



## SAFER SCHOOLS AND CAMPUSES BEST PRACTICES CLEARINGHOUSE

- Lessons from the Field -

# Supporting Transgender & Nonbinary Students in K-12 Schools

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*Wednesday, April 13, 2022 | 3:00 – 4:15 PM ET*  
*Transcript*

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**Tim Duffey:**

Good afternoon, and welcome to today's Lessons from the Fields Webinar, Supporting Transgender & Non-binary Students in K-12 Schools. On behalf of The U.S. Department of Education, we are pleased you've joined us today. In fact, some 3,500 people have registered for today's webinar, so additional people will likely be joining us as we kick off here this afternoon. Thanks to all of you who are already online with us. My name is Tim Duffey, Training Specialist at the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, or NCSSE. NCSSE is funded by the Office of Safe and Supportive Schools within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. To learn more about NCSSE and to access a range of resources that address school climate and conditions for learning, we encourage you to visit our website. To give you a sense of what the website looks like and the content it contains, here we share an image of our home page on the left and an image of some of our most popular products on the right hand side of your screen.

Please note that all materials you'll see today, including the slides, reference resources and the recorded version of this webinar will be available on the event webpage within this website. In fact, some items including slides and speaker bios have already been posted there. Please also note you can access previous Lessons from the Field sessions by visiting the webinar series webpage, which is also listed here in the lower right corner, and which will be posted into the chat. Before I review our agenda and introduce today's speakers, I want to quickly review information shared by those of you who registered for the webinar, to provide a sense of who's joined us today. So you'll see that just a slightly higher number of student support personnel are the leading category on the left side, followed by that catchall category of other, state and district staff, third, and you'll see the other roles as we offered you and presented after that, to give you an idea.

The other category often comes in very high, and in this event, that includes folks like federal grantees, various community-based organizations, federal staff, and specific student support roles in schools like school nurses, counselors, psychologists, and social workers are actually quite a few folks in that category, which would increase the size of that first bar in this graph if added there so that gives you a sense of who's joined. Let's look now at the agenda for today. After completing this introduction, we'll be kicking off today's event with a brief welcome from the Department of Education as indicated in item two on the agenda. That'll be followed by essential information from the CDC and Health and Human Services on supporting transgender and non-binary students as indicated in agenda item three. These presentations will then be followed by two round-table discussions and a question and answer session with our key presenters today.

We'll close with important announcements and end by 4:15 Eastern time. We are joined today by a slate of speakers with deep experience and understanding what it takes to meaningfully support transgender and non-binary students in school settings. Today, our speakers include Sam Ames, pronouns they/he, Director of Advocacy and Government Affairs at the Trevor Project; Amy Cannava, pronouns she/her, High School Psychologist, Arlington County Schools Virginia; Rae Garrison, Principal of West Jordan Middle School, Utah. Rae's pronouns are she/her, Sam Long, pronouns/he him, a High School Science Teacher at Denver High School in Colorado; Dr. Katherine Rasberry, pronouns she/her, Acting Chief of the Research Application and Evaluation branch within the Division of Adolescent and School Health at the CDC.

We're also joined by Rebekah, pronouns she/her, student, and Christian Rhodes, he/him, Senior Advisor Office of the Secretary in the U.S. Department of Education; Laura Ross, pronouns she/her, joins us as a Middle School Counselor from Forks Middle School in Georgia; and Melanie Willingham-Jaggers, pronouns she/they, as Executive Director of GLSEN. It's now my distinct honor to introduce Mr. Christian Rhodes, who will moderate today's. As Senior Advisor in the Office of the Secretary at the U.S. Department of Education. Christian provides leadership and support to many priorities of the Secretary, including this webinar series. You'll see details in his bio regarding leadership roles he's played throughout his career, but what you'll quickly get a sense of as he joins us today is his passionate commitment to all students, families, and educators. Christian, the webinar is yours.

**Christian Rhodes:**

No, thank you so much, Tim, and thank you so much for those who are participating today. We're honored and thankful that you've decided to spend a few minutes today talking about such an important topic, and one that I think is an important element, particularly for such a time as this. My name is Christian Rhodes, and I do serve as Senior Advisor. I'm at the Department of Education in the Office of the Secretary. I've had a chance to do several of these Lessons from the Field Webinars, and this one by far is one of our largest in registrants. We're looking forward to having more people participate, and also the opportunity for those who are on to get a chance to go back and listen as we've

archived, and we'll continue to archive these Lessons from the Field Webinars. The reality is that this discussion is critically important for our students and our educators throughout the country. In some respect, our nation's schools are doing more than ever to support our transgender and non-binary students.

Today, you'll hear a lot of positive work that's happening in schools, what they're doing to support students, but the truth is that challenges still remain for students, educators, and staff, including the forms of harassment and other discrimination, barriers to opportunities, and to be frank, just lack of visibility. In addition to that outside the school environment, there's an increase hundreds of bills that are really targeting unfairly students, I think, these bills have been proposed across the country and they're really targeting our young people. As President Biden said, these bills will restrict transgender students' access to healthcare and full participation in school. It would ultimately, and why I'm here as a moderator, is undermine the humanity of such a vulnerable group of our students, and it really goes against everything we know that our country, to be. Studies have shown that political attacks, in particular, when the dignity and humanity of transgender youth are damaging their mental health and well-being, and they're putting our students and their families, and many times the educators that support them, at greater risk of bullying and discrimination.

We've seen a national rise of violence towards transgender students, especially transgender women and girls of color, which underscores the importance of this conversation. I just want to thank the Department for the willingness to stand on this issue and communicate our unwavering support. As the Secretary said on Transgender Day of Visibility, all of us here at the Department stand committed to ensuring that transgender and non-binary students are seen, are supported and heard. We also want to affirm for our parents, our caregivers, our teachers, our coaches, those who are supporting young people across the country and this great education system that we have, that we support you as well, and your efforts in ensuring that all of our students meet their full potential. Now, we have a lineup a great discussion of panelists for you today, and those who are doing the work in the field, really supporting students and families.

Before we do that, I just want to make sure I do a couple of housekeeping notes, administrative areas that I think are important. There's a number of resources we have at the Department I just want to highlight for you. One is a fact sheet outlining how the Biden-Harris Administration is advancing equality and visibility for our transgender Americans. This fact sheet is posted in the chat and also available on our website. I also want to highlight three additional resources that you might have seen in the announcement of this webinar. One is Confronting Anti-LGBTQIA+ Harassment in Schools. This is a fact sheet really done in collaboration between our Office of Civil Rights and the Department's Justice Civil Rights Division. It's really created so specifically for students, families and educators. I want to thank all of our partners across the whole of government that have really supported our efforts and the Administration's efforts in this particular area.

This resource, in particular, the one I just mentioned in collaboration between us and Department of Justice gives examples of possible discrimination and explains what steps you or anyone can take if a student experiences discrimination in school. The second resource that I want to highlight is a special video message for transgender students from the Department of Education, Justice and Health and Human Services. In it, as I said before, you'll hear departments cross governments clear and unwavering supports for all students, including transgender students. The third resource, which I believe is now being added in the chat, or resource discussing supporting transgender youth in schools and provides educators in particular with concrete suggestions for creating a safe and welcoming and supportive environment for transgender and non-binary students. You can find these resources and more information on resources for LGBTQI+ students webpage hosted on the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights.

The link, I think, is right now in the chat. Our hope at the Department is that these resources you'll use and look at them and that they're important for us as a department, but also for those in the field who are supporting students and families to have at their disposal. As the President says and his proclamation for Transgender Day of Visibility, "On this day, and every day we recognize the resilience, the strength and the joy of transgender and non-binary and gender non-conforming people." He also added in that proclamation, "To transgender Americans of all ages, I," he, "the President of the United States wants you didn't know that you are brave and you do belong. We hear, and we see you. "In his way, the President says, "I have your back." So with that, we're going it to turn over to our colleagues. I just want to acknowledge them at the CDC have been with us on this Lessons from the Field journey, from the very beginning. We're so honored for them to continue to provide us their insights and feedback as we discussed this extremely important topic. So with that, I will turn it over to our first speaker, Dr. Catherine Rasberry.

**Catherine Rasberry:** Good afternoon, everyone. As Christian just mentioned, I'm Catherine Rasberry. I'm a health scientist in CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health. I use she/her pronouns. I'm here today to give you a quick sense of some of the work happening at CDC to support safe and supportive environments for our transgender and non-binary youth. Current research shows us that transgender and other gender diverse youth experience stigma and discrimination that put them at risk for negative experiences. From an analysis that CDC conducted with 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey data from 19 locations across the country that included a question for students on whether or not they identified as transgender. We found that transgender students experienced higher rates of school-based violence and suicide-related behaviors than cisgender students. There isn't yet a gender identity question on our National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, but an increasing number of states and local education agencies have added this question to their local YRBS to understand the experiences of transgender youth.

In 2021, 18 states and 22 local school districts chose to ask this question. The collection of gender identity data is so important because it helps us to better understand the experiences of transgender youth so that we can then support them appropriately. CDC supports schools in their efforts to improve health services and health education, and to create more supportive school environments for all youth, but including transgender youth. On the next few slides, I'll share some examples of work that's happening in CDC-funded districts that are doing just that. To improve support for transgender non-binary and gender non-conforming students, Chicago Public Schools released guidelines outlining gender-affirming protocols and policies. These guidelines describe ways that schools are expected to create safe and supportive spaces for all students, such as ensuring that they're protected from bullying and discrimination, establishing their right to privacy, allowing open expression of their gender identity and ensuring that they're addressed by their affirmed name and pronouns.

The district also provided a toolkit with resources to support gender diversity in schools, and they held professional development for all 40,000 staff members to help schools implement these guidelines. Seattle Public Schools is highlighting the strength, resilience, and pride of queer and transgender students in their district through the creation of a book and photo exhibit, which showcase the stories of LGBTQ+ students, their families, and district staff. The book and the exhibit will be used as educational tools for staff training, classroom education, community engagement, and parent education. Seattle Public Schools is also incorporating the book into students' learning by developing grade-level lesson plans.

The book will be available at all school libraries, as well as school counselor and nurse offices and the school-based health centers. These activities help support inclusivity, district-wide reaching more than 53,000 students. Albuquerque Public Schools formed a virtual GSA so that they could continue meeting despite disruptions they faced from pandemic-related school building closures. Through this format, students and their advisors collaborated on The Pronouns Project, empowering students to advocate to use their preferred names in their virtual classroom settings. Students met with community leaders and with school board members to gain guidance and support for their work before they presented it to district leadership and they got the change approved. As a result, students in the district can now update their preferred name in the student information system, which automatically updates teachers' rosters and virtual classrooms.

Students also wrote a resolution to make the district more supportive for LGBTQ+ students. They presented this with hundreds of signatures from students, staff and other community members. They presented this to the Board of Education. The board approved their resolution, which includes mandatory safe zone training for all district staff and the creation of an advisory council of LGBTQ+ students to speak with the board and other district officials. These types of supports are so important. Policies and practices designed to

support LGBTQ students are essential to fostering safe and supportive schools, which have a positive impact on adolescent risks and experiences. When schools implement these types of policies and practices, things like GSAs and identifying safe spaces and training educators on inclusivity we see improvements in a range of key outcomes, including mental health and suicide-related behaviors, among all youth in the school, not just the LGBTQ youth. When we make schools more protective for LGBTQ youth, we're actually making the more protected for all you. With that, I'll turn it back over to Christian.

**Christian Rhodes:**

Thank you so much for your presentation and for the work that the CDC is doing. I also want to acknowledge that there are a number of questions coming into the Q&A and we're trying our hardest to answer those as quickly as possible. While this particular webinar is primarily focused on supports for students, it's not a legal seminar. We do have a number of resources in our Office of Civil Rights, that website that I strongly recommend for your review. Also, here I saw several chats around the volume, so I will try to use my teacher voice as I moderate the next speaker. I'm going to also ask our panelists and speakers to speak up as well. I want to make sure that everyone can hear this. I think next will be, going to be hearing from really a leader in this space, in this field, Melanie Willingham-Jagger, the Executive Director of GLSEN. Melanie, I'm going to pass it to you and just thank you so much for your leadership and the ongoing work that you continue to do in your organization. Melanie?

**Melanie W-J:**

Thank you to Christian and The U.S. Department of Education for the opportunity to be here today. My name is Melanie Willingham-Jaggers. I use they and she pronouns, and I'm the executive director of GLSEN, a national non-profit founded by educators over 30 years ago to foster safe and supportive K-12 schools for LGBTQ+ youth. When I say that I use they and she pronouns, what I mean is both, they/them/theirs and she/her/hers pronouns are welcome and respectful ways to refer to me and align with my gender identity as a person who is non-binary and a Black woman. I also want to flag what I did just now sharing my pronouns that I use when I introduce myself. It is one simple way to foster a welcoming environment for transgender and non-binary students. The other side of that coin is asking students and others what pronouns they use.

Let's make sure we're all on the same page. I want to start with some key terms. Gender identity is a person's deeply held knowledge of their own gender, which may or may not align with society's expectations of the sex an individual is assigned at birth. Gender expression is how through things like hairstyle and clothing we express who we are. This changes over time, over a person's life. So someone who wore dresses as a child may, sorry. A person who never wore dresses as a child may wear these conventionally feminine articles of clothing later in life. Speaking of convention, gender non-conforming is the term used to describe people whose gender expression differs from social expectations. Being gender non-conforming is distinct for being trans transgender, although some transgender people also consider themselves to be gender non-

conforming. Transgender, or Trans, is an adjective describing a person whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

For example, a trans woman is a woman whose sex was assigned male when she was born. Some transgender people do not identify as either male or female and use a term like non-binary to describe their gender identity. Non-binary is a term used by people whose gender identity is not exclusively male or female, including those who identify using terms like gender queer and agender. Those who are Indigenous may identify as two-spirit. The history of the First Nations People and many others show us that non-binary people are and have long been part of diverse human societies. Finally, cisgender is an adjective describing a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex they were assigned at birth. For example, a cisgender man was assigned male at birth and identifies as a man. Transgender and non-binary students are represented across all student groups, including students of color and students with disabilities. For example, in GLSEN's 2019 National School Climate Survey of LGBTQ+ secondary school students, 28% of all students surveyed, 29% of Indigenous LGBTQ students and one in four Black LGBTQ+ students identified as transgender.

GLSEN's survey research shows that trans and non-binary student frequently experience victimization in K-12 schools. 83% of transgender students, including trans and trans non-binary students reported being harassed or bullied at school because of their gender identity. More than three in four transgender students experience discrimination at school, such as being barred from using the bathroom that aligns with their gender identity, or are being persistently mis-gendered, as when someone repeatedly uses the term "miss" or she/her pronouns to address a transgender boy. For trans and non-binary students who are students of color and students with disabilities, these experiences of victimization often intersect with, or are compounded by racism and ableism. All students deserve access to safe and supportive school environments. GLSEN's research has surfaced four supports that are shown to improve school climate for transgender, non-binary and all LGBTQ+ youth. These are comprehensive policies that prohibit bias related to victimization, curricular resources that include positive representations of LGBTQ+ people, supportive student groups like Gender Sexuality Alliances, or Gay-Straight Alliances, and finally supportive school personnel.

I know our panelists will be digging in on aspects of these four supports, and I want to briefly zoom out to give you a sense of their impact. On this slide, you can see transgender and non-binary students reported feelings of school belonging, disaggregated by whether or not they had one of the four supports. You'll see here that there's at least a 20-point difference with those having one of the supports reporting significantly higher feelings of belonging than those without support. These supports matter for real concrete measurable educational outcomes. For example, this slide shows that the presence of each of the four supports is associated with fewer absences due to feeling unsafe. With that, I'll leave the links to The GLSEN resources I touched on. Thank you,

again, to The U.S. Department of Education for hosting this webinar and supporting transgender students and non-binary students' access to safe and welcoming schools. Thank you also to Dr. Rasberry for sharing the CDC's resources and finally, thank you to those working in schools across the country to foster safe and welcoming learning environments for transgender and non-binary students.

**Christian Rhodes:**

Thank you so much, Melanie. Thanks, again for the outstanding information. Just again, to acknowledge some of the questions coming in, all the resources that are being referenced, we're trying our hardest to either put them into the chat and obviously, they'll be made available as well afterwards. I also want to acknowledge close to 1700 participants in today's webinar, which clearly shows the interest and the need for such an important discussion. At this point, it's probably a good time for us to have our first round table discuss where I'll be joined by Rae Garrison, Sam Long, and Rebekah.

I'll welcome each of you as turn your screens on. As an administrator, a teacher and student, you each bring a unique, practical experience of what we say in the field, on the ground perspective to the discussion, so we're so happy you are joining us today. Now, we do have time for a quick question of each of you, then, and as you answer, please remind us of your name, role, and your affiliation if you can. We're getting a teacher perspective. Sam, what instructional practices can teachers use to foster safe and supportive classroom environments for transgender and non-binary students? Thanks, Sam. The floor is yours.

**Sam Long:**

Hi, Christian. It's a pleasure to be here on this webinar. It's a question that I think about each day as a high school teacher who is openly transgender and someone who experienced high school while starting to transition experienced a lot of challenges that we still see students experiencing now. So what we can do as teachers to foster safe and supportive classroom environments, one, would be to learn about our students, to learn about their names, pronouns, identities, and interests, and to do this not just on the first day, but regularly. We need to invite students to share their pronouns, even if we think it might be, or someone thinks it might be obvious, and we want to set the standard that we call people what they want to be called. We want to invite that, but not demand for students to share anything that they're not comfortable with, but to invite them to share so that people know what they would like to be called.

I like to always give my students a lot of opportunity to talk and to socialize as well, because that's where we're really getting the experience of getting used to calling people by their pronouns, getting used to calling people by their names. Coming back from some online school last year, I found we really needed to give students a lot of opportunities to do that social learning. In our classroom, we need to be a stickler for inclusive language in any conversation, and especially in the content that we teach. I'd like to give some examples from my content, which is science. I've mostly taught biology and when we're teaching about life and living things, we need to be clear that we're including all living things,



including all people in that. So I want to offer one resource that I'm going to drop in the chat from my website. So me and two other trans identified high school teachers put together a language guide.

Our site is called [genderinclusivebiology.com](http://genderinclusivebiology.com). Some things that we come up on a lot are for teaching about cell division or reproduction, a lot of textbooks, a lot of existing teaching will say, "Well, women produce eggs. Males are more likely to be color blind. The mother carries the fetus for this many months," and some ways that we can show our support for trans and non-binary students is just to clean up that language, be more precise. We can be more accurate and be more inclusive. So I would say, no, it's not women that produce eggs, it's ovaries that produce eggs. That's accurate and that's precise. We're acknowledging that not all women produce eggs and also not all egg producers are women, for example. We're teaching students that language matters. We're not just talking about imaginary people and living things, that our language impinges on the people in our classroom and in our community.

Another thing that we can do in all subject areas is to teach the idea that diversity and difference are not bad things. Diversity and difference are positive attributes. It's an important part of evolution in biology that there is variation in populations. Something being different is not necessarily a disease or something that needs to be fixed or considered a deficit. So I know I come up on that idea a lot in teaching biology and anatomy. Teaching that just because something is common doesn't mean it's the better way to be or anything, and just something is rare or maybe unknown to doesn't mean that it's bad or a disease, and students find that very interesting. It's of particular interest to students to learn how even biological sex, and many ways we measure biological sex are diverse as well. So to wrap up in inclusive practices, we're learning about students and their identities. We're being serious about inclusive language and demanding that from our students, and we're teaching in any content area that diversity is a positive thing.

**Christian Rhodes:**

Thank you so much, Sam, for that answer and the resources that you're providing in the chat. From an administrator perspective, I'd like to pass it to Rae Garrison. Tell me a little bit more, you understand, I think we understand the role school administrators have in play in setting standards and ensuring school staff adhere to those standards. How can principals and other administrators be vocal, visible and effective in supporting transgender and non-binary students?

**Rae Garrison:**

Hi, Christian. Thank you for the opportunity to share, and just by way of introduction, my name's Rae Garrison. I'm a middle school principal in West Jordan. I'm also a co-facilitator for the LGBTQ+ School Leaders Network with the National Association for Secondary school principals. I head up a group of administrators who identify as LGBTQ+, so head of a unique group of educators there and school leaders, and we've been discussing these issues for years. First and foremost, to your point, I think we can all agree that the principal's primary responsibility as the head of the school is to create and sustain an environment

where every student feels safe. Now, I've been in education 23 years now, 18 years as an administrator and things have changed for the positive, but however, with our climate and things going on, I believe our transgender and non-binary students need the genuine care and protection from their school's principals specifically now more than ever before.

Part of feeling safe at school is being known by the adults, including the school principal. You as a school principal can have a great impact on the level. A student feels accepted and valued, cared for and encouraged, so I would ask the school leaders who are part of this training, are you familiar with, and are you looking out for your transgender and non-binary students, because traditionally, this is a group of students who have been marginalized? I remember years ago, meeting with a student who was transitioning and had told me they don't go to the bathroom at school. Well, that's unacceptable. Now this is some years ago, things have changed. I'm sitting in a new school building where you better believe that I was asking about gender-neutral bathrooms going into this new building, and we were able to make that happen. So school leaders need to ask the hard questions about policy. If you're not asking as the school leader, you're not advocating for the safety of your students, so you need to be proactive.

So instead of just waiting and, "Oh, I have a student who's not using the bathroom," What is the policy? How is your school or district handling student privacy, official records, names and pronouns? Are there gender-segregated activities at your school, and why would that be? What's the restroom accessibility like? Your locker rooms? Your phys ed classes? Your intermural sports? School activities and programs? Dress code? Dress code is something that has evolved and positive changes have been made. Our school district went through a big revamping of the dress code and I was highly impressed with the committee and what they were able to come up with in being inclusive for our transgender and non-binary students in that dress code revision. I would also say that communication is key as a school leader. Again, going back to talk to your students, you can survey all you want, do school climate surveys, but unless you talk to your students, that's really what makes a difference is that personal connection, that relationship. Gather as much information as you can from the student, of course, without making them feel uncomfortable.

Sometimes you can ask a school counselor or psychologist or your social workers to check in with the student and have the conversation about their preferred name or pronouns and aid them in coming up with a transition plan. Do that collaboratively with the student and their caregivers and their teachers. Some students are very public with their identity while others want to maintain privacy, so it's important to note that there may be families that are not supportive to the student's gender identity or transition. We, as schools, we don't out students. That's very important to protect the student's privacy, but at the same time, work on a plan together and to help open the doors of communication that may lead to a deep level of understanding among family members. That communication is really important to ensure the student would

have appropriate support and access to ongoing counseling at your school or other services.

**Christian Rhodes:** That's good.

**Rae Garrison:** I think I might have reached my three minutes.

**Christian Rhodes:** Listen, you did, but I do want to thank you for the resources and the practical experience, I do appreciate that. You actually provided a perfect segue way. I think one thing you said was listen to what the student is saying. I'd like to ask Rebekah who, one, thank you for joining this talk, this webinar. I'm not sure if you've done one of 1,700 people, but don't worry about it's just you and I talking right now. I think in listening to a teacher perspective and administrator's perspective, I'd love to hear from your perspective, what have teachers, what have educators done that has worked to create a safe and supportive school environment for you, and why do you think that worked?

**Rebekah:** Yeah. So first of all, thank you so much. I'm Rebekah. My pronouns are she/her and I'm in ninth grade. I am a total nerd and I love school. I play field hockey, I do musical theater and I play at the clarinet. I'm a straight A student, and I love to write. The reason I'm able to thrive in school and love school the way that I do is because my schools have always supported me. I entered the public school system in third grade, and I was already living as myself. My teachers and administrators went out of their way to work with my parents to ensure that I would be safe. They made sure my name was correct everywhere in the school's databases, even though I hadn't legally changed it yet. That meant I never had to be called the wrong name. They also let me know that they were there for me if I ever had a problem. I think most importantly, they just let me be me. They treated me like every other girl. In middle school, I had an amazing librarian who filled her book shelves with LGBTQ+ inclusive books.

It was amazing to see myself represented in the books around me, but it was even more important for my peers to be able to see and read stories that celebrate LGBTQ+ characters. Whether other students realized it or not, that impacted the way that they saw me. Now, I'm in high school. This year, for the first time I had teachers ask for pronouns at the start of the year, and that was huge. For me. People generally assume I use the pronouns that I do, and that's a huge privilege that I have, but even so by normalizing, sharing, and asking for pronouns teachers model a really simple way for the whole school community to be more inclusive. I think they create a space for all students to be known. It also tells me that a teacher has done enough work to know that pronouns matter. Like most transgender students, I have to try to figure out which teachers and staff supportive of who I am. I'm looking for clues every day to decide how much of myself I can bring to any class or activity.

So when teachers ask for pronouns, or I see a GLSEN poster in the classroom or a Pride pin fan on someone's lanyard, those all give me hints that a teacher will support and respect me, and that's super important. I'm not necessarily out to

all my teachers, but it's not a secret. I just don't walk into class at the beginning of the year and announce that I'm transgender. So getting a feel for who may be safe or who may not be is really important. I work with an organization called The Gender Cool Project. It's led by transgender and non-binary youth like me and we work to replace misinformed opinions by showing transgender and non-binary youth who are thriving. We focus on who we are instead of what we are, and that's the most powerful thing that educators have done in my life. I think whether it's on the field hockey field, in the classroom, or on stage in the school musical, I'm not defined by being transgender. It's one tiny part of who I am. It's pretty cool, but there's so much more to me and I get to decide what parts of me I share in the classroom on any given day.

**Christian Rhodes:**

Wow. Rebekah, thank you. I think I can probably speak for a number of people. You don't see the chat, but I could see frankly listen to you, speak with such energy and exuberance, and obviously, also amazed at the educational community that surrounded you. It's amazing, so thank you so much for the way you presented that information and obviously, being yourself in that space. I'm going to challenge you, move on to the next one, Rebekah, we could hear you talk a little bit more. I think the voices of students matter even more as we are engaging in such tough, critical conversations that oftentimes may be uncomfortable for people, so thank you, again. As we move to our second round table and we do have to consider the mental health needs of our transgender and non-binary students.

With an eye towards the clock and time and recognizing limited space, we want to make sure that we go into this important discussion. So I want to thank and bring to the virtual stage, Sam Ames, Amy and Laura, who are going to take some of the information from the first round table, and really hopefully some of the learnings there, but then also have a question for each of them. I'm going to ask that we try our hardest to get through our answers so that we can get to some of the important questions and answer is that we have it towards the end of this presentation. So with Sam, let's start with you. What do we know about the mental health needs of our transgender and non-binary youth?

**Sam Ames:**

Thank you so much. My name is Sam Ames. I am the Director of Advocacy and Government Affairs at the Trevor Project, which is an organization that exists to serve the mental health and suicide risk of LGBTQ youth. So, first of all, what we know about the mental health needs of trans and non-binary youth is the same thing we know about the mental health needs of all youth, that in order to thrive, they need love and acceptance and support and community. What isn't the same is the rate of marginalization they face, which is often intersected with other identities, students of color, students who come from low socioeconomic status. What we know is that all of these things are connected to much higher numbers of mental health challenges and suicide risk. Research shows that as a baseline trans and non-binary youth already face very elevated risk for depression, for suicidal thoughts and for suicide attempts. Compared to youth who are cisgender, even within the LGBTQ community, we know that those rates are very high. I think most of us here do.

A study published in 2020 by our researchers in the Journal of Adolescent Health found that trans and non-binary youth were two to two-and-a-half times more likely to experience depressive symptoms, can seriously consider suicide and attempt suicide, compared not to straight youth, but to their cisgender LGB peers. A year later, our 2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Mental Health found that the number of LGB youth who seriously considered suicide in the last year was 32%, which is really, really high, but for trans and non-binary youth it rose to 52%. We also found that the number of LGB youth who reported an actual suicide attempt in the last year was one in 10, again, already way too high, but for trans and non-binary youth, it was one in five. These last two years, trans youth have obviously been facing a lot, specifically a wave of legislation aimed at just about every moment of their daily lives. But I do want to also say that we've seen this enormous wave of support from parents, from peers, and from teachers.

What's most incredible has been watching the bravery of these young people themselves, like the incredible role Rebekah, who I have the incredibly unenviable task of following today. These young people are clearly speaking out, they're protesting, they're showing up to provide testimony and advocate for their selves and their friends in state houses all over the country. I am at these hearings. I see them. I'll be honest that I see some of them skip school to do it. I know we have a lot of teachers on today and I say that a little sheepishly, but also what an incredible civics lesson? Also, I think we all know nobody should have to learn about checks and balances while they're praying for their governor to veto a law attacking them. But I really believe that in this moment, when for better or for worse, trans youths are learning that lesson the hard way. We are so clearly watching the next generation of leaders being born, and it is so clear that we are going to need them.

**Christian Rhodes:** Thank you so much. I agree with the advocacy that we're seeing in the voices of our youth, which is so important. Laura, I'd like to go to you. What school programming have you found that supports the health and well-being of transgender and non-binary students, and ultimately, why do you find that that programming works?

**Laura Ross:** Hi, everyone. I'm Laura Ross. I am a middle school counselor in the Metro Atlanta area of Georgia. My pronouns are she/her/hers. We have been able to implement a few different things that have helped make our transgender and our non-binary students really see that there are people and spaces in our school that show that they're recognized and supported and affirmed and loved and represented. I would say the biggest change for us was to break out of being silent about it, or ignoring or treating that part of a student's identity as invisible, and rather than do that, make sure that we are vocal about where are the safe spaces in our school? As school counselors, we've always had the safe space posters and stickers outside and inside our office, but I knew we had more educators in the building who would be a safe space for our students. One of the first things I did was get a lot of safe space stickers and posters and offer those to educators.

Now our students can walk around our entire school building and see multiple places where they know an adult is going to support them, that that space that they're in and that classroom is going to be a supportive one and a one that's going to advocate for them and stand up if there is mistreatment because they are transgender or non-binary. Then three years ago, our middle school started our first GSA. I believe we were the first in our district to start a middle school GSA. One of the challenges that we faced, I knew for several years we needed that, but one of the challenges we faced was that I was always told it had to be student initiated. Our middle school students don't always know about, specifically a GSA, but three years ago, we had some students ask and wanting to start one, which was fantastic. In our first year, we had about eight students that stayed after school for that club. This year is our third year.

We had over 20 students sign this year, and it's just created a space where our students can have that commonality with others and feel supported by their peers. It's helped really with their emotional well-being and sense of confidence and sense of feeling like they belong and that they're welcomed in the school and just that social connection with other students. Even for our students who maybe are transgender and non-binary who can't attend the GSA, just the fact that it exists in our school and that there is that space, and there's multiple staff advisors that would support them is just another way for them to see that they are welcomed at the school and that there are safe spaces and safe people in that school where they are going to be affirmed, they're going to be loved, and they're going to be recognized and supported.

I would say the last thing is really trying to build up representation in our school, and Rebekah talked about this as well. Our media specialist in our media center in our school has started to note our LGBTQ+ books. I have some in my office through different programs. Hope in a Box has a great program where they will get high school, middle school or elementary school level LGBTQ books, characters or authors, and just having that representation in our transgender and non-binary students being able to see themselves represented in stories and texts throughout the school is just another way to help build their confidence in themselves and how they feel about themselves and that they are an affirmed and valid contributor to our school community.

**Christian Rhodes:** Thank you, Laura. Thanks for real practical examples, particularly the books and the organizations that can help provide some of the resources that you mentioned. As we go to the last for this particular panel, I would love to hear from you, Amy, on what can schools do to support transgender and non-binary students when parents may be even unsupportive or unaware of their gender identity?

**Amy Cannava:** Absolutely. Thank you. So my name is Amy Cannava. My pronouns are she/her/hers, and I am the chair of the National Association of School Psychologists LGBTQIA2-S Committee. Under NASP ethical guidelines and best practices, school psychologists are obligated to protect and maintain students' confidentiality, unless there's intent to harm self or others or students who are

involved in illegal activity. One transgender status is actually privileged information and accidental disclosure can put children at risk. The professional standards of the National Association of School Psychologists, therefore require that we respect the rights of persons to choose for themselves whether to disclose their private thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors. Specifically, we prevent disclosures related to sexual orientation or gender identity without student consent. Even with the best of intentions, accidental disclosure can inadvertently rob a student up their ability to be validated and affirmed by supportive persons and parents when the student is able to come out on their own accord.

We know that affirming parents are a protective factor for youth and we should work with family needs to be such, but acceptance is a journey that and that timeline for that journey, doesn't always align with the student's need for validation. The Family Acceptance Project has launched a campaign which includes 50 ways that parents can actually reduce risk and improve student and mental well-being for LGBTQ youth just by supporting them. School psychs can work with families to help parents understand that affirming young people be actually life saving, and that we know that after the age of 11, transgender persons are less likely to change their gender journeys significantly.

School psychs can share local and national-affirming organizations, help parents to understand gender development and share culturally-affirming resources. Recognizing that parents generally want to support young people, school psychs can actually reduce fear, which often blocks that support. It's recognized that there's going to be times when ethical and legal or state or local policies might be in direct conflict with our ethical standards, and so school psychologists consider the interest and rights of children and youth to be their highest priority in decision making and act as advocates for all students. These assumptions necessitate that school psychologists speak up for the needs and rights of students, even when it may be difficult to do so, and we work with young people and their families to create and ensure inclusive and affirming environments at home so parents can support their kids.

**Christian Rhodes:** Thank you, Amy, and thanks for those resources. I will say, I had a quick chance just to breeze through the questions and while I think everyone was listening intently to what you said, most people wanted to know, how did you get that border in Zoom? So if you can drop a chat, a link, or-

**Amy Cannava:** Sure.

**Christian Rhodes:** ... Let us know that seemed to be at a consensus winner in today's presentation, but thank you again for the resources and the work that you do in supporting students and families. We're coming close to time. We're scheduled to end at 4:15. I want to be good respecters of people's time and obviously, our panelists. What we'd like to do is have a round robin of questions, some of the ones that we've been able to receive we've gotten a number of questions here; a mix of legal questions and obviously, those supporting students as well.

`What we want to do here is get a couple of voices in, so I'm going to apologize to our panelists who have stayed on the whole time. I'm going to try my hardest to get to everyone, but recognizing time is limited, I want to pull Melanie back in if she's still with us. We've gotten a lot of questions about referring to students by their chosen name and pronouns that align with their gender identity. Can you speak to some of the best practices you and your organization have seen in this space?

**Melanie W-J:**

Sure. The way we address each other has the power to signal dignity and welcome, or to do the opposite, to demean and convey that someone does not belong. GLSEN's National School Climate Survey found that 45% of transgender students experience discrimination at school related to their name or pronoun. These and other forms of anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination are associated with serious negative educational and well-being outcomes, including increased absences, lower GPAs, lower self-esteem and higher levels of depression. Educators have an important role to play in preventing and responding to the persistent or intentional use of an incorrect name or pronoun, individual practices like asking students and others what pronouns they use are meaningful, but should be supported by comprehensive inclusive policies like those outlined in GLSEN's model, local education agency policy on transgender and non-binary students. For example, a gender-inclusive policy should state that when requested, a student and their parent or guardian a student's name and gender markers should be changed in the student record.

Annual training or professional development should be provided to support educators in implementing gender-inclusive policies. State agencies can support schools and school districts by issuing guidance and providing technical assistance on supporting transgender and non-binary students. For example, the state of the Illinois State Board of Education issued guidance clarifying school's responsibilities and outlining best practices like surveying all students annually to ask how they wish to identify themselves and removing gender markers from school records whenever possible. State and local education agencies can find support for implementing these and other best practices in GLSEN's recent report, State Use of Every Student Succeeds Act to Advance LGBTQ+ Equality. It rolls right off the tongue, as you can tell. This report outlines how federal funds can support their work, that includes state spotlights on inclusive practices that inform their work.

**Christian Rhodes:**

Thank you. Thank you for those resources. I know for those who are watching, we've been dropping a lot of the reference materials in real time. I'm proud of the team. Good job team behind the scenes and doing so. I'm going to skip around a little bit, but Sam Ames, I want to get to this important question that we've been getting. We're recognizing, I said in my opening remarks and this current political climate is really affecting you, so I'd love to hear from you just from your work is this current, social, politic climate is it affecting the number of youth that are calling into the crisis hotline or the Trevor Project? What trends can you speak to in this space?



**Sam Ames:**

Yeah. Our crisis services team has been hearing some really heartbreaking calls from trans and non-binary youth who are reaching out because they need to talk about the political climate that they've suddenly found themselves in the center of. We can't necessarily attribute increases in calls and messages that our counselors receive from youth who need support to any one factor, because that's not how statistics work, but I can say that a lot of these young people are mentioning these anti-LGBTQ political efforts taking place in their home states. We are hearing from young people and their families who are scared, who are worried about what this means for them. We have heard young trans people break down and express suicidal thoughts over these politics and over these policies. It's actually shocking how engaged these young people are in what is being done to them. They're watching this wave of legislation targeting them in just about every area of their life. Some of them restrict trans girls from playing on sports teams that correspond with their gender identity.

Some ban or even criminalized doctors for prescribing gender-affirming medical care. Some force teachers, our best teachers, many of you on this call, to tell a legal guardian if a student feels safe enough to tell them they're LGBTQ, or ask if they can use a different name or pronoun. As dangerous as these bills are, just their existence is already having consequences. We recently did a recent poll with morning consults and found that 66% of LGBTQ youth and 85% of trans and non-binary youth say they're not just watching these recent debates over their identity and their existence, but that it's already having a negative impact on their mental health, or telling us about a variety of emotions, angry, sad, stressed. The one that sticks out to me is scared. They are scared. What that underscores for me is just how critical it is that these young people have someone to talk to while this political climate looks the way it does. Trevor Project operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We take calls. We take texts from youth who are in crisis or need someone to talk to.

But research tells us the most impactful thing is the people in their lives. The good news here is that the data also shows just having one accepting adult in their life, just one, is associated with one-third lower odds of reporting a suicide attempt in the past year. That holds specifically true for affirming school staff. Supportive educators are associated with a reduction in past year suicide attempts of 33%. So the power that just one supportive teacher have to keep a young trans person literally alive is immense. That is actually the note I want to end on. I know this is hard information, but there is hope that the work I know many of you on this call are already doing, whether you know it or not is saving lives. So I actually just want to end on thank you for doing it, and thank you for doing it enough that you came to a webinar like this to learn how to do it better.

**Christian Rhodes:**

Thank you, Sam. You're so right, and the data is startling, but I think is something that doesn't unfortunately surprise many of us who are in this space and in this field. Again, recognizing limited time, I'm going to try to do a speed round. But I'm going to go to Rae and Rae, I'm going to ask you just taking some of the data and information we heard from Sam and recognizing the role administrators play in help creating the school community culture and that

community, I'd love to hear, how do we respond to effectively to objections from the community, while also ensuring that trans and non-binary students have a safe and supportive environment that all of our students should have?

**Rae Garrison:**

I heard somebody mention that they had a middle school GSA formed about three years ago. Our district just opened up clubs at the middle level this year, and our school formed a GSA, and it was not met without opposition. There was definitely some opposition as soon as signage went up in the school, meetings and things being advertised, I got some phone calls. I think that it's just really important to have those hard conversations with the adults in your community that may be speaking out very loudly against these student groups and GSAs that are supportive of students. I think the best thing you can do is communicate and just persevere, because there is a lot of great student-initiated work going on and to have adults in the community attacking our students, when I have the conversation with an adult and say, "Why are you attacking a student at my school?" I have to go into mama bear principal mode, but "Why are you attacking a particular student group?" And have those conversations, then also things like signage and flags and whatever you can do to give visible symbols.

We have teachers who wear ally pins or rainbow pins or different things like that. There's teachers who have safe space posters, so staying the course, I think, is really important because there are going to be those in the community that speak out and speak out loudly. There are some, as we've seen, it's huge in the political climate right now. But what I see are kids who are just wanting to be themselves, and so allowing them and supporting them. We had students hang up their first round of GSA signs and a bunch were taken down, and so we made new signs and put them right back up and we just kept putting them up, and to where our Pride flag in the school's been torn down two times, but it was without incident really, because nobody really even knew it happened before we got another one right back up there. So just showing the community and the students that this is going to be supported and our transgender and non-binary students, our LGBTQ+ students, they're not going anywhere. They're here and we love them and we support them.

**Christian Rhodes:**

Thank you. Thank you for that, Rae. Thanks for the perseverance man, the take one down, we'll put it back up. I think they're learning about you. I also can say that I know you're in a school because I heard a school bell go off, or an announcement. There are no plants here, this is a real deal. Live action as coach just said the other day. Listen, I want to apologize to Laura and Amy and Sam Long, just because I want to make sure that we get to our last question and to the extent possible close on hearing from Rebekah, our student. So I want to thank them for their participation and frankly, for hanging on this long for this second question that never came. Rebekah, I real really want to just turn to you and just ask from a student's perspective, what is one thing that you really wish educators knew?

**Rebekah:**

Yeah. I'm going to keep this short, but I think I want all teachers, educators, everyone to know that they don't have to have all the answers or do everything perfectly to have a positive impact on a student's life. Just showing up and being truly willing to listen and learn makes a really big difference. You're going to make mistakes. We all make mistakes. Maybe you mess up with student's pronouns. If someone corrects you, say, "Thank you," and move on. Don't tell them how hard it is for you to get it right, or that you're trying so hard because that puts them in a position to make you feel better for a mistake that hurts them. It doesn't make sense. Just say, "Thank you," and fix it, moving forward. When we see you're trying, it matters to someone, my best experiences with teachers have been when I was able to tell them that they were doing something that was unintentionally making my life harder as a trans person, but they would say, "Oh, wow. I had no idea. Tell me more," or, "Let's figure out how we can make this better for you," and that's just so powerful.

**Christian Rhodes:**

Rebekah, thank you again. It's simple, but effective in this, and I have to acknowledge in my own vulnerability in that as I was moderating, I was tense about making sure that I was using the right terms and being careful. I think what you just said is extremely important, that we make mistakes and even those unintentional opportunities for us to learn, so thank you for you sharing, obviously, for all those who were on today providing their story, their truths, but also really great resource and engaging discussion on such an important topic. Again, just on of the Department of Education, I just want to thank everyone who joined today. Before I pass it to Tim, I just want to acknowledge that this is an extremely important conversation.

I'm so thankful to our department under the leadership of our secretary and this administration and President Biden and Vice President Harris is really taking lean in to supporting all of our students and recognizing that despite the political and social climate, that we have an obligation. Some will call it moral to stand up for all of our students and ensure they have safe and learning environments that they can thrive and be their true selves. So with that, I'll pass it back to Tim, and thank all those again for the participation, especially our panelists and triple especially for Rebekah. Thank you.

**Tim Duffey:**

Thank you, Christian. Let me extend my personal thanks as well to all of you who've joined us today, but most particularly to our panelists, a very powerful and important conversation that we had today. It's certainly a high of a long period of work and preparation for this, so thank you again to all of you for being here. As we close, we're posting a link to the feedback form now on screen. I'm going to encourage everyone who attended today to take a few minutes just to provide us with some feedback about this session and to share what topics and formats for future sessions in this Lessons from the Field Series as we move forward throughout the rest of this year. This will also be posted into the chat. In addition, please visit our website where today's presentation will be posted, and you can listen to an archive version of the presentation there, or share it with colleagues or friends who may have had an interest in this topic, but weren't able to be with us today.

You can also see all of the slides that were shared today by the speakers, along with links to the resources that were referenced during this session at that site. Again, Henry will be posting that into the chat again now as a reminder. Another reminder is that we have been capturing all of the many questions that you've been posting in the Q&A box. We know we weren't able to get to all of them, but we'll make sure that information is shared with The U.S. Department of Education to inform upcoming webinars in this series and additional resources that we might be able to provide to assist all of you in this important work. As we close, I want to again extend my sincere thank you, especially to each of our presenters, excellent body of information that was shared today. I can tell by the comments in the chat that it was welcomed and important information for our participants.

To your participants somewhere around 1700 people that are with us today. Thank you for your active engagement. You kept it a lively event through the Q&A section, for sure. We're going to leave Zoom open for about another five minutes, and this will allow you to access any of these links that we'll be posting on screen or in the chat, but also to access that feedback form and give and list any additional questions you may have. Our next Lessons from the Field webinar will be conducted sometime in early May, and we'll address a topic yet to be finally determined, but we are leaning towards something around mental health support in schools, again. So watch for that announcement coming soon. Because you've registered for this event, you will see an invitation for that when it arrives. Again, we greatly appreciate your time today. Thank you for all you do to provide students with such a safe and supportive learning environment. I hope you'll join us in the future Lessons from the Field Webinar for now. Have a great afternoon, and thank you again.