on the national and state climate for LGBTQ youth in schools often includes suggestions or practices that can mitigate the negative social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes that may occur because of a hostile school climate. The suggested practices will vary by study and researcher, but for the purposes of the current investigation, the four supportive practices identified by GLSEN (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020) will serve as guideposts for ways schools can be more inclusive of LGBTQ students.

*GSA or Other LGBTQ-Focused Student Organization*

The existing literature reinforces the positive effect LGBTQ-focused clubs can have on students' wellbeing. It is important to note that "Gay-Straight Alliance" (GSA) has historically been the name for student organizations that promote acceptance for all sexualities, but this

iteration of the acronym has become outdated. The GSA Network, a national organization focused on establishing safer schools and healthier communities for the LGBTQ population, changed its name in recent years to be more inclusive of other sexualities and gender identities. Formerly known as the Gay-Straight Alliance Network, the organization is now called the Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network; the acronym is the same, but the message is more inclusive. The organization stated, "We have heard from countless youth leaders who understand their genders and sexualities to be uniquely theirs and have moved beyond the labels of gay and straight, and the limits of a binary gender system" (GSA Network, 2016, para. 3). GLSEN is another national organization that still uses the GSA acronym but also now includes Gender and Sexuality Alliance as the revised iteration of its meaning (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020). Research is still working to adapt to this shift in terminology, and references to GSAs with the previous iteration of the acronym in the following studies reflect the need for more inclusive language. To draw a link between existing research and current practice, the phrase "GSA or Other LGBTQ-Focused Student Organization" will be used in this study.

The 2019 National School Climate Survey indicated that access to and participation in LGBTQ-focused clubs is associated with greater achievement, school engagement, and enhanced psychological wellbeing (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020). These effects can last beyond high school graduation. Toomey et al. (2011) conducted a retrospective study of young adults (age 21-25) who identify as LGBT. The study explored participants' retrospective perceptions of GSA impact, victimization, psychosocial adjustment, and educational outcomes. The sample included 245 individuals in the San Francisco Bay Area. Eighty-six participants (35%) reported attending a high school with a GSA, so analyses related to outcomes of having a GSA were limited to these eighty-six individuals. Though this group within the sample is small, "the presence of a

GSA in high school was significantly associated with young adult psychosocial well-being and educational attainment" (Toomey et al., 2011, p. 180). Among the 86 participants who had access to and regularly attended their school's GSA, the data suggest this participation buffered the effects of depression from low-level victimization in school. The distinction of low-level victimization is important and suggests that the presence of and participation in an LGBTQ-focused student organization alone cannot provide psychosocial protection again extreme victimization in school.

The retrospective nature of the Toomey et al. (2011) study was a limitation, but a later and much larger study by Poteat et al. (2012) yielded comparable results from participants who were, at the time, currently enrolled in grades 7-12 in Dane County, Wisconsin. With the presence of a GSA, sexual orientation, and gender identity serving as the independent variables, researchers found LGBTQ students with access to a GSA were less likely to experience negative outcomes related to "truancy, smoking, drinking, suicide attempts, and sexual behavior with casual partners" (Poteat et al., 2012, p. 325). Researchers hypothesized that the presence of a GSA would affect levels of victimization, school belonging, and academic performance, but the data in this study did not support this hypothesis.

Marx and Kettrey (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of existing literature, and the results were contradictory to those of Poteat et al. (2012). The meta-analysis synthesized 15 primary studies involving a total of 62,623 participants. Studies included in the meta-analysis implemented quantitative measures of victimization of LGBTQ youth at high schools with and without LGBTQ-focused student clubs. The forms of victimization researchers focused on include fear for safety, homophobic victimization, and homophobic remarks. The results showed victimization rates were lower in schools with GSAs. "Standardized mean differences for each

measure of victimization were statistically significant and indicated that students in schools with GSAs reported approximately one-quarter of a standard deviation less victimization than their peers in schools without GSAs" (Marx & Kettrey, 2016, p. 1278).

Qualitative findings reinforce and provide clarity for the quantitative findings. A two-year qualitative study (Mayberry et al., 2011) of four high schools in the southeastern United States involved interviews with 20 participants (12 GSA student members, four faculty advisors, two school principals, and two district-level administrators). Data collected from all stakeholders revealed the sense of community and empowerment students acquire from participating in a GSA. McCormick et al. (2015) interviewed 36 high school students (age 15-18) and, among questions about other supportive practices, asked about the perceived effect of a GSA. Academically, participants reported the GSA provided a group to be accountable to, an increased feeling of connectedness to and within the school, and a sense of hope for what they could achieve in their own lives. Socially, GSAs represented a space where students' thoughts, feelings, and experiences were normalized, where an appreciation could be developed for one's own and others' differences, where relationships could be forged, and where support could be found for the process of coming out (McCormick et al., 2015).

The variability in findings related to LGBTQ-focused student clubs is likely due to the variability in mission, values, and goals that inform the workings of the club. The GSA Network (2020) identifies three types of GSAs, beginning with the most insular and ending with the most progressive: support-based, social-based, and/or activist-based. Support-based GSAs function as a safe space for LGBTQ students. Social-based GSAs operate as a means to build social networks for LGBTQ students; they provide a sense of community. Activist-based GSAs are geared toward improving the school and/or community climate for LGBTQ students; they are

focused on changing policies and procedures to be more inclusive of this population. While most GSAs involve some combination of the three, there is usually a primary focus of the students involved with the club. LGBTQ youth who, for example, find themselves in school environments that are extremely hostile and homophobic would benefit most from an activist-based GSA focused on updating the school's bullying policy to include explicit protections for gender and sexual minority students. In this environment, though, a GSA with an activist focus would also be the most difficult to establish and maintain.

*Inclusive Curricular Resources*

A GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student club alone cannot make the school climate more inclusive of and safe for LGBTQ youth. Change of this nature and scope requires the implementation of other practices to normalize the experiences of the LGBTQ community. Utilizing inclusive curricular resources is one such practice. Examples of LGBTQ-inclusive curricula include learning about sexuality, gender identification, and related health topics in health class; reading stories with gender and sexual minority characters in English; and exploring the history of the fight for LGBTQ rights in social studies. Researchers have investigated the association between inclusive curricular resources and bullying and perceptions of safety at school for LGBTQ students. Snapp, McGuire, et al. (2015) collected survey data from 1,232 middle and high school students from 154 schools in California. These data suggested that sex education/health classes (followed by English and social studies classes) were most likely to include materials inclusive of the LGBTQ community, and when this occurred, students reported lower rates of bullying and higher rates of feeling safe at school. Researchers were careful to note, though, LGBTQ-inclusive curricula "are only effective in promoting a positive overall climate when they reach a critical mass within a school" (Snapp, McGuire, et al., 2015, p. 590).

This means the responsibility cannot solely lie with health and English teachers; instructors of all subjects must be informed and willing to include topics related to the LGBTQ community when appropriate for this practice to yield positive results.

On the 2019 National School Climate Survey, despite demonstrated benefits of LGBTQ-inclusive curricula in existing literature, just over a third (33.2%) of students indicated experiencing this practice, and of that group, less than half (48.8%) indicated LGBTQ topics had been addressed positively (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020). The 2019 National School Climate Survey identified the same three classes where students reported inclusion of LGBTQ-related topics, but in a different order from the Snapp, McGuire, et al. (2015) study: history/social studies classes came in first, followed by English and health classes, respectively. Page (2016) conceptualized a framework for identifying and measuring curriculum inclusivity using two variables: visibility and integration. This framework could be used to consider and plan inclusive lessons and materials in most content areas.

In Page's (2016) framework, partial visibility/no integration is the smallest step educators can take to make the curriculum more LGBTQ-inclusive. This involves making available texts and materials that include LGBTQ topics, characters, etc. for students to choose and explore of their own volition. Constrained visibility/no integration occurs when educators work with small groups of students to whom LGBTQ-related topics are important. These groups may engage in book clubs or independent projects, but these efforts are limited to a few students. In full visibility/partial integration, all students are exposed to lessons or materials that implicitly or explicitly reference LGBTQ characters, issues, etc. A mini-lesson on gay rights activists and their work while addressing the larger issue of civil rights in social studies is an example of this level of inclusion. A more involved example of this could be an English teacher "queering the

classics," an approach that involves applying a queer theory lens or exploring LGBTQ-related themes in canonical texts already found in the curriculum. Finally, in full visibility/full integration, educators regularly use queer theory and pedagogy. "Teachers who use a queer pedagogy not only ensure that their curriculum and text selection are inclusive but also explicitly engage lenses of gender, sexuality, intersectionality, and power" (Page, 2016, pp. 682-683). When considering the four core content areas, this approach might seem less intuitive in a math class, but it can seamlessly be used in English, social studies, and science classes.

Students can provide invaluable feedback as to the level of LGBTQ visibility and integration in curricular resources. Snapp, Burdge, et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study of 26 high school students on the implementation of LGBTQ-inclusive curricula. The classes that were inclusive of LGBTQ-related topics were social science (e.g., history) and humanities (e.g., English) classes, echoing the findings in the existing literature. In most instances, the inclusion of LGBTQ-related topics occurred in a stand-alone lesson, reminiscent of Page's (2016) full visibility/partial integration designation for inclusive curricula. Of greatest importance is the effect the inclusive curricula had on LGBTQ and heterosexual students, who indicated LGBTQ-inclusive curricula had a positive effect on many aspects of their lives, "including their safety, well-being, learning, achievement, and ability to understand others" (Snapp, Burdge, et al., 2015, p. 256). Though those who identify as LGBTQ do not make up most of the student population, including this population in the curriculum provides much-needed normalization of their experiences and enhances the understanding of those who do not identify as LGBTQ.

*Supportive School Personnel*

"Being able to speak with a caring adult in school may have a significant positive impact on school experiences for students, particularly those who feel marginalized or experience

harassment" (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020, p. 61). Having just one trusted adult at school can be an important protective factor for LGBTQ youth. On the 2019 National School Climate Survey (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020, p. 61), 97.7% of respondents indicated there was at least one adult at school who is perceived as supportive of LGBTQ students; 66.3% of respondents indicated there were six or more supportive adults in school. It is important to note that supportive personnel includes teachers, coaches, counselors, administrators, and other staff.

Over the past decade, there has been noticeable consistency in the type of school faculty or staff LGBTQ students feel comfortable talking to about topics related to sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Based on results from the 2009 National School Climate Survey, students overwhelmingly felt more comfortable talking with a school-based mental health professional (58.2%) or teacher (52.8%) while less than a third felt comfortable speaking with a principal (28.8%) or assistant principal (27.9%) (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010). These percentages have remained consistent through the 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2019 administrations (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, et al., 2012; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, et al., 2016; Kosciw, Greytak, Zongrone, et al., 2018; and Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020). Teachers and school-based mental health professionals might trade first and second place for the staff members with whom students are most comfortable talking about LGBTQ issues, but other than this slight change, the percentages have held steady across six survey administrations.

Supportive school personnel can be cultivated through professional learning. Greytak et al. (2013) conducted a quasi-experimental study of 2,042 staff members from 37 schools in an urban school district in the northeastern United States. Researchers conducted workshops on bullying and harassment of LGBT youth with the following goals: Increase awareness of how

bullying and harassment affect school climate; increase understanding of how bullying and harassment affect LGBT students/staff; and expand adults' skills in ensuring the school climate is safe for and inclusive of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. The findings suggested that the brief workshops resulted in increased understanding among school personnel of how bullying and harassment toward LGBTQ youth negatively affect the school climate. Additionally, participants indicated increased empathy for the experiences of LGBTQ youth, particularly in hostile school climates.

Of course, a single two-hour workshop is just an example of an introduction to cultivating supportive school personnel. Pennell (2017) identifies other strategies that could be used with students or with school staff to increase their understanding of school climate through a non-heteronormative lens. Strategies include increasing awareness of systemic heterosexism by participating in a heteronormativity scavenger hunt to identify areas (e.g., physical, procedural, etc.) where the school can be more inclusive of LGBTQ students. A gender spectrum activity can serve as a follow-up to the heteronormativity scavenger hunt. In this activity, staff can reflect on gender-based norms and explore the topic of gender separately from the topic of sex. The third and final strategy proposed by Pennell (2017) involves using LGBTQ+ narratives to highlight queer cultural capital – where positive aspects of being in the LGBTQ community are highlighted through real-world experiences. The strength of these suggestions is that they are low-cost/no-cost, reflection-based activities to equip willing staff members with the knowledge and skills they need to be that "one trusted adult" for an LGBTQ student.

The conditional willingness of staff members is an important distinction when discussing supportive school personnel. Some minds (and as a result, behaviors) cannot be changed. Vega et al. (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of existing literature to investigate the way teachers view

their role in ensuring a safe environment and the way heterosexual teachers contribute to or reduce heteronormativity in schools. Their findings suggested "schools seem to work from the assumption that all individuals, students, and staff are or should be heterosexual, which leads to inequitable practices" (Vega et al., 2012, p. 258). The assumption referenced by the researchers highlights the need for training and support for school personnel explored by Greytak et al. (2013) and Pennell (2017). If school personnel are more aware of their assumptions, they can keep their preconceived notions in check to maintain an inclusive learning environment.

As previously discussed, nearly every student who participated in the 2019 National School Climate Survey (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020) indicated there was at least one adult at school with whom they felt comfortable talking about LGBTQ-related issues. This is encouraging but even more important considering that a supportive adult might not be accessible to LGBTQ students outside of school. At times, however, being a visible supportive adult in school can feel like a risk. GLSEN (2016) has assembled a Safe Space Kit to provide guidance and suggestions to supportive school personnel wanting to be more visible and accessible, but visibility can open the door for other concerns. GLSEN (2020) reported that while nearly half of the teachers who participated in a national survey of secondary school educators had implemented at least one LGBTQ-supportive practice, 73% had faced at least one barrier in implementing those practices. The three barriers reported by LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ teachers alike were parent/community backlash, unsupportive administration, and fear of their employment being jeopardized (GLSEN, 2020).

*Inclusive and Supportive School Policies*

The lack of policies that are inclusive and supportive of LGBTQ students is an example of the heteronormativity that can permeate the school environment (Pennell, 2017). Smith (2018)

states that heteronormative policies contribute to the "othering of LGBTQ identities" (p. 301). Students could be surrounded by supportive personnel in every classroom and area on campus, but without policies that explicitly provide protection and inclusion of this population, that support is merely social and not systemic. Having just one of the four LGBTQ-supportive practices in place is a good starting point, but their impact is strengthened by the presence of the others. Smith (2018) explains that school faculty and staff can be trained to be allies to their LGBTQ students, but no amount of training will "invoke a responsibility to confront policies and practices that contribute to LGBTQ students' exclusion" (p. 301). This practice requires the involvement of those in leadership roles.

Inclusive and supportive school policies can take on two distinct goals: providing protections to students based on sexual identity and gender expression, and explicitly including LGBTQ youth in pre-existing policies and procedures that are not harmful or discriminatory to this population of students. GLSEN (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020) identifies three distinct levels of inclusive and supportive school policies. When assessing whether policies include protections for LGBTQ youth against bullying and harassment, comprehensive policies include explicit protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. These policies usually include procedures for reporting violations; this standardized procedure communicates that victimization of LGBTQ youth is unacceptable by the school community. Partially enumerated policies do not include comparable protections for both sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. The lack of explicit identification of both sexual orientation and gender identity poses a threat to the strength of the protections included in such policies. Finally, generic policies prohibit bullying or harassment in a general sense but do not explicitly mention sexual orientation or gender identity/expression as categories protected under said policy.

The same three categories of policies can also be used to determine whether a school's pre-existing policies and procedures are inclusive of LGBTQ students in a non-discriminatory way. Inclusive school policies allow for students to bring same-sex partners to school dances, permit students to wear clothes that match their gender identity, provide access to the restroom that corresponds to a student's gender and/or provides access to a gender-neutral restroom, allow students to participate in school-sponsored sports and activities that correspond to a student's gender identity, etc. (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020). Schools implementing policies that address both areas of inclusion and support – prevention of harassment/bullying and integration in school culture – ensure LGBTQ students feel safe and respected.

Day et al. (2019) conducted a study involving 1,061 LGBTQ youth (age 15-21). Researchers sought to measure the effects of having both a GSA and policies inclusive and supportive of LGBTQ students. The findings suggested that having *both* practices in place at a school could increase the support LGBTQ students feel from their peers and adults and decrease incidents of bullying and homophobia. Researchers determined the effects of each practice applied to a different stakeholder group: GSAs had a positive effect on peer support, and LGBTQ-inclusive and -supportive policies had a positive effect on faculty and staff (Day et al., 2019). These practices, according to the researchers, are protective factors that improve the school climate for all students, especially LGBTQ students. The study's results support previous literature (Russell & McGuire, 2008) that claimed "LGBTQ-focused policies directly reduce bias-based bullying, and that they may mitigate the negative effects of bullying by strengthening support among classmates and teachers" (Day et al., 2019, p. 426).

## Administrator's Influence

"As the leaders of the school, school administrators have a particularly important role to play in the school experiences of LGBTQ youth" (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020, p. 62). Aside from potentially being a supportive adult in the building for LGBTQ students, administrators can affect the daily experiences of this population via decisions they make and the power and scope of their role. Hernandez and Fraynd (2014) argued, "School leaders have a tremendous amount of influence over the culture and climate of their districts and schools. If schools are to become truly inclusive, leaders must examine and take appropriate action to improve the policy landscape for the protection and care of LGBTQ individuals" (p. 121). The following literature demonstrates how the principal is a pivotal stakeholder in making the school climate safe for and inclusive of LGBTQ students.

### *School Climate and Implemented Practices*

The Organizational Climate Index (OCI) (Hoy et al., 2002) identifies four dimensions of school climate: collegial leadership, professional teacher behavior, achievement press, and institutional vulnerability. Collegial leadership refers to the way principals address the social needs of faculty/staff and work toward achieving school goals. Professional teacher behavior is demonstrated by working individually and collectively to ensure positive outcomes for all students. Achievement press is the dedication to academic outcomes despite setbacks or obstacles. Institutional vulnerability reflects the degree to which outside individuals or groups (parents, community members, etc.) can exert power over school policies, procedures, etc. While collegial leadership might seem like the dimension most closely linked to school principals, the fact is the principal can have an impact on the other three dimensions, as well. Principals can establish expectations and make important decisions related to professional teacher behavior,

achievement press, and institutional vulnerability. If the school principal wants to address any of these dimensions of school climate, he/she can initiate and support that effort by virtue of the leadership role.

The school principal is often referred to as the person who determines whether new initiatives or efforts live or die. Hertberg-Davis and Brighton (2006) conducted a study that demonstrated how the principal's belief in and messaging on instructional practices determined the way teachers responded to and implemented those practices. In this case study, researchers observed how principal behavior, messaging, and interest affected teachers' willingness and success in implementing differentiation strategies. They found that teachers mimicked the behavior of their principal in how they responded to being asked to implement the strategies. The teachers needed support from the administrator (e.g., resources, encouragement, etc.) to be successful. The administrator who made change seem desirable and possible saw the most effective implementation of the new strategies. Finally, systemic change regarding strategies required the administrator to have a long-term vision (Hertberg-Davis & Brighton, 2006). It stands to reason that these findings could occur for any potential systemic, school-wide change, instructional or otherwise, including implementing practices supportive of LGBTQ students.

Ni et al. (2018) conducted a study investigating how principals perceive their decision influence and how they perceive the decision influence of other stakeholders (e.g., teachers, district leadership, and local/state government). Decisions include topics related to teacher evaluation, personnel, professional development, policy, etc. Over 6,500 principals from nearly 80,000 public schools participated in the study. While certain characteristics, such as community type (e.g., urban vs. rural) (Beesley & Clark, 2015) or student achievement levels (e.g., low vs. high) (Bloom & Owens, 2011) can affect the degree to which principals believe they influence

certain factors, principals tend to perceive themselves as having the highest level of decision influence in a school. Administrators in this study perceived teachers as having the next highest level of decision influence and this is seen as a supportive influence, not inhibitive. As shown in the Hertberg-Davis and Brighton (2006) investigation, teachers tend to replicate the behaviors and attitudes of principals regarding proposed changes or new initiatives. If that is the case, it comes as no surprise that principals perceive the influence of teachers positively.

A principal's interest level in implementing a new schoolwide practice can be strengthened and developed through training and awareness-raising. Greytak et al. (2013) investigated the impacts of professional development designed to better equip educators to support LGBTQ students reinforces this notion. Before and after participating in the workshops, teachers and administrators completed a pre- and post-intervention questionnaire that measured changes in awareness, empathy, the importance of intervening, and self-efficacy in supporting LGBTQ students. On the pre-intervention questionnaire, administrators reported being less aware of bullying or harassment of LGBTQ students, yet "they were more likely to rate intervention in anti-LGBT remarks as important and had higher levels of self-efficacy related to both intervening in biased remarks and addressing anti-LGBT bullying and harassment" (Greytak et al., 2013, p. 88) on the post-intervention questionnaire. Administrators also showed marked increases on indicators related to school climate, including bullying/harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, bullying/harassment based on gender identity, and frequency of hearing biased language against the LGBTQ population in general. In turn, this increased awareness coincided with an increased understanding of the importance of intervening when these instances of a hostile school climate occur.

*Influences on Administrators*

Principals do not exist in a vacuum; they are not immune to contextual influences. As seen in the Greytak et al. (2013) study, increased knowledge about a school climate issue can influence a principal's awareness and interest in a positive manner. Awareness makes possible the desire to change. While school administrators understand the power of their influence in the building, they also understand the influences they are exposed to at all levels of the public education system. For example, Ni et al. (2018) demonstrated that while principals see themselves as the most influential decision-maker in the school building, they do not see themselves as more influential than the state education agency (SEA) when it comes to curriculum and student performance standards.

Wirt and Krug (2001) argued principals' approach to leadership is affected by the following characteristics: personal (e.g., principal's experience, age, gender), school (e.g., size, student diversity, staff), political forces (e.g., teachers' unions, school board, district leadership), and the professional network (e.g., relationships to other decision-makers). The influence of these characteristics is entrenched over time through participation in the public school system at various levels. School principals grew up in schools as students, worked in schools as educators, and now lead schools as administrators while subconsciously being exposed to, perpetrating, and upholding the heteronormative culture that has made the school environment hostile toward LGBTQ students. Steck and Perry (2018) refer to this as the culture of silence that allows heteronormativity to continue unchecked in schools to the detriment of LGBTQ youth.

"The heteronormative culture is disrupted when the practice of silence has been broken by school leaders implementing policies and practices directed at supporting the legitimacy of sexual diversity and reducing the marginalization and victimization of LGBTQ students (Steck &

Perry, 2018, p. 230). Principals who attempt to disrupt this well-established culture of heteronormativity run the risk of receiving backlash from students, faculty/staff, district leadership, families, members of the community, and/or other outside organizations. What has been historically upheld in schools (i.e., a culture of heteronormativity) is perceived as "normal," and any attempt to change that sense of normalcy can be met with trepidation or outright hostility. Principals may have to navigate "conservative parents, educational leaders, school personnel, and school board members who use their power and authority to block or limit proactive efforts to break silence and challenge the status quo" (Steck & Perry, 2018, p. 238). To weather opposition or pushback from these stakeholders, administrator awareness and support are crucial in making the school climate healthy and supportive of LGBTQ students.

**Summary**

This review of the literature demonstrates how specific, research-based practices can have a positive impact on school climate for LGBTQ students. These practices can mitigate a hostile school, state, and/or national climate for a population of students who are at risk for negative outcomes because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Further, as the leader of the school, an administrator alone cannot change school climate, but this person can help establish the environmental conditions in a school (e.g., staff buy-in, support, and resources) so that practices supportive of LGBTQ students are valued and consistently implemented.

# CHAPTER 3

# RESEARCH METHODS

## Introduction

This descriptive, nonexperimental study implemented a 32-item survey to observe high school principals' perspectives on practices that make the learning environment safe for and inclusive of the LGBTQ student population. This included to what degree those practices are being implemented and the barriers that negatively impact or even prohibit implementation of the practices. The survey, formatted in multiple-choice items, was accessed via principals' email addresses issued by the West Virginia Department of Education.

A 1970 report of the Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity (U.S. Congress, 1972) states the principal's leadership "sets the tone of the school, the climate for learning, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become" (p. 56). This statement still holds and is increasingly true for LGBTQ students, as literature consistently demonstrates the hostile climate this population faces both in and outside of school. As the target population and focus of this study, principals can influence the degree to which the school climate is welcoming and supportive of LGBTQ students.

## Research Design

Nonexperimental research lacks the randomization and control groups found in experimental designs (Arnold, 1997), but the ability to generalize sometimes can be stronger with nonexperimental research than with experimental (Reio, 2016). Specifically, nonexperimental design can afford the researcher the opportunity to develop a broad description of a phenomenon (McMillan, 2016). As such, this was an appropriate design for the current

study. To collect data that have the breadth needed to construct a thorough description, a survey will provide a "panoramic snapshot that displays an expansive landscape" (Cook & Cook, 2008).

**Research Questions**

The following research questions will guide the investigation:

1. What LGBTQ-supportive practices are being implemented in West Virginia public high schools?
2. What barriers negatively impact implementation of these practices?

**Population and Sample**

West Virginia principals (n = 105) of public high schools (grades 9-12) were invited to participate in the survey. Names and email addresses of each West Virginia high school principal were identified using the West Virginia Department of Education (n.d.) School Directory and individual school websites. The population was representative of rural, urban, and suburban community types, administrators with varying years of experience, and schools of varying sizes.

A total of n = 33 responses were collected on the anonymous online survey. Among these responses, three participants did not meet the eligibility criteria. In these cases, the survey ended, and no additional data were collected. One survey form was left entirely blank. The final number of eligible participants was n = 29. Among those who answered the demographics items, just over half ($\bar{x}$ = 52%) worked at a school with 500-999 students. Nearly two-thirds ($\bar{x}$ = 64%) of the participants reported their school was in a rural community. The most variability in demographics came on the question related to years of experience at the school level; n = 10 participants reported having 5-10 years of experience ($\bar{x}$ = 40%), the most by far. Five (n = 5, $\bar{x}$ = 20%) participants indicated having 16-20 years of experience; n = 4 ($\bar{x}$ = 16%) reported having 11-15 years of experience; and three (n = 3, $\bar{x}$ = 12%) reported having less than 5 years and 21 or

more years of experience, respectively.

**Instrumentation**

Participants accessed the 32-item researcher-created survey via Qualtrics. A pilot study was conducted (n = 6) and included former West Virginia high school principals, out-of-state high school principals, and West Virginia principals at other programmatic levels. These individuals completed the survey instrument and provided feedback on the instrument. The length was identified as a weakness during the pilot study. As a result, the number of items was reduced. Additionally, the Likert-type scales (previously used frequently in the instrument) were cumbersome for pilot study participants, particularly those taking the survey on a mobile device. To make the instrument more user-friendly, all Likert-type items were removed and replaced with multiple-choice items that were more concise. This change made the instrument easier to use for participants whether they use a laptop/desktop or a mobile device. The feedback (Appendix B) provided by participants demonstrated the need to make the instrument more user-friendly, both in terms of length and accessibility.

Demographic data were collected at the end of the survey. These questions were limited to school size, grade levels, community type, and years of experience in administration. Any demographic data beyond that would have threatened the anonymity of participants. Anonymity is crucial for two reasons: Participants will be more likely to be candid in their responses, and the topic being investigated could be viewed as politically or socially charged. Some participants might have interpreted the questions as sensitive in nature; the anonymity of the online survey was intended to make them feel safer in responding (van Selm & Janknowski, 2006).

The survey measured the degree to which four LGBTQ-supportive practices (a GSA or other LGBTQ-focused organization, inclusive curricular resources, supportive personnel, and

inclusive/supportive policies) are being implemented along with the barriers that impact implementation. Research Question 1 was addressed through items that focused on each of the four LGBTQ-supportive practices individually. Research Question 2 was addressed through a series of items that, using display logic, explored which obstacles, if any, have negatively affected the implementation of each practice. Barriers included stakeholder groups (e.g., students, staff, families, etc.) along with logistical components (e.g., school culture, school budget, staff interest, etc.).

**Data Collection**

A week before launching the survey, an introductory email was sent to the population (n = 105) notifying them of an upcoming opportunity to participate in this study. This email prepared the population to engage in the survey instrument and served as an accuracy check on the email addresses collected for the population. Following this notice, an invitation to participate in the survey was emailed to all current principals at West Virginia public high schools serving students in grades 9-12. The West Virginia Department of Education (n.d.) WV School Directory was used to identify the principal at each traditional high school (grades 9-12). School websites were used to verify the name and contact information of each principal. The email invitation included an anonymous survey link (generated by Qualtrics). This email also contained an informed consent statement; accessing the survey link served as an indication of providing consent to use responses for data analysis purposes. No personally identifiable information was collected on the survey instrument, but participants were reminded not to type their names or other personal information anywhere on the survey.

**Data Analysis**

Participants' responses to survey items were recorded, stored, and analyzed using

Qualtrics. Descriptive statistics were obtained using Qualtrics and Microsoft Excel software. To analyze differences that may exist in the reporting rate of barriers by type (stakeholder group versus logistical component) and barrier location (internal versus external), dependent *t*-tests were conducted. These tests compared the means for the two groups in each instance to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the barriers reported by principals.

**Summary**

This investigation of the climate for LGBTQ students in West Virginia high schools and principals' perceptions of barriers that negatively affect the learning environment for this population used a descriptive, non-experimental survey method. The two research questions guided the development of the instrument and the analysis of the data. Existing literature has demonstrated the need for and benefits of implementing specific practices to make the school climate safe for and inclusive of LGBTQ students. The data collected in this study has shed light on the degree to which these practices are being implemented in West Virginia public high schools serving students in grades 9-12 along with principals' perceptions of barriers that negatively affect or even prohibit implementation of these practices.

# CHAPTER 4

# PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

## Introduction

This study investigated the frequency of LGBTQ-supportive practices implemented in West Virginia public high schools and the barriers that negatively affected the implementation of those practices. The following chapter will contain an in-depth explanation and analysis of the data collection, study participants, and findings for the following research questions:

1. What LGBTQ-supportive practices are being implemented in West Virginia public high schools?
2. What barriers negatively impact implementation of these practices?

## Data Collection

Prior to the dissemination of the survey instrument, the Marshall University Institutional Review Board approved the plan for this study (Appendix A), including the survey instrument. The initial invitation to participate in the study was sent out via email in mid-August of 2021. Follow-up reminders were sent out at the beginning of September 2021, middle of September 2021, and beginning of October 2021, respectively. Each time an invitation or reminder was sent to the population, a letter (Appendix C) with an overview of the investigation and consent statement was attached. Participants were informed that accessing and completing the survey served as consent to analyze the data provided. The doctoral candidate was the only individual to access the data. After applying the eligibility criteria, a total of n = 29 participants ($\bar{x}$ = 27.6%) responded to the survey.

**Table 2**

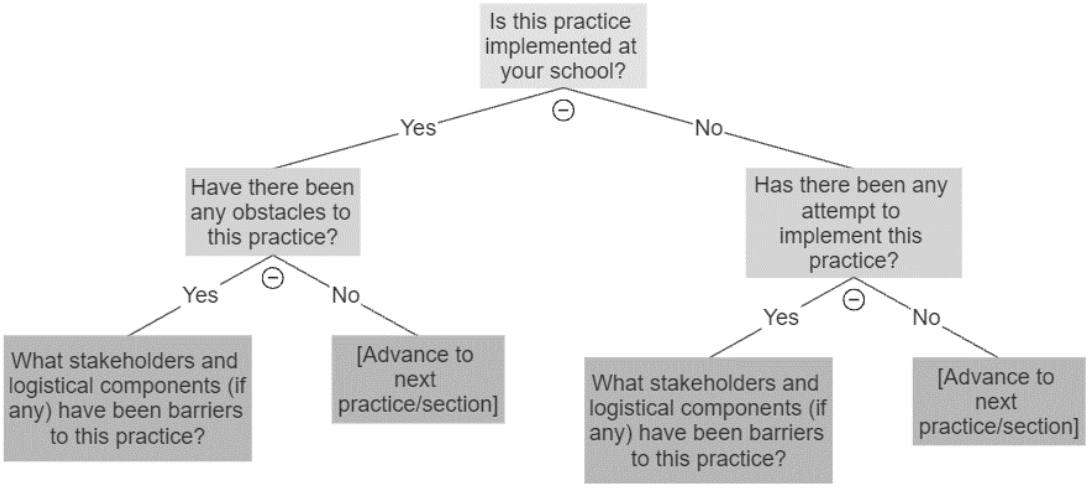
*Study Timeline*

| Date | Action Taken |
|---|---|
| August 18, 2021 | Initial invitation to participate sent via email |
| August 27, 2021 | First reminder to participate sent via email |
| September 10, 2021 | Second reminder to participate sent via email |
| September 21, 2021 | Third reminder to participate sent via email |
| October 8, 2021 | Final reminder to participate sent via email |

Data were collected using a 32-item survey. Participants, however, did not have to answer all 32 items, as the instrument was not designed for every item to be appropriate for every participant. Using display logic, participants were presented with appropriate items based on previous responses. For each of the four supportive practices investigated (an LGBTQ-focused student organization, inclusive curricular resources, supportive personnel, and inclusive/supportive policies), participants were asked questions to determine whether the practice was implemented at the school, what obstacles (if any) they had experienced, and if there had been any attempt to implement those practices not currently in place. See *Figure 1* to observe how participants' responses guided the items they were presented.

**Figure 1**

*Item Display Logic (for each practice)*




For each practice, the display logic allowed for the collection of data in three groups by practice: principals working at schools where the practice was implemented; principals working at schools where the practice was not implemented, but an attempt had been made to do so; and principals working at schools where the practice was not implemented, and no attempt had been made to do so.

After each group of questions (respectively targeting each of the four practices under investigation), participants were presented with three demographic questions. A total of n = 25 ($\bar{x}$ = 86%) answered these demographic questions, which focused on characteristics such as student population, community type, and years of experience in school administration. These characteristics were considered important to determine the generalizability of the data.

**Survey Instrument**

The survey was developed by the doctoral candidate using the National School Climate Survey (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020) to determine which LGBTQ-supportive practices should be

explored in the investigation. On a national scale, this organization has collected longitudinal data on the implementation of four specific practices (GSA, inclusive curricular resources, supportive personnel, and inclusive and supportive policies) that mitigate a negative or hostile school climate for LGBTQ youth. After the targeted practices were identified, items related to their rate of implementation were developed. Items that measured barriers were developed to measure stakeholder groups and logistical components that could negatively affect implementation. The nature of the practices informed potential logistical barriers that could be identified. For example, inclusive curricular resources might require the purchase of new materials, which yields a potential financial barrier. Also, having a club like a GSA requires time in the schedule and a staff member to be the sponsor of the organization; this creates the potential for both time and manpower barriers.

## Participant Characteristics

Participants were recruited to participate in the anonymous online survey using their professional email addresses created and assigned by the West Virginia Department of Education or their local school district. A total of n = 33 accessed the survey; however, three participants did not meet the eligibility criteria. The first survey item determined eligibility criteria. Participants were asked whether they were currently serving as the principal of a West Virginia public high school (grades 9-12); three individuals marked "No." The survey was terminated for these three individuals. One survey form was returned completely blank. After filtering for these conditions, the number of participants who accessed the survey and provided usable data was n = 29.

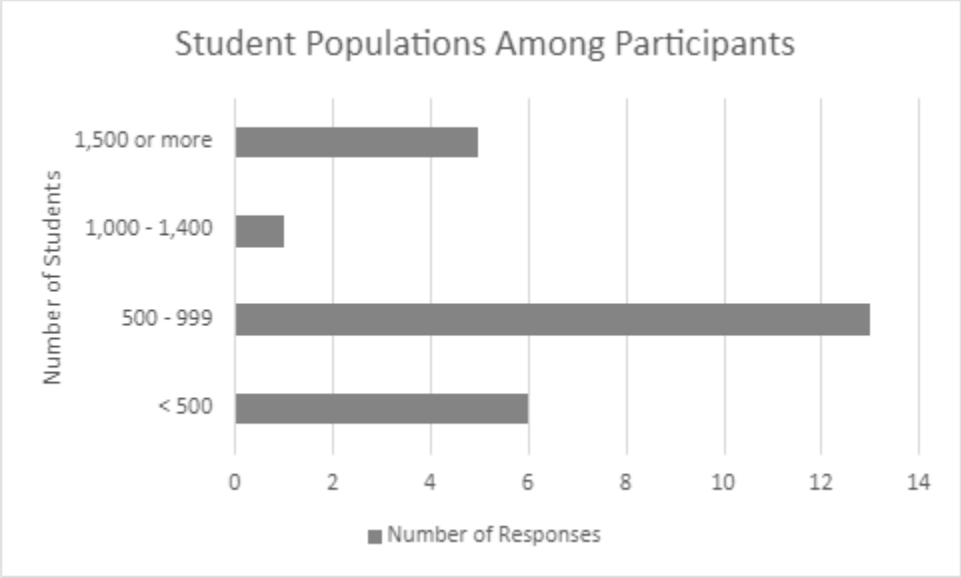
### *School Population*

The size of the student body was of interest to determine if high schools of varying sizes

were represented. This would increase the generalizability of the data to schools across the state, regardless of size. Twenty-five (n = 25) participants reported the size of their school population. The majority (n = 13, $\bar{x}$ = 52%) reported working at a school with 500-999 students. One participant (n = 1, $\bar{x}$ = 4%) reported working at a school with 1,000-1,400 students. Six (n = 6, $\bar{x}$ = 24%) reported a student population of less than 500 students, and five (n = 5, $\bar{x}$ = 20%) reported working in a school with 1,500 students or more. The variance among these responses was $\sigma^2 = 1.04$. See *Figure 2* below.

**Figure 2**

*Student Populations Among Participants*

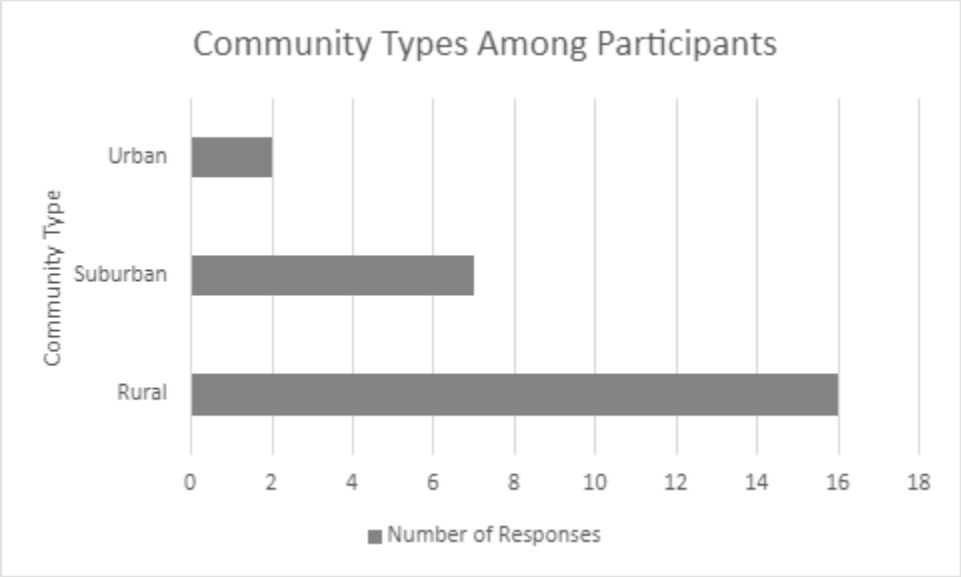


*Community Type*

While West Virginia is predominantly rural, there is still some diversity in community types, especially in the state's largest cities. Once again, this characteristic was considered important to determine if the data were reflective of the state's various community types. The question related to community type had the lowest variance, $\sigma^2 = 0.41$. Most participants ($n = 16$, $\bar{x} = 64\%$) reported their school was in a rural community. Seven ($n = 7$, $\bar{x} = 28\%$) participants reported working at a school in a suburban area, and two ($n = 2$, $\bar{x} = 8\%$) participants reported working in an urban area. See *Figure 3* below.

**Figure 3**

*Community Types Among Participants*



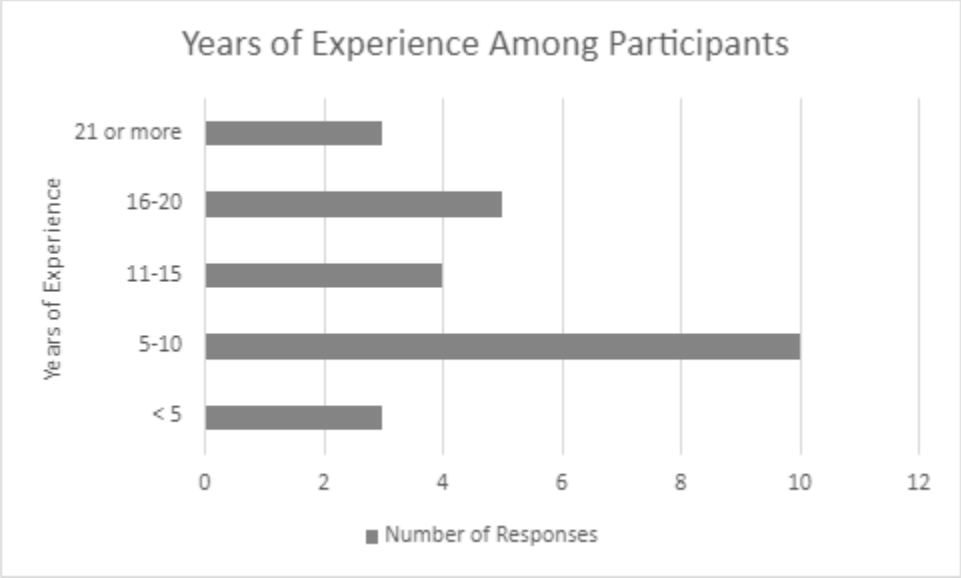

*Years of Experience*

The years of experience among participants was considered important data to collect to observe whether the information collected and results reported were reflective of principals' experiences regardless of where they were in their career at the time they completed the survey.

Participants were asked to report their years of experience in administration at the school level (i.e., head principal). This item resulted in the highest variance, $\sigma^2 = 1.81$. Of the n = 25 who responded to the question, n = 10 ($\overline{x}$ = 40%) reported having 5-10 years of experience. This reflected most of the answers. The remaining ranges for years of experience were reported as follows: n = 5 ($\overline{x}$ = 20%) reported 16-20 years of experience; n = 4 ($\overline{x}$ = 16%) reported 11-15 years of experience; and n = 3 ($\overline{x}$ = 12%) participants reported fewer than five years and 21 or more years of experience, respectively. See *Figure 4* below.

**Figure 4**

*Years of Experience Among Participants*




**Major Findings – Research Question 1**

The first research question in this investigation was, "What LGBTQ-supportive practices are being implemented in West Virginia public high schools?" The four practices, vetted by existing literature, that can make the school climate safe for and inclusive of LGBTQ students are as follows: (1) a GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization, (2) inclusive curricular

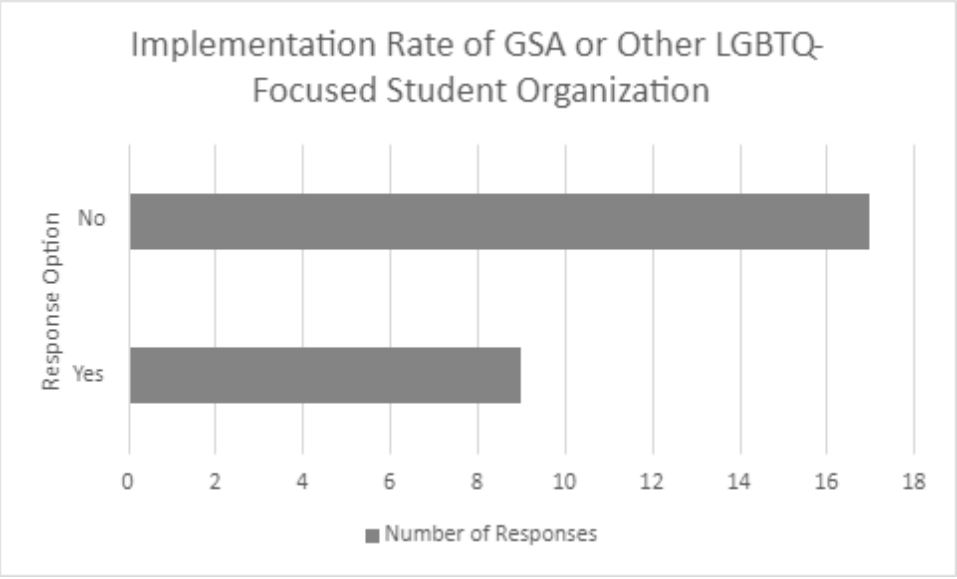
resources, (3) supportive personnel, and (4) inclusive and supportive policies (Kosciw, Clark, et al., 2020). The findings related to implementation have been broken down by practice and then analyzed within and across all practices.

*GSA or Other LGBTQ-Focused Student Organization*

A GSA (or similarly focused student organization) provides a safe place for gender and sexual minority students and allies to build community, establish positive relationships, and seek assistance or resources. Most participants reported working in a school that does not have a GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization. Seventeen participants (n = 17, $\overline{x}$ = 65.4%) marked "No" when asked if this practice was in place at their school; nine (n = 9, $\overline{x}$ = 34.6%) participants indicated their school did have this practice in place. See *Figure 5* below.

**Figure 5**

*Implementation Rate of GSA or Other LGBTQ-Focused Student Organization*




Among respondents who indicated this practice was not in place, when asked whether an attempt had been made to implement a GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization, n =

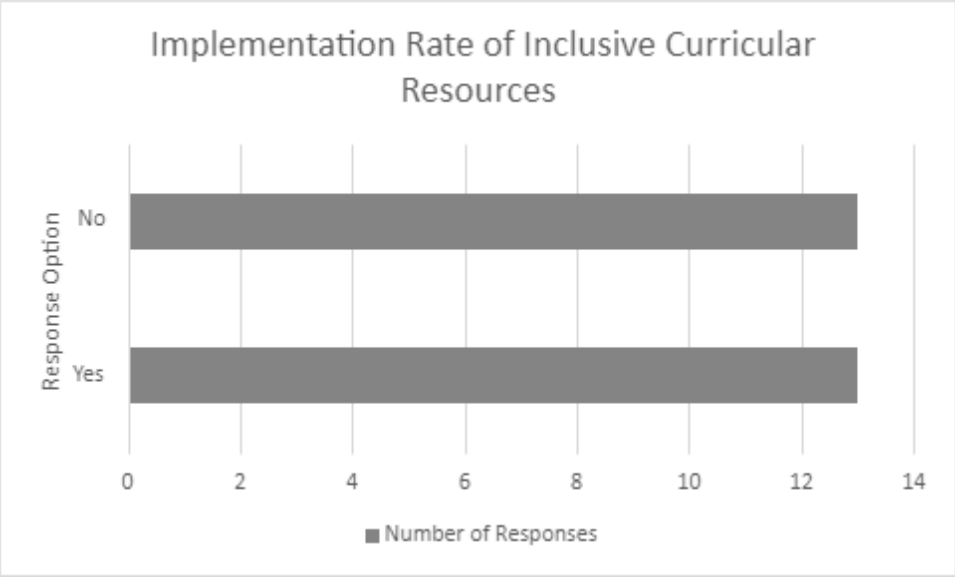
14, $\overline{x}$ = 82.4% (of n = 17) responded "No." Factoring in the variable of attempting to implement the practice made no significant statistical difference in the data collected. This variable was considered important to explore, as it could reveal the potential for barriers that caused the implementation attempt to be unsuccessful.

*Inclusive Curricular Resources*

Inclusive curricular resources intentionally integrate historical figures, texts, and perspectives of LGBTQ individuals. Data were evenly split regarding the implementation of such curricular resources. Thirteen (n = 13, $\overline{x}$ = 50%) participants responded that these resources are used in their buildings; thirteen (n = 13, $\overline{x}$ = 50%) participants responded that resources are not used in their building. See *Figure 6* below.

**Figure 6**

*Implementation Rate of Inclusive Curricular Resources*




All thirteen (n = 13) of the participants who reported LGBTQ-inclusive curricular resources were not implemented at their schools also reported that no attempt had been made to

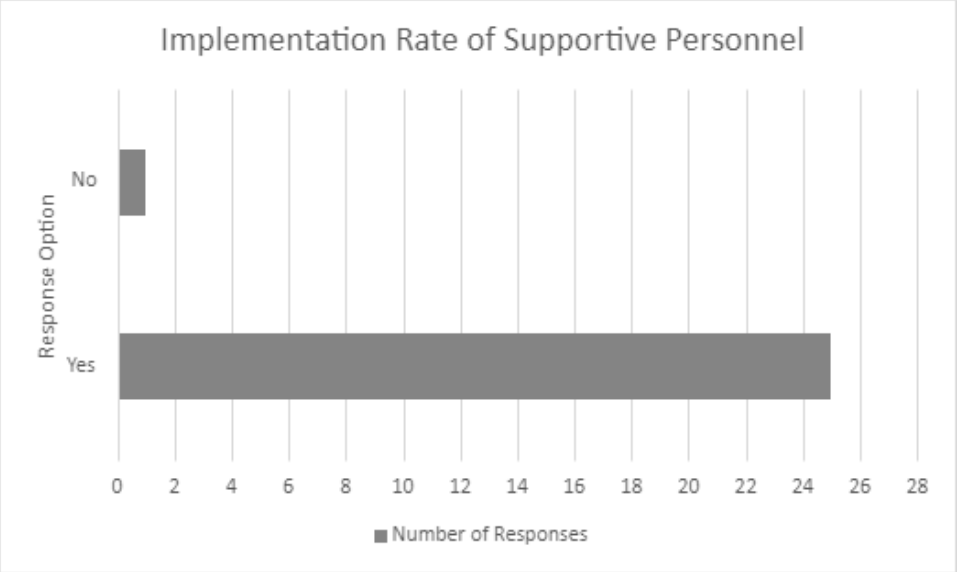
institute this practice.

*Supportive Personnel*

When asked whether supportive personnel, adults with whom LGBTQ students feel safe and respected, are accessible to students, n = 25, $\overline{x}$ = 96.2%, participants responded "Yes." One (n = 1, $\overline{x}$ = 3.8%) respondent reported that this type of school personnel was not accessible to LGBTQ students. See *Figure 7* below.

**Figure 7**

*Implementation Rate of Supportive Personnel*




In the instance of the one (n = 1) participant who reported that this kind of personnel was not accessible to LGBTQ students, this individual also reported that no attempt had been made to institute this practice in the school.

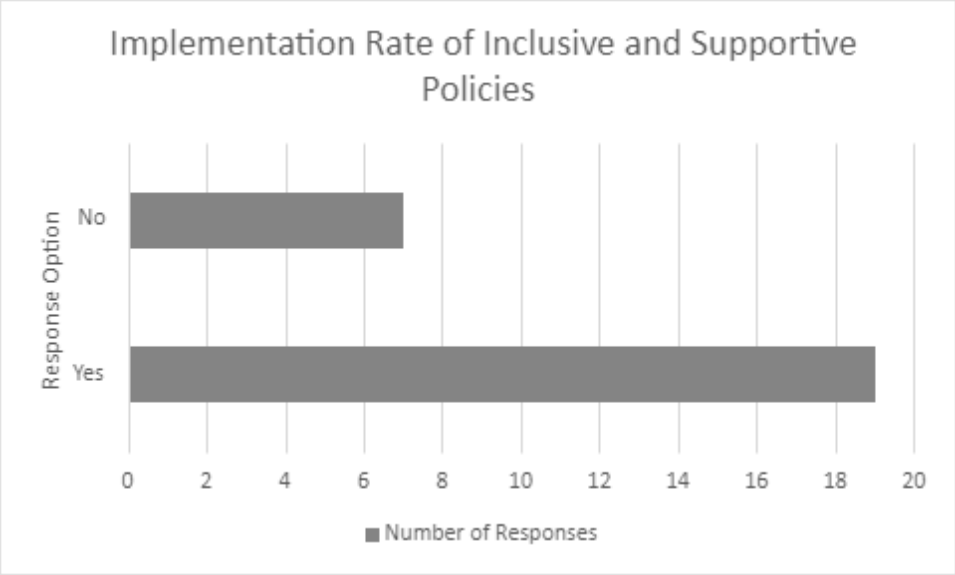
*Inclusive and Supportive Policies*

Inclusive and supportive policies specifically acknowledge and protect LGBTQ students from bullying and harassment while ensuring equitable access and experiences related to all

school-related activities, including during the school day and extracurricular activities. Nineteen (n = 19, $\overline{x}$ = 73.1%) participants indicated that these policies are in place at their schools. Seven (n = 7, $\overline{x}$ = 26.9%) participants responded that this practice is not implemented in their buildings. See *Figure 8* below.

**Figure 8**

*Implementation Rate of Inclusive and Supportive Policies*



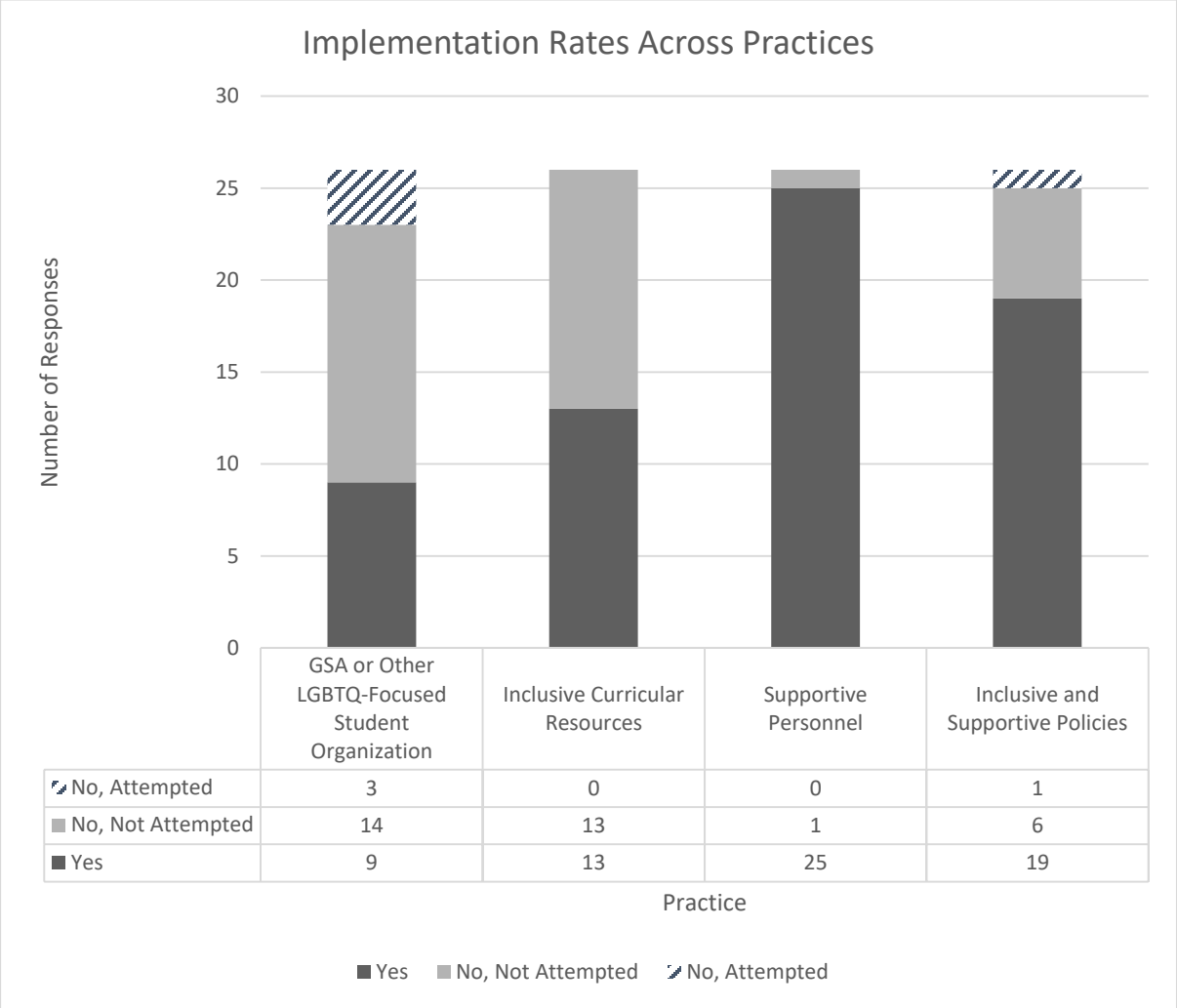

Among the seven (n = 7) respondents who indicated this practice was not implemented in their buildings, one participant (n = 1) indicated an attempt had been made to do so.

*Comparing Implementation Rates*

For a better picture of how the implementation rates vary across each of the four practices, it is important to consider the differences in the data across three groups: principals who reported the practice was not being implemented, but an attempt had been made to do so; principals who reported the practice was not being implemented, and an attempt had been made to do so; and principals who reported the practice was being implemented. See *Figure 9* below.

**Figure 9**

*Implementation Rates Across Practices*




Based on this graph, among participants, the practice most likely to be implemented was supportive school personnel; alternately, the practice least likely to be implemented was a GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization. A GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization was simultaneously the practice least likely to be implemented and most likely to not be attempted (n = 14 of 17); however, three participants indicated the former practice had been attempted. Inclusive curricular resources were close behind, reported as not implemented or

attempted thirteen times (n = 13); however, no such attempts were reported for inclusive curricular resources. Additionally, among the seven individuals (n = 7) who reported inclusive and supportive policies were not implemented, one participant (n = 1) reported that an attempt had been made to do so.

It is important to first consider the likelihood of each practice being implemented before comparing rates across practices. This perspective allows the data to be observed for each individual practice prior to considering multiple practices concurrently. Using *Table 2*, the "Total" column demonstrates that 63% of the time, the participants indicated a practice that is supportive of LGBTQ students is implemented at their schools. This number does not indicate, however, whether multiple practices are implemented in the same building. Among participants, the supportive personnel practice was implemented 96.2% of the time; the most, by far. A GSA or other LGBTQ-focused organization was less prevalent among participants, implemented 34.6% of the time. The table also suggests that, among participants, those practices which were not being implemented had likely not been attempted at a systemic level within the school.

**Table 3**

*Comparing Likelihood of Implementation Among Practices*

| | GSA or Other LGBTQ-Focused Organization | Inclusive Curricular Resources | Supportive Personnel | Inclusive and Supportive Policies | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No, Attempted | 3, 11.5% | 0, 0% | 0, 0% | 1, 3.8% | **4, 3.8%** |
| No, Not Attempted | 14, 53.8% | 13, 50% | 1, 3.8% | 6, 23.1% | **34, 32.7%** |
| Yes | 9, 34.6% | 13, 50% | 25, 96.2% | 19, 73.1% | **66, 63.5%** |

When comparing implementation rates across practices, using *Table 3*, two practices were reported as not implemented but an attempt had been made to do so: a GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization and inclusive and supportive policies. A GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization was reported to have the most unsuccessful attempts (n = 3, $\overline{x}$ = 75%). Unsurprisingly, when comparing this practice to the others, participants reported having this kind of student organization in their buildings 13.6% of the time, making it the practice students are least likely to have access to across all practices.

The practice of integrating inclusive curricular resources was second in terms of lack of implementation, reported as not being implemented with no attempt to do so 38.2% of the time. By far, the practice most likely to be implemented across all four was supportive personnel, reported as implemented among 37.9% of participants. This practice was the least likely to be reported as not being implemented without any attempt to do so ($\overline{x}$ = 2.9%).

**Table 4**

*Comparing Likelihood of Implementation Across Practices*

| | No, Attempted | No, Not Attempted | Yes |
|---|---|---|---|
| GSA or Other LGBTQ-Focused Student Organization | 3, 75% | 14, 41.2% | 9, 13.6% |
| Inclusive Curricular Resources | 0 | 13, 38.2% | 13, 19.7% |
| Supportive Personnel | 0 | 1, 2.9% | 25, 37.9% |
| Inclusive and Supportive Policies | 1, 25% | 6, 17.6% | 19, 28.8% |

The data suggest that all four targeted practices for supporting LGBTQ youth in schools are being implemented in West Virginia public high schools at varying degrees. However, after

analyzing the data for each practice individually and across practices, the practice of supportive personnel was consistent in having a high likelihood of implementation from both analytical perspectives. Alternatively, the practice of having a GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization was least likely to be implemented from both analytical perspectives. In instances where this practice was not implemented, it was most likely to have been attempted unsuccessfully. Though almost half of the respondents indicated inclusive curricular resources were implemented at their schools, when comparing across practices, these resources were reported as implemented less than 20% of the time; in fact, this practice was reported as not attempted as often as a GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization.

**Major Findings – Research Question 2**

The second research question in this investigation was, "What barriers negatively impact implementation of these practices?" For this study, barriers were observed and analyzed from two perspectives: stakeholder groups versus logistical components (see *Table 4*) and internal barriers versus external barriers. Data related to barriers were collected in two groups: principals of schools where each practice was being implemented, and principals of schools where each practice was not being implemented, but an attempt had been made to do so. Data related to barriers were not collected from principals of schools where each practice was not being implemented and no attempt had been made to do so. This data would be hypothetical in nature, and the investigation only sought to observe barriers principals had experienced in attempting or attempting to implement the four targeted practices.

**Table 5**

*Barrier Groups 1*

| Obstacle: Stakeholder Groups | Obstacle: Logistical Components |
|---|---|
| Student body | School culture |
| Faculty/staff | School finance/budget |
| School leadership | Time/scheduling |
| Families/caregivers | Staff interest/manpower |
| Community | Student interest |
| District leadership | Family/caregiver involvement |
| | Community involvement |

For each obstacle group related to the individual practices, participants were given the opportunity to include additional qualitative data with the "Other" option that included a text box; no data were input for this option on any item. Barriers were analyzed by frequency and then analyzed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the response rates of two groups of obstacles identified in *Table 4*: stakeholder groups versus logistical components.

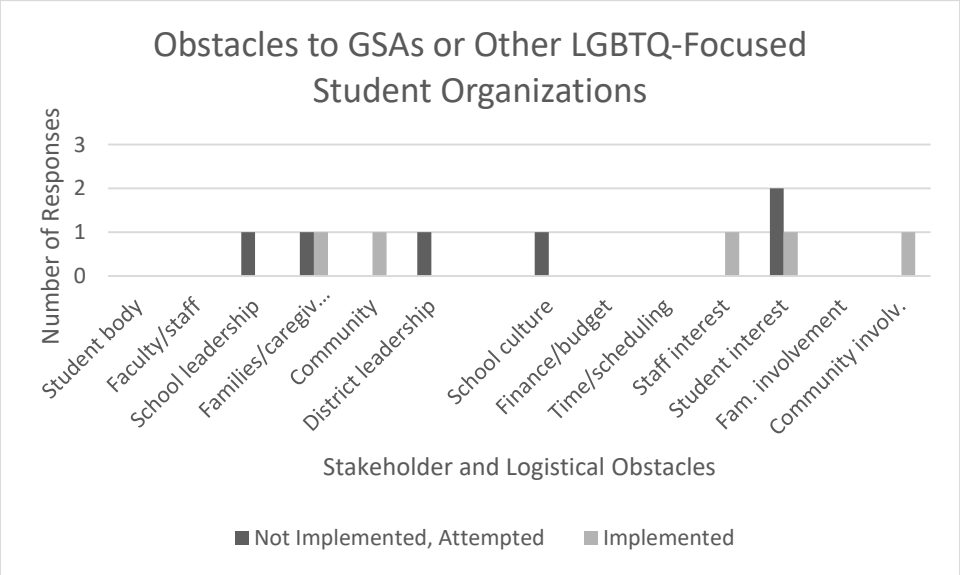
*GSA or Other LGBTQ-Focused Student Organization*

The practice of having a GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization was the practice least likely to be implemented and the one most likely to be attempted unsuccessfully. Beginning with principals who reported having this type of student organization in place, the barriers they faced related mostly to logistical concerns, namely staff interest, student interest, and community involvement. The stakeholder barriers were fewer in number, limited to families/caregivers and community – both external stakeholder groups. At the school where this practice was not in place, but an attempt had been made to do so, the barriers were evenly split. Stakeholder groups identified as barriers were faculty/staff, families/caregivers, and district leadership; logistical components identified as barriers were school culture and student interest. The frequency rates of the barriers reported can be seen in *Figure 10*.

When looking at both groups collectively (Not Implemented, Attempted and Implemented), most of the barriers were related to forces *inside* of the school. Of the total 11 barriers reported by principals in both groups, n = 6 ($\overline{x}$ = 54.5%) were related to stakeholder groups and logistical components inside the school. Five (n = 5, $\overline{x}$ = 45.5%) barriers identified were related to stakeholder groups or logistical components that exist outside the school building.

**Figure 10**

*Obstacles to GSAs or Other LGBTQ-Focused Student Organizations*



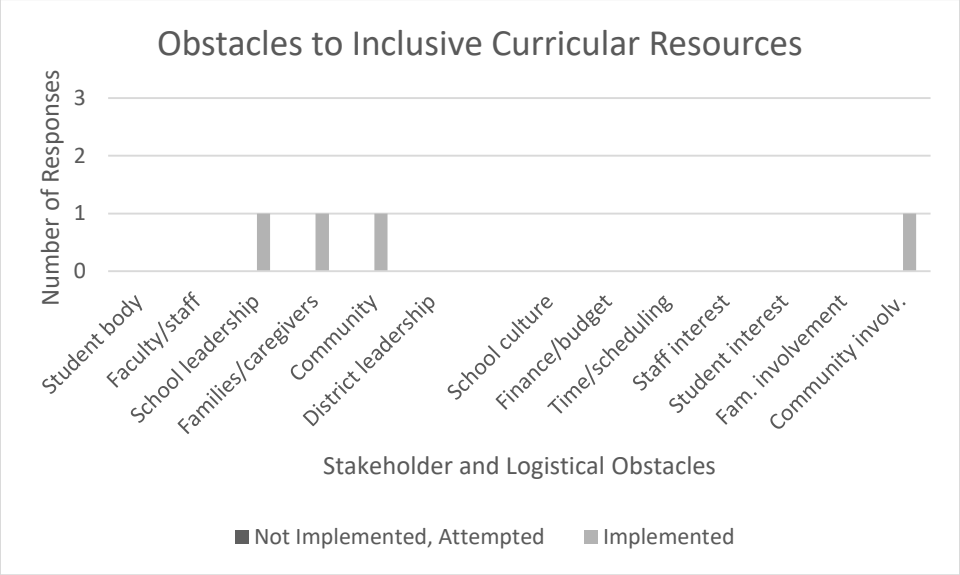

*Inclusive Curricular Resources*

Participants reported the fewest number of obstacles (n = 4) for inclusive curricular resources. In this instance, 75% of the obstacles were stakeholder groups: school leadership, families/caregivers, and community. Most of these stakeholder groups exist outside the school environment, but their influence is such that it negatively affected participants' perceptions of or experiences with the implementation of the practice, resulting in being identified as a barrier by some participants. One logistical barrier was identified – community involvement. Again, the

source of the pushback for this practice exists outside of the school.

**Figure 11**

*Obstacles to Inclusive Curricular Resources*

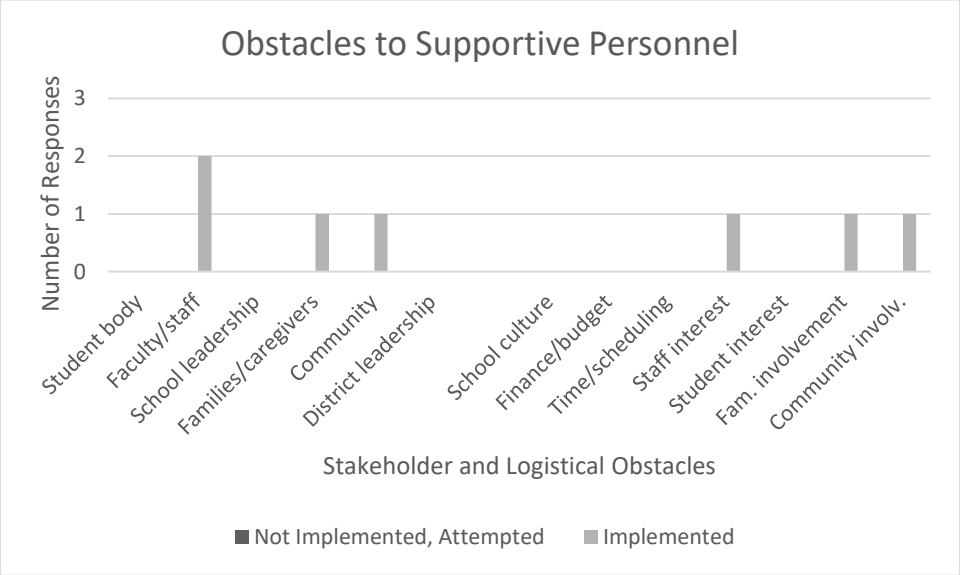



*Supportive Personnel*

Participants reported a total of seven (n = 7) obstacles to implementing supportive personnel in their buildings. This was the first instance that more than one principal identified the same obstacle, in this case, the faculty/staff stakeholder group. Because of this repeated identification, stakeholder groups outnumbered logistical components in the types of obstacles that negatively affect the implementation of the practice. However, it is important to note that even with the double identification of faculty/staff as an obstacle, external forces (i.e., families/caregivers, community, family involvement, and community involvement) still outnumbered the internal forces (i.e., faculty/staff and staff interest) affecting the implementation of this practice.

**Figure 12**

*Obstacles to Supportive Personnel*



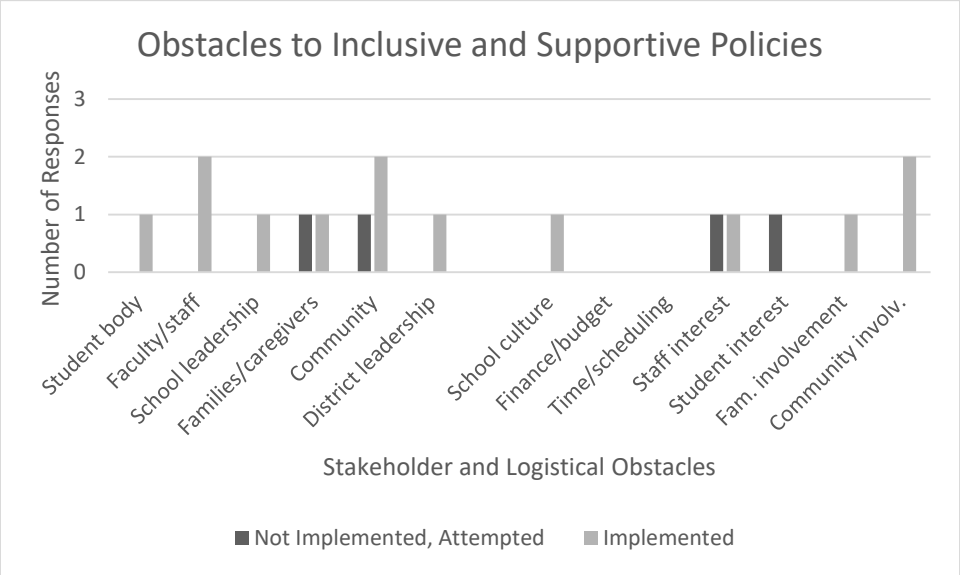

*Inclusive and Supportive Policies*

This practice of implementing inclusive and supportive policies yielded the highest number of reported obstacles: n = 13 ($\overline{x}$ = 76%) in schools where the practice is implemented and n = 4 ($\overline{x}$ = 24%) in the school where the practice is not implemented but an attempt had been made to do so. This number reflects the frequency at which barriers were reported by principals in schools where this practice is implemented and the principal that reported the practice was not implemented but an attempt had been made to do so. Beginning with principals who reported the practice was implemented in their buildings, stakeholder groups (n = 8, $\overline{x}$ = 62%) far outnumbered logistical components (n = 5, $\overline{x}$ = 38%). This practice was the first and only one to feature every stakeholder group identified as an obstacle, some more than once. The logistical obstacles, fewer in number, were slightly more related to outside forces, namely family involvement and community involvement.

In the school where an attempt had been made to implement this practice, the barriers were evenly split among stakeholder groups (n = 2, $\overline{x}$ = 50%) and logistical components (n = 2, $\overline{x}$ = 50%). The obstacles in the form of stakeholder groups were entirely external, and the obstacles in the form of logistical components were entirely internal. This demonstrates the benefit of considering the data from two angles: barrier type (stakeholder group or logistical component) and barrier location (internal or external).

**Figure 13**

*Obstacles to Inclusive and Supportive Policies*




*Statistical Analysis of Reported Barriers*

Because data related to obstacles were mostly limited to principals of schools where each practice was implemented, the statistical analysis focused on two conditions: reported frequencies of barriers by type (stakeholder groups versus logistical components) and reported frequencies of barriers by location (internal versus external). Internal barriers are made up of stakeholder groups and logistical components that exist inside the school. External barriers are

made up of stakeholder groups and logistical components that exist outside the school. The division of obstacles into barrier groups can be seen in *Table 5*. In both statistical analyses, dependent *t*-tests were conducted, as there was an overlap in the barriers both in terms of the type or the location. These groups were not independent of each other. According to Laerd Statistics (2018), the dependent *t*-test is appropriate when four assumptions are met.

1. The dependent variable can be measured with interval or ratio data. This holds true for the current investigation, as the data collected regarding barriers was ratio data.
2. The independent variable is comprised of two categorical groups. This is true for both dependent *t*-tests used in this investigation. For the first dependent *t*-test, the categories were based on the barrier type (stakeholder group or logistical component). For the second dependent *t*-test, the categories were based on the barrier location (internal or external).
3. There are no outliers in the data. There were no outliers observed in the data.
4. The data are normally distributed. As there were no outliers, it is safe to conclude the data were distributed normally.

**Table 6**

*Barrier Groups 2*

| Internal | External |
|---|---|
| Student body | Families/caregivers |
| Faculty/staff | Community |
| School leadership | District leadership |
| School culture | Family involvement |
| Finance/budget | Community involvement |
| Time/scheduling | |
| Staff interest | |
| Student interest | |

The first dependent *t*-test was conducted on the means of the type of obstacles reported: stakeholder group and logistical components. This test was conducted to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the frequency of response rate for stakeholder group barriers and logistical component barriers, despite the differences in the frequencies the two barrier types were reported. See *Table 6* below for the results of the data analysis. After running the dependent *t*-test, the following result was observed: $t_{(3)} = 1.46$, $p > 0.05$. This result demonstrates that there is no statistically significant difference between the frequency of reporting stakeholder groups or logistical components as barriers to implementing the four targeted practices.

**Table 7**

*t-Test 1: Paired Two Sample for Means*

| | *Stakeholder Barriers* | *Logistical Barriers* |
|---|---|---|
| Mean | 5.5 | 4.25 |
| Variance | 9.666666667 | 7.583333333 |
| Observations | 4 | 4 |
| Pearson Correlation | 0.837044911 | |
| Hypothesized Mean Difference | 0 | |
| df | 3 | |
| t Stat | 1.463850109 | |
| P(T<=t) one-tail | 0.119721299 | |
| t Critical one-tail | 2.353363435 | |
| P(T<=t) two-tail | 0.239442599 | |
| t Critical two-tail | 3.182446305 | |

A second dependent *t*-test was conducted to observe whether there was a statistically significant difference in the frequency of reporting the location of barriers that affect the implementation of the four targeted practices: internal barriers and external barriers. Once again, a dependent *t*-test was selected due to overlap in the characteristics of the internal and external barriers. For all four practices, the response rates of barriers were divided into the two specified

groups. The results of the analysis can be found in *Table 7*. After running the *t*-test, the following result was observed: $t_{(3)} = -1.19$, $p > 0.05$. This indicates there was no statistically significant difference in the reporting rate of internal barriers when compared to the reporting rate of external barriers that affected the implementation of the four targeted practices.

**Table 8**

*t-Test 2: Paired Two Sample for Means*

| | *Internal Barriers* | *External Barriers* |
|---|---|---|
| Mean | 4.5 | 5.25 |
| Variance | 9.666666667 | 6.916666667 |
| Observations | 4 | 4 |
| Pearson Correlation | 0.917222012 | |
| Hypothesized Mean Difference | 0 | |
| df | 3 | |
| t Stat | -1.192079121 | |
| P(T<=t) one-tail | 0.159465896 | |
| t Critical one-tail | 2.353363435 | |
| P(T<=t) two-tail | 0.318931792 | |
| t Critical two-tail | 3.182446305 | |

**Summary**

This chapter included an overview of the data collected. A total of n = 29 West Virginia public high school principals made up the sample from a population the size of n = 105. Based on demographic data, a total of n = 25 public high schools were represented out of a total of n = 105 (four of the participants did not provide demographic data). Organized by research question, the data reveal that while all four of the practices targeted in this investigation are being implemented in West Virginia public high schools, the practices are not treated or implemented equally. Among participants, LGBTQ students were most likely to have access to supportive personnel in their schools and were least likely to have access to a GSA or other LGBTQ-

focused student organization. Inclusive curricular resources and inclusive and supportive policies fell between those practices in terms of the likelihood of their implementation.

Implementation of inclusive and supportive policies was, by far, the practice most likely to face barriers. Survey participants reported facing barriers across stakeholder groups (both internal and external) and logistical components (both internal and external). No statistically significant differences were observed when analyzing barrier types (stakeholder groups versus logistical components) or barrier location (internal versus external). In terms of reporting, the data were comparable. This does not, however, account for the degree of impact of the barriers.

The following chapter will include conclusions and recommendations based upon the data presented and analyzed in this chapter. Implications of the data will be reported along with recommendations for future research.

# CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Introduction

This study observed the status of and contributing factors to a pervasive problem – the hostile school climate many LGBTQ students face in West Virginia public high schools. Following a review of the study's findings, this chapter will include a summary of the findings, implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

## Summary of Findings

*Research Question 1 - What LGBTQ-supportive practices are being implemented in West Virginia public high schools?*

The data suggest that all four practices are being implemented, but LGBTQ students do not have an equal likelihood of accessing these practices in their schools. When considering the likelihood of implementation by practice, supportive personnel were most likely to be reported. When asked whether supportive personnel were accessible to LGBTQ students, participants marked "Yes" 96.2% of the time. Looking across practices, when participants reported a practice was implemented in their buildings, supportive personnel was indicated 37.9% of the time, accounting for the largest share of the practices reported. This confirms GLSEN's (2021) most recent report that, among LGBTQ youth in West Virginia who took the National School Climate Survey, 94% indicated there was at least one supportive adult at school.

The practice least likely to be implemented among participants was a GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization. When asked whether this practice was implemented in their schools, participants marked "Yes" 34.6% of the time. Looking across practices, when participants indicated a practice was implemented in their buildings, a GSA or other LGBTQ-

focused student organization was indicated 13.6% of the time. This is consistent with GLSEN's (2021) finding that 38% of LGBTQ youth in West Virginia reported having access to a student organization of this nature. This same practice was also the most likely to be attempted unsuccessfully among participants. A total of n = 3 ($\overline{x}$ = 75%) respondents indicated this practice had been attempted but was not implemented. The only other practice reported attempted unsuccessfully was inclusive and supportive policies (n = 1, $\overline{x}$ = 25%).

When asked whether their school implemented inclusive curricular resources, half of the participants (n = 13, $\overline{x}$ = 50%) marked "Yes," and half (n = 13, $\overline{x}$ = 50%) marked "No." Looking across practices, the use of inclusive curricular resources was reported 19.7% of the time. This is not consistent with GLSEN's (2021) finding that 11% of LGBTQ youth in West Virginia indicated LGBTQ people, history, and events were included in the curriculum. This disconnect is concerning; as Page (2016) stated, "When queer students are not visible in the curriculum or in the social networks of school, when the school is silent about their experience, this creates feelings of disenfranchisement and rejection" (p. 678). In the context of this investigation, this indicates an incongruent understanding of what constitutes inclusive curricular resources. The inconsistent findings could be due to the spectrum of ways inclusive curricular resources can be integrated (Page, 2016). Principals could also be making incorrect conclusions about the materials being utilized in classrooms.

When asked whether the practice of inclusive and supportive policies was implemented in their schools, participants marked "Yes" 73.1% (n = 19) of the time. However, when comparing the frequency of the reported practices to each other, this practice represented 28.8% of those reported. GLSEN (2021) found that only 9% of LGBTQ youth in West Virginia reported bullying or anti-harassment policies that explicitly included protections based on sexual

orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. The practice of having inclusive and supportive policies can be thought of as the overarching umbrella that provides basic protections for a vulnerable population of students. According to Day et al. (2019), these policies "play a vital role in strengthening social supports in schools for LGBTQ youth" (pp. 420-421). These policies could enhance the likelihood and efficacy of the three remaining practices, but as this study found, inclusive and supportive policies faced the most obstacles impeding implementation. This means that the LGBTQ-supportive practice that has the greatest impact at a systemic level (i.e., school-wide inclusive and supportive policies) is the one that receives the most pushback. Changing the climate of a school is challenging work, and this finding reinforces that notion.

*Research Question 2 - What barriers negatively impact implementation of these practices?*

The survey instrument collected data on the frequency of barriers participants faced in implementing the four targeted practices. Participants reported n = 11 ($\overline{x}$ = 28%) barriers to having a GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization, n = 4 ($\overline{x}$ = 10.3%) barriers to inclusive curricular resources, n = 7 ($\overline{x}$ = 18%) barriers to supportive personnel, and n = 17 ($\overline{x}$ = 43.6%) barriers to inclusive and supportive policies. Surprisingly, the practice that faced the most barriers (inclusive and supportive policies) was not the one to be implemented less often (a GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization).

The survey instrument also collected data on the types of barriers principals faced when implementing (or attempting to implement) the targeted practices. Participants were asked questions about two types of obstacles: stakeholder groups and logistical components. Based on the frequencies of reported obstacles, GSAs or other LGBTQ-focused student organizations had to overcome more logistical components (n = 6, $\overline{x}$ = 54.5%); stakeholders represented most of

the obstacles to inclusive curricular resources (n = 3, $\overline{x}$ = 75%); supportive personnel faced more obstacles from stakeholders (n = 4, $\overline{x}$ = 57%); and stakeholder obstacles were also reported most often for inclusive and supportive policies (n = 10, $\overline{x}$ =58.5%).

There was an overlap in the barriers, both in type (stakeholder groups versus logistical components) and location (internal versus external). For example, the student body was listed as a stakeholder group, but student interest was also listed as a logistical component. Similar overlaps occurred for faculty/staff, family/caregivers, and community. These overlaps were intentionally created to observe barriers both holistically (i.e., in stakeholder groups, like students) and analytically (i.e., in logistical components, like student interest). Because of these overlaps, dependent *t*-tests were conducted to observe whether there was a statistically significant difference in the reporting rates of the barriers.

Following both dependent *t*-tests, data analysis yielded statistically insignificant results. To be clear, these tests do not determine the power of influence of each barrier type (stakeholder group or logistical component) or barrier location (internal or external). Instead, the tests demonstrate that in terms of the frequency of barriers principals experienced in implementing (or attempting to implement) the four targeted practices, there was no statistically significant difference in how often barrier types or locations were reported. This is important as it indicates that, when implementing or attempting to implement LGBTQ-supportive practices, principals faced barriers in the form of stakeholder groups and logistical components (both internal and external, respectively) at comparable rates.

**Implications**

This study operated on a major assumption – that West Virginia public high school principals were aware of the need for and efficacy of the four targeted practices that have been

proven to make the school climate safe for and inclusive of LGBTQ students. The following implications will take this assumption into account. This study surfaced three key takeaways: (1) the role of professional learning, (2) awareness of the practices, and (3) the importance of policy.

The low participation rate ($\bar{x}$ = 27.6%) could be due to a lack of perceived knowledge about this specific topic. If that is the case, professional learning opportunities about the roles of school principals in making the learning environment safe for LGBTQ students are needed. Acton (2021) stated that while principals are aware of the importance of their role as change agents, "it appears that an emphasis on change agent skills has been overlooked" (p. 49). It would be ill-informed to mistake a lack of ability for a lack of willingness; in this light, it is important for local education agencies to ensure school principals have the skills and tools they need to make meaningful changes to improve the school climate for LGBTQ students.

This lack of assurance that the target population is aware of the four targeted practices, and has the information and skills needed to make appropriate decisions regarding school climate for LGBTQ youth, casts doubt on the validity of supportive personnel being the practice most likely to be implemented in West Virginia public high schools (among survey participants). Asking principals whether LGBTQ students have access to staff with whom they feel safe and respected is likely to get a consistently positive result, because, for decades in education (especially since legislation like IDEA), the emphasis has been on ensuring *all* students succeed, regardless of background, ethnicity, needs, etc.

This tendency to refer to students with blanket statements leads to an overgeneralization of what is happening for specific groups of students. Smith (2018) found that, upon asking teachers about how they specifically addressed and supported gender and sexual minority students, "the most common response was to include LGBTQ students in a broader narrative

about their commitments to teaching, supporting, or caring for 'all students'" (p. 301). This is not to say such a response comes from bad intentions; instead, it could be due to a lack of information and insight – which could, again, be addressed through sustained professional learning opportunities that are tailored to administrators,' teachers,' and students' unique needs. Such training opportunities provide concrete examples of what implementation of supportive personnel for LGBTQ students specifically can look like in West Virginia public high schools. Kosciw, Clark, et al. (2020) found that most LGBTQ youth considered counselors/school-based mental health professionals and teachers to be supportive personnel over all other types of staff, including coaches, school resource officers (SROs), and principals/vice principals. This is not an insignificant number of staff, and more can be done to demonstrate how these individuals can be more supportive of their LGBTQ students.

The possibility exists, though, that the low response rate was due to a lack of willingness among the population to discuss the topic of LGBTQ youth. If principals view the topic as controversial, they are less likely to discuss it, even in the form of an anonymous online survey. "School administrators hate controversy and will often discourage teachers from discussing hot topics in their classrooms at all" (Recco, 2018, para. 2). The lack of willingness to engage in discussion could stem from discomfort (or even personal objections) with the topic. In this case, those personal objections are motivated by the heteronormative ideology, and they prevent LGBTQ youth from receiving the supports necessary for them to access the educational opportunities they deserve.

Another implication is that while all four of the targeted practices were reported by participants, there was a clear distinction in which practice was more likely to be implemented in West Virginia public high schools. This could be addressed through systemic change in the form

of statewide and district-wide policies. Policies for safe schools are developed at both the state and district levels. West Virginia Board of Education (WVBE, 2019) Policy 4373 provides "guidance to assist all public schools to design and implement procedures to create and support positive school climate and culture improvement processes" (p. 5). The definition of harassment/ bullying/intimidation in this policy protects sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression from such treatment, and consequences for this behavior infraction are outlined therein. There is no guidance, however, for establishing a learning environment that includes preventive measures against harassment, bullying, and intimidation of LGBTQ students; instead, the guidance is reactive in nature (i.e., punishment-based). Granted, local school districts are instructed to develop local policies, but guidance from the state education agency could establish a framework for schools to proactively combat harassment and/or bullying of LGBTQ youth instead of reactively responding to it when it happens. Local policies would be more likely to fall in line with state-level guidance that includes specific suggestions for making the school climate safe and supportive for student groups at higher risk for bullying and harassment. The four targeted LGBTQ-supportive practices explored in this investigation are concrete ways to proactively make the school climate safe for and inclusive of LGBTQ students.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Replication of this investigation's data collection process should be conducted during a time when principals are more accessible. A higher participation rate would yield meaningful information that could strengthen the analysis of the data. Accessing a greater number of the population would also increase the generalizability of the findings. The validity of survey research has been called into question due to sample sizes that may not be representative of the entire population (Mullinix et al., 2015). Future replication of this investigation with a higher

response rate would address concerns of external validity associated with the current study.

The needs of school principals to understand and implement the four targeted LGBTQ-supportive practices could be assessed using a survey to determine how the state education agency and local school districts can support principals in making the learning environment safe for and inclusive of gender and sexual minority students. An investigation of this nature could provide valuable information on how to equip school principals with the skills needed to have a positive impact on school climate for LGBTQ youth. Doing so would address the potential skills deficit proposed by Acton (2021).

A survey of the local anti-bullying/anti-harassment/safe school policies in West Virginia that specifically mention sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression could be combined, in a mixed methods design, with qualitative data on the consistency with which schools implement and adhere to those policies. Studies in this area tend to report that having anti-bullying or anti-harassment policies that specifically include protections for gender and sexual minority students have a positive impact on school climate; however, there is scant data on the degree to which all stakeholder groups abide by such policies. The impact of these policies depends on "knowledge and implementation […] in reducing student victimization" (Seelman & Walker, 2018, p. 2316). A policy is nothing more than words on a page; the fidelity with which that policy is implemented is of the highest importance.

**Conclusion**

"In all likelihood, the vast majority of any student's teachers will be cisgender and heterosexual" (Smith, 2018, p. 302). The same could be said for any student's principals. Because of this, most principals approach their roles through a heteronormative lens, as this lens reflects their lives and experiences. This in and of itself is not the problem. It is when the

heteronormative lens blocks the possibility of seeing situations from another point of view that problems arise, and in these instances, the students are the ones who tend to pay the price.

"Secondary school administrators are challenged with providing a safe and inclusive school environment where LGBTQ students are positioned to have greater potential to thrive physically, psycho-sexually, and academically" (Steck & Perry, 2018, p. 227). While it is true that school is a place where *all* students should have equal access and opportunity in terms of learning and growing, when the emphasis is placed on *all*, it is easy to overlook the *small*. The LGBTQ student population does not make up most of the student body, in West Virginia or nationally, but this population is overwhelmingly at risk for negative outcomes, both in the short term as adolescents and in the long term as adults (Wagaman et al., 2020; Rhoades et al., 2018). Among educators in West Virginia, there is a push to ensure schools are a place where every student can learn. In that case, this includes minority student populations whose experiences, in the absence of supportive practices, are not comparable to those of their non-minority peers. Minority student populations, like LGBTQ youth, deserve access to the same high-quality educational experiences as their peers outside of the LGBTQ community.

Existing empirical research has consistently reinforced the fact that a hostile school climate can be improved for the emotional, physical, and academic well-being of LGBTQ students. The implementation of specific practices, vetted by literature, can have a positive impact on the school climate – for LGBTQ students and everyone else, as well. Low-cost and no-cost solutions to this problem have been explored and have yielded positive results, yet at the moment, these solutions are not implemented at a critical mass in the 27% of West Virginia public high schools represented in this investigation. The first step in achieving a critical mass among the schools represented by the sample would be to have comparable implementation rates

across all four LGBTQ-supportive practices. More can and should be done to make the learning environment welcoming of and safe for LGBTQ students, and school leaders need practical training and support in ensuring proactive steps are taken to make school a safe place for this population of students. Those proactive steps take the form of supportive practices that mitigate the risk factors associated with a hostile school climate, including bullying, intimidation, disenfranchisement, etc.

By implementing four supportive practices – a GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization, inclusive curricular resources, supportive personnel, and inclusive and supportive policies – schools can reduce or even eliminate those risk factors for LGBTQ students. These practices have mutually beneficial outcomes: LGBTQ students feel safe and welcome at school, and attendance and achievement rates will be positively affected, as a result. These are the low-cost/no-cost steps school leaders can take to ensure all students in their buildings have a positive, welcoming environment in which to learn. As the leader and change agent of the building, the school principal must understand the significance of making the learning environment safe for students, both the "all" and the "small."

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## APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY
www.marshall.edu

**Office of Research Integrity**
Institutional Review Board
One John Marshall Drive
Huntington, WV 25755

FWA 00002704

IRB1 #00002205
IRB2 #00003206

August 16, 2021

Charles Bethel, Ed.D.
Leadership Studies, MUGC

RE: IRBNet ID# 1771541-1
**At:** Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Bethel:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Protocol Title:** | [1771541-1] School Climate for LGBTQ Youth: Principals' Perceptions and Attitudes | |
| **Site Location:** | MUGC | |
| **Submission Type:** | New Project | APPROVED |
| **Review Type:** | Exempt Review | |

In accordance with 45CFR46.104(d)(2), the above study was granted Exempted approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Designee. No further submission (or closure) is required for an Exempt study **unless** there is an amendment to the study. All amendments must be submitted and approved by the IRB Chair/Designee.

This study is for student Jessica George.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/ Behavioral) Coordinator Anna Robinson, MS, CIC at 304-696-2477 or robinsonn1@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director, Office of Research Integrity

## APPENDIX B: PILOT STUDY FEEDBACK

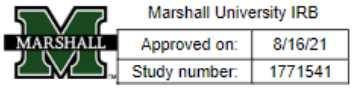
Q44 - Use the box below to provide feedback regarding this survey. Comments can include thoughts on wording, question flow, clarity, ease of use, etc.

| Use the box below to provide feedback regarding this survey. Comments can i... |
| --- |
| Could some questions be combined? |
| Try to shorten if you can. |
| The survey was a little long. Other than that I think it's ok. |
| The rating questions were hard to do on a cell. |

**End of Report**

## APPENDIX C: SURVEY INVITATION AND CONSENT STATEMENT

Anonymous Survey Consent




You are invited to participate in a research project entitled "School Climate for LGBTQ Youth: Principals' Perceptions and Experiences," designed to analyze the factors that affect implementation of LGBTQ-supportive practices that make the school climate safe for and inclusive of this population of students. This study has been approved by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The research is being conducted by Dr. Charles Bethel, the Principal Investigator, and Jessica L. George, the Co-investigator.

This survey is comprised of multiple-choice items and will take approximately 5-7 minutes to complete. Your replies will be anonymous, so do not type your name anywhere on the form. There are no known risks involved with this study. Results will be reported in aggregate form only; individual responses will not be reported or shared.

Participation is completely voluntary and there will be no penalty or loss of benefits if you choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw. If you choose not to participate, you can leave the survey site. You may choose to not answer any question by simply leaving it blank. Once you complete the survey, you can delete your browsing history for added security. If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Dr. Charles Bethel, Chair at (304) 746-8952 or bethel3@marshall.edu or Jessica L. George at (606) 205-6061 or george31@marshall.edu.

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity at (304) 696-4303.

By accessing the link and completing this survey, you are providing consent for use of your responses. You are also confirming that you are 18 years of age or older.

Please print this page for your records.

If you choose to participate in the study, you will find the survey at https://marshall.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6MDJtrVHZLrO486.

**APPENDIX D: SURVEY INSTRUMENT**

# School Climate for LGBTQ Youth: Principals' Perceptions and Experiences

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 Are you currently employed as principal of a public school that serves students in grades 9-12 in West Virginia?

- Yes
- No

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Block 1

Q2 Does your school have a GSA (gay-straight alliance, gender-sexuality alliance) or other LGBTQ-focused student organization?

- Yes
- No

End of Block: Block 1

Start of Block: Block 2

Q3 Have there been any obstacles to implementing a GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization at your school?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

End of Block: Block 2

Start of Block: Block 18

Q4 What stakeholders (if any) have been obstacles to your school's GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Student body
- ☐ Faculty/staff
- ☐ School leadership
- ☐ District leadership
- ☐ Families/caregivers
- ☐ Community
- ☐ Other _____

Q5 What logistical components (if any) have been obstacles to your school's GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization? (select all that apply)

- [ ] School finance/budget
- [ ] Time/scheduling
- [ ] Student interest
- [ ] Staff interest/manpower
- [ ] School culture
- [ ] Family/caregiver involvement
- [ ] Community involvement
- [ ] Other _____

End of Block: Block 18

Start of Block: Block 18

Q6 Has there been any attempt to implement a GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization at your school?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

End of Block: Block 18

Start of Block: Block 3

Q7 What stakeholders (if any) have been obstacles to your school's GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Student body
- ☐ Faculty/staff
- ☐ School leadership
- ☐ District leadership
- ☐ Family/caregivers
- ☐ Community
- ☐ Other _____

Q8 What logistical components (if any) have been obstacles to implementing a GSA or other LGBTQ-focused student organization? (select all that apply)

- [ ] School finance/budget
- [ ] Time/scheduling
- [ ] Student interest
- [ ] Staff interest/manpower
- [ ] School culture
- [ ] Family/caregiver involvement
- [ ] Community involvement
- [ ] Other _____

End of Block: Block 3

Start of Block: Block 4

Q9 Does your school use LGBTQ-inclusive curricular resources? (e.g., instructional materials; lessons/activities; reading materials; representations of LGBTQ people, history, or events; etc.)

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

End of Block: Block 4

Start of Block: Block 21

Q10 Have there been any obstacles to using LGBTQ-inclusive curricular resources?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

End of Block: Block 21

Start of Block: Block 5

Q11 What stakeholders (if any) have been obstacles to the use of LGBTQ-inclusive curricular resources? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Student body
- ☐ Faculty/staff
- ☐ School leadership
- ☐ District leadership
- ☐ Family/caregivers
- ☐ Community
- ☐ Other _____

Q12 What logistical components (if any) have been obstacles to the use of LGBTQ-inclusive curricular resources? (select all that apply)

- [ ] School finance/budget
- [ ] Time/scheduling
- [ ] Student interest
- [ ] Staff interest/manpower
- [ ] School culture
- [ ] Family/caregiver involvement
- [ ] Community involvement
- [ ] Other _____

End of Block: Block 5

Start of Block: Block 23

Q13 Has there been any attempt to use LGBTQ-inclusive curricular resources?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

End of Block: Block 23

Start of Block: Block 18

Q14 What stakeholders (if any) have been obstacles to using LGBTQ-inclusive curricular resources? (select all that apply)

- [ ] Student body
- [ ] Faculty/staff
- [ ] School leadership
- [ ] District leadership
- [ ] Families/caregivers
- [ ] Community
- [ ] Other _____

Q15 What logistical components (if any) have been obstacles to using LGBTQ-inclusive curricular resources? (select all that apply)

- [ ] School finance/budget
- [ ] Time/scheduling
- [ ] Student interest
- [ ] Staff interest/manpower
- [ ] School culture
- [ ] Family/caregiver involvement
- [ ] Community involvement
- [ ] Other _____

End of Block: Block 18

Start of Block: Block 7

Q16 Are supportive personnel accessible to LGBTQ students? (i.e., personnel with whom LGBTQ students feel safe, respected, and accepted)

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

End of Block: Block 7

Start of Block: Block 22

Q17 Have there been any obstacles to making supportive personnel accessible to LGBTQ students?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

End of Block: Block 22

Start of Block: Block 8

Q18 What stakeholders (if any) have been obstacles to making supportive personnel accessible for LGBTQ students? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Student body
- ☐ Faculty/staff
- ☐ School leadership
- ☐ District leadership
- ☐ Family/caregivers
- ☐ Community
- ☐ Other _____

Q19 What logistical components (if any) have been obstacles to making supportive personnel accessible to LGBTQ students? (select all that apply)

- [ ] School finance/budget
- [ ] Time/scheduling
- [ ] Student interest
- [ ] Staff interest/manpower
- [ ] School culture
- [ ] Family/caregiver involvement
- [ ] Community involvement
- [ ] Other _____

End of Block: Block 8

Start of Block: Block 9

Q20 Has there been any attempt to make supportive personnel accessible to LGBTQ students?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Q21 What stakeholders (if any) have been obstacles to making supportive personnel accessible to LGBTQ students? (select all that apply)

- [ ] Student body
- [ ] Faculty/staff
- [ ] School leadership
- [ ] District leadership
- [ ] Family/caregivers
- [ ] Community
- [ ] Other _____

Q22 What logistical components (if any) have been obstacles to making supportive personnel accessible to LGBTQ students? (select all that apply)

- [ ] School finance/budget
- [ ] Time/scheduling
- [ ] Student interest
- [ ] Staff interest/manpower
- [ ] School culture
- [ ] Family/caregiver involvement
- [ ] Community involvement
- [ ] Other _____

End of Block: Block 9

Start of Block: Block 10

Q23 Does your school have inclusive and supportive policies that explicitly include the LGBTQ student population? (e.g., dress code, discipline, bullying/harassment, etc.)

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

End of Block: Block 10

Start of Block: Block 23

Q24 Have there been any obstacles to instituting inclusive and supportive policies that explicitly include the LGBTQ student population?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

End of Block: Block 23

Start of Block: Block 11

Q25 What stakeholders (if any) have been obstacles to inclusive and supportive policies that explicitly include the LGBTQ student population? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Student body
- ☐ Faculty/staff
- ☐ School leadership
- ☐ District leadership
- ☐ Family/caregivers
- ☐ Community
- ☐ Other _____

Q26 What logistical components (if any) have been obstacles to inclusive and supportive policies that explicitly include the LGBTQ student population? (select all that apply)

- [ ] School finance/budget
- [ ] Time/scheduling
- [ ] Student interest
- [ ] Staff interest/manpower
- [ ] School culture
- [ ] Family/caregiver involvement
- [ ] Community involvement
- [ ] Other _____

End of Block: Block 11

Start of Block: Block 12

Q27 Has there been any attempt to institute inclusive and supportive policies that explicitly include the LGBTQ student population?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

End of Block: Block 12

Start of Block: Block 19

Q28 What stakeholders (if any) have been obstacles to instituting inclusive and supportive policies that explicitly include the LGBTQ student population (select all that apply)

- ☐ Student body
- ☐ Faculty/staff
- ☐ School leadership
- ☐ District leadership
- ☐ Family/caregivers
- ☐ Community
- ☐ Other _____

Q29 What logistical components (if any) have been obstacles to instituting inclusive and supportive policies that explicitly include the LGBTQ student population? (select all that apply)

- ☐ School finance/budget
- ☐ Time/scheduling
- ☐ Student interest
- ☐ Staff interest/manpower
- ☐ School culture
- ☐ Family/caregiver involvement
- ☐ Community involvement
- ☐ Other _____

**End of Block: Block 19**

**Start of Block: Block 16**

Q30 How many students attend your school?

- ○ < 500
- ○ 500 - 999
- ○ 1,000 - 1,499
- ○ 1,500 or more

---

Q31 Select the community type in which your school is located.

- ○ Rural
- ○ Suburban
- ○ Urban

---

Q32 How many years of experience do you have in administration at the school level?

- ○ < 5
- ○ 5 - 10
- ○ 11 - 15
- ○ 16 - 20
- ○ 21 or more

**End of Block: Block 16**