

# California Department of Education

## Report to the Legislature, the Governor, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Senator John Laird's Office: Supporting LGBTQ+ Students in California Schools— Findings and Recommendations of the Senate Bill 857 LGBTQ+ Statewide Advisory Task Force



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DECEMBER 2025

*Description:* The California Legislature's passage of Senate Bill 857 (Laird, 2023) required the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to convene a statewide advisory task force to identify the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) pupils and recommend strategies to support their safety, well-being, and educational success. The report includes (1) an Introduction that details the purpose of the report alongside the legislative overview, (2) Methodology, (3) Key Findings from within the Community, (4) Policy Recommendations, (5) Conclusion, and (6) Appendix.

*Authority:* California Education Code Section 219

*Recipient:* The Legislature, the Governor, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Senator John Laird's Office

*Due Date:* January 1, 2026

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# Executive Summary

## A. Overview

California has long been recognized as a national leader in establishing civil rights protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) students. Existing state statutes create a robust legal framework intended to ensure nondiscrimination, inclusive curriculum, culturally competent staff training, access to affirming mental health supports, and privacy protections. The Legislature's passage of Senate Bill 857 (Laird, 2023) further strengthened this commitment by requiring the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to convene a statewide advisory task force to identify the needs of LGBTQ+ pupils and recommend strategies to support their safety, well-being, and educational success.

Over an eighteen-month period, the SB 857 LGBTQ+ Statewide Advisory Task Force—composed of students, educators, administrators, mental health professionals, and community advocates from across California—convened to inform this report. A consistent finding emerged across roles and regions: While California's legal protections are strong, LGBTQ+ students' lived experiences vary widely by district, school site, and classroom. Persistent gaps between policy and practice—driven by limited accountability, insufficient technical assistance, and uneven implementation—undermine the intent of existing laws and contribute to disparities in student safety, belonging, and access to support.

At the same time, the Task Force documented compelling examples of courage, innovation, and effective practice already underway across the state. These bright spots demonstrate that inclusive, affirming school environments are achievable and provide practical models for the statewide systems and structures recommended in this report. Task Force members shared examples of collaboration and leadership that show progress is not aspirational—it is already occurring and can be strengthened and scaled through coherent policy, statewide technical assistance, and accountability.

Students emphasized the critical role of Genders and Sexualities Alliances (GSAs) and other affinity spaces in fostering safety and connection, often describing them as lifelines for support and belonging. At the same time, reliance on GSAs highlights the need for all school environments, not just designated spaces, to provide consistent safety and affirmation. Teachers identified everyday practices that improve student well-being but noted these efforts depend on clarity, confidence, and institutional support.

Administrators described district-level leadership translating legal mandates into more inclusive systems. Mental health professionals highlighted trauma-informed supports embedded within Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, while community-based organizations and higher education partners emphasized the value of cross-sector collaboration in strengthening student supports.

Many effective models already exist across California. What is needed now is coherence, statewide infrastructure, and accountability to ensure these successes are not dependent on individual champions or isolated pockets of progress.

## **B. Urgency of Action and Conclusion**

California stands at a pivotal moment. While the state has enacted strong legislative protections affirming the rights, safety, and inclusion of LGBTQ+ students, the Task Force found that the gap between policy and practice remains significant. Without clearer statewide technical assistance, consistent training, and meaningful accountability mechanisms, students' experiences of protection will continue to vary unevenly across regions and districts. Too often, access to safety and belonging depends on local capacity or leadership rather than the guarantees established in state law.

This implementation gap is occurring amid increasing and targeted hostility toward LGBTQ+ students and educators. Task force participants described growing harassment, intimidation, and coordinated disinformation campaigns that have created chilling effects in schools and communities. Students emphasized that safety is not defined solely by facilities or curriculum, but by whether the adults around them are informed, prepared, and willing to intervene and respond to harm. Where staff lack clarity, confidence, or institutional backing, statutory protections lose their force in practice. Districts and schools that have invested in comprehensive training, clear local guidance, inclusive instructional resources, and proactive student supports offer clear examples of what works.

California has the tools to respond decisively. Existing statutory requirements must therefore be treated not as endpoints, but as a foundation for continued action. In a rapidly shifting national landscape—where LGBTQ+ rights are increasingly contested and, in some cases, actively dismantled—California's leadership depends on sustained implementation, monitoring, and continuous improvement. Preserving and scaling progress will require ongoing investment in statewide infrastructure, updated training and curriculum, strengthened accountability systems, and responsiveness to evolving student needs.

By closing the gap between law and lived experience, California can ensure its commitments are realized consistently across all communities. With clear leadership, coordinated support, and sustained vigilance, the state can ensure that every LGBTQ+ student—and the educators who support them—benefit from protections that are durable, meaningful, and responsive over time.

**Supporting LGBTQ+ Students in California Schools:  
Findings and Recommendations of the Senate Bill 857 LGBTQ+ Statewide  
Advisory Task Force (California *Education Code* Section 219)**

January 2026

## **Full Report**

### **I. Introduction**

#### **A. Purpose of the Report**

This report fulfills the mandate of Senate Bill (SB) 857 (Laird, 2023), which directed the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SSPI) to convene an advisory task force to identify the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) pupils and to develop recommendations to support their safety, well-being, and educational success. The findings and recommendations presented here are grounded in the lived experiences of students, educators, administrators, mental health professionals, community advocates, and families across California.

The purpose of this report is threefold:

1. To elevate the voices and experiences of California’s LGBTQ+ students, who described both profound resilience and significant unmet needs that affect their educational trajectories.
2. To assess how well existing state laws and protections are being implemented, and to identify systemic gaps that undermine their effectiveness.
3. To propose actionable recommendations—policy, structural, and programmatic—that will strengthen statewide coherence and ensure that every student, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, experiences the protections California’s laws were designed to provide.

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#### **B. Why Now? Context and Urgency**

The timing of this report is critical. California remains one of the strongest states in the nation in its statutory protections for LGBTQ+ youth, due to its robust nondiscrimination laws and inclusive curriculum mandates. Yet students, educators, administrators, mental health professionals, and community advocates consistently reported that the existence of these laws does not guarantee their implementation.

Local variation—shaped by political climate, school board actions, resource disparities, lack of knowledge, or community pressures—has resulted in uneven experiences for LGBTQ+ students across the state. While some school communities have developed

inclusive and affirming environments, others struggle with misinformation, targeted opposition, and unclear or inconsistent practices.

This report also arrives during a period of unprecedented national hostility toward LGBTQ+ youth. Across the country, and this year alone, hundreds of bills have been introduced seeking to limit access to healthcare, restrict participation in school activities, or suppress curriculum and expression. California students feel the ripple effects of these attacks—through social media, community discourse, and national news narratives—not only as political events but as personal threats to safety and belonging.

At the same time, recent state mandates, such as Assembly Bill 5 (Zbur, 2023) and the launch of the statewide Providing Relevant, Inclusive Support that Matters (PRISM) for LGBTQ+ Students training, signal commitments to equipping educators with the knowledge and tools needed to support LGBTQ+ students. These efforts represent progress, yet they also reveal the need for updated systems, clearer technical assistance, sustainable infrastructure, and stronger accountability.

In this moment of both possibility and challenge, California has an opportunity to reaffirm its leadership by strengthening implementation and compliance, expanding protections, and ensuring that the promise of equity is felt in every classroom—not just on paper, and not just in certain communities.

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## **C. Overview of Contributors and Participatory Process**

The findings in this report are derived from the collective expertise and lived experiences of members of the SB 857 LGBTQ+ Statewide Advisory Task Force (Task Force), convened by SSPI Tony Thurmond and led by one staff at the California Department of Education (CDE). The Task Force is composed of:

- Eight LGBTQ+ high school students
- Five certificated K–12 public school teachers
- Five public school administrators
- Five mental health professionals experienced in LGBTQ+ affirming care
- Six community LGBTQ+ advocates with programmatic expertise in LGBTQ+ youth services, family and community support, or legal or educational advocacy
- One representative from the Office of Health Equity, California Department of Public Health

These members represent the geographical, racial, ethnic, linguistic, socioeconomic, and cultural diversity of California's LGBTQ+ communities and allies. Their insights—

offered across more than a year of sustained engagement—form the backbone of this report.

The participatory approach was deliberate. The Task Force recognized that LGBTQ+ students' needs cannot be fully understood through policy review alone; they must be informed by those who directly experience California's schools as students, educators, caregivers, and practitioners. Every theme and recommendation in this report reflects firsthand accounts of what is working, what is falling short, and what must change.

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## **D. About Senate Bill 857**

SB 857 (Laird, 2023) requires the SSPI, by July 1, 2024, to convene an advisory task force to identify the needs of LGBTQ+ pupils and to recommend supportive policies and initiatives that promote student well-being and educational success. The law further requires the Task Force to report its findings and recommendations to the Legislature, the Governor, and the SSPI by January 1, 2026.

SB 857 affirms California's commitment to:

- Understanding and addressing the barriers faced by LGBTQ+ students,
- Ensuring equitable access to educational opportunities,
- Strengthening school climates statewide, and
- Developing policy solutions grounded in community expertise and lived experience.

This report fulfills that legislative charge.

# **II. Methodology**

## **A. Overview of Approach**

The SB 857 LGBTQ+ Statewide Advisory Task Force ("Task Force") employed a community-centered, trauma-informed, and equity-driven approach to gather information about the experiences and needs of LGBTQ+ students in California's K–12 public schools. The methodology was designed to elevate the voices of those with lived experience—students, educators, administrators, mental health professionals, and community advocates—while ensuring representation across regions, identities, and professional roles.

This section describes how Task Force members were selected, how data were collected, and how findings were synthesized to form the basis of this report.

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## **B. Formation of the Task Force**

In early spring 2024, SSPI Tony Thurmond, supported by his CDE designee Daniela Torres (Principal Consultant), convened the SB 857 LGBTQ+ Statewide Advisory Task Force pursuant to the requirements of SB 857 (Laird, 2023). The CDE received over 100 applications to join the Task Force from individuals across the state. While the statute requires a minimum of 15 members, the Superintendent appointed 30 members to ensure broad representation.

The final membership included:

- Eight LGBTQ+ high school students
- Five certificated K–12 public school teachers
- Five public school administrators
- Five mental health professionals experienced in LGBTQ+-affirming care
- Six community LGBTQ+ advocates with programmatic expertise in LGBTQ+ youth services, family and community support, or legal or educational advocacy
- One representative from the Office of Health Equity, California Department of Public Health

Task Force members collectively represent California's racial, ethnic, linguistic, geographic, socioeconomic, cultural, and educational diversity. Their varied experiences and leadership roles ensured that the voices captured in this report reflect the rich complexity of California's LGBTQ+ communities and school contexts.

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## **C. Meeting Cadence and Process**

The Task Force met regularly over an eighteen-month period, combining whole-group meetings, facilitated subgroup discussions, written input, and iterative review of emerging themes. Meetings were structured to:

- Build trust among members,
- Allow students and practitioners to share personal experiences safely,
- Support trauma-informed engagement, and
- Surface patterns across roles and regions.

The process was explicitly non-hierarchical; educators and administrators did not hold more weight than students; community advocates and mental health professionals were encouraged to raise systemic concerns that may be invisible within school systems. This structure fostered collective ownership of the findings.

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## **D. Two-Phase Data Collection Model**

To ensure depth, nuance, and cross-validation, the Task Force employed a two-phase methodology:

### **Phase 1: Role-Based Subgroup Interviews**

Members were organized into five role-based subgroups:

1. Students
2. Teachers
3. Administrators
4. Mental Health Professionals
5. Community Advocates

Each subgroup participated in facilitated discussions guided by a set of core questions related to:

- School climate and safety
- Mental health and well-being
- Inclusive curriculum
- Staff training and accountability
- School facilities and access
- Participation in school activities
- Legal rights, implementation gaps, and systemic needs

The CDE Principal Consultant used open-ended prompts to elicit both positive experiences and challenges, allowing participants to describe not only the barriers they encountered but also the innovative practices and successes in their communities.

This phase generated rich qualitative data reflecting the lived experiences of interest-holders across diverse regions and school contexts.

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### **Phase 2: Cross-Group Synthesis and Validation**

Findings from each subgroup were synthesized and presented back to the full Task Force for:

- Reflection
- Clarification
- Validation
- Cross-role comparison
- Identification of shared themes

This iterative review process allowed members to analyze patterns across experiences, confirm areas of alignment, and surface nuanced distinctions between groups. For example, educators and mental health professionals reinforced each other's observations regarding inconsistent training; students and teachers echoed concerns about bullying and safety; school administrators and community advocates highlighted structural barriers and accountability gaps that others had experienced directly.

This second phase ensured that the findings presented in this report reflect consensus and convergence, not singular perspectives.

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## **E. Geographic and Demographic Representation**

Participants represented every major region of California, including:

- Northern California
- Greater Bay Area
- Central Valley
- Central Coast
- Inland Empire
- Southern California, including San Diego

The Task Force also benefited from demographic diversity across:

- Age
- Race and ethnicity
- Gender identity and expression
- Sexual orientation
- Educational attainment

This diversity was critical for understanding how LGBTQ+ students' experiences vary across different communities and school systems.

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## **F. Community-Centered and Trauma-Informed Principles**

Given the sensitive nature of LGBTQ+ student experiences, the Task Force employed trauma-informed practices throughout the data-gathering process. These included:

- Establishing community agreements
- Offering optional modes of participation
- Validating lived experiences without requiring disclosure
- Ensuring students were never placed in adversarial dynamics with adults

- Protecting anonymity in shared themes
- Recognizing that participants may carry historical or ongoing trauma related to schooling, identity, or discrimination

These principles helped create a safe environment where students and adults could share candid experiences without fear of retaliation or judgment.

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## **G. Ethical Considerations**

The Task Force Principal Consultant prioritized:

- Confidentiality, ensuring no student or adult participant was identifiable in the findings
- Voluntary participation, with clear opt-in procedures
- Non-extractive engagement, ensuring participants' insights informed real policy outcomes, rather than depleting resources
- Transparency, with members reviewing and validating themes
- Respect for perspective and dynamics, particularly with the given resources available or not available at schools or districts

These ethical commitments strengthened the legitimacy, accuracy, and integrity of the group and their findings.

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## **H. Limitations and Considerations**

The Task Force acknowledges that:

- Findings are qualitative rather than representative of all schools statewide.
- AB 5 (PRISM training) took effect after most data collection; therefore, early implementation feedback is limited.
- Community conditions and political climates continue to evolve rapidly, requiring ongoing updates to training and policy recommendations.

Even with these limitations, the methodology provides a robust, credible, and deeply human portrait of the experiences shaping LGBTQ+ students' lives in California schools.

### **III. Key Findings: Voices from the Community**

Through eighteen months of discussions, interviews, and cross-group validation, the Task Force identified five overarching themes that shape the experiences of LGBTQ+ students in California schools. Each theme reflects both significant progress and systemic challenges, illustrating the uneven landscape that students navigate daily. These findings also highlight promising practices, emerging innovations, and statewide opportunities for strengthening equity and coherence.

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#### **A. School Climate and Safety: Experiences Differ Widely Across Schools and Districts**

Across every subgroup, the Task Force heard that school climate is the single most influential factor in whether LGBTQ+ students feel safe, supported, and able to learn. This climate is shaped not only by peer interactions, but also by staff behavior, district leadership, communication practices, and the overall culture of the school. Additionally, California currently lacks a consistent and representative statewide data set that school and district leaders can rely upon to inform comprehensive, responsive, and equitable policies related to student health, wellness, and school climate. The absence of a single, mandated instrument undermines the state's ability to identify disparities, monitor trends, assess policy impact, and ensure accountability for student well-being and school climate statewide.

##### **1. Variation by Region, School, and Even Classroom**

Students described dramatically different experiences depending on where they attended school. In some districts, students reported feeling affirmed and connected, supported by GSAs, inclusive faculty, and visible LGBTQ+ representation. In others, they encountered silence, resistance, or active hostility.

One student summarized the inconsistency: "We are told we have protections, but that doesn't mean all people follow them."

Several educators acknowledged that LGBTQ+ students' safety often hinges on whether individual staff members intervene when identity-based mistreatment occurs. When adults respond consistently and confidently, students feel protected. When adults are uncertain, hesitant, or unsupported by leadership, students quickly lose trust.

##### **2. Bullying and Harassment Remain Persistent Concerns**

Students and teachers reported ongoing incidents of:

- Verbal harassment
- Misgendering
- Targeted online attacks

- Exclusion from peer groups
- Hostile remarks in hallways or classrooms

While some schools maintain strong anti-bullying systems, others struggle with inconsistent or ineffective responses. In many cases, students were unsure how to report harm or doubted that reporting would lead to meaningful action. Teachers echoed this concern, noting that district responses were often slow, unclear, or inconsistent with stated policies. Notably, bullying and harassment does not only occur between peers; students often report hearing negative remarks or being targeted by educators and other adults in schools.

A teacher shared: “Students know when the system won’t protect them. They stop reporting because nothing happens.”

### **3. Successes Show What is Possible when Climate is Intentionally Cultivated**

Despite these challenges, the Task Force documented powerful examples of affirming school culture:

- GSAs functioning as central hubs of belonging
- Schools, districts, and county offices of education (COEs) creating LGBTQ+ advisory groups to guide policy
- Administrators issuing clear public statements supporting student rights
- Schools and districts celebrating LGBTQ+ history month, community pride events, resource events, and inclusive reading programs
- School Employee and Leadership LGBTQ+ pride groups
- Student-led peer support structures that decrease isolation
- Regional collaboration and partnerships with other schools, districts, and community partners

These successes reveal that safe and affirming school climates are achievable, often at low cost, when leadership is committed and practices are consistently implemented.

### **4. Gendered Spaces Highlight Broader Issues of Safety and Supervision**

While not the dominant concern, gendered spaces—such as restrooms and changing areas—surfaced as part of a broader pattern: students feel unsafe when:

- Supervision is lacking,
- Adults hesitate to intervene,
- Or facilities are not sufficiently accessible or clean.

Students emphasized that the issue is not simply “the restroom” but the culture around it. When staff respond quickly and consistently, all-gender facilities work well. When supervision is inconsistent or the space becomes a site of misconduct, LGBTQ+ youth avoid them.

## **5. Political Climate and Targeted Opposition Heighten Vulnerability**

Students, teachers, administrators, and advocates described coordinated harassment campaigns, misinformation circulating at school board meetings, and targeted attacks on LGBTQ+ youth—particularly transgender and nonbinary students. These events create a climate of fear that extends beyond individual schools.

Mental health professionals and community advocates shared that students often seek help not just for school-based issues, but for navigating external threats, including online targeting and public rhetoric that frames them as political flashpoints.

This broader environment intensifies the need for clear, consistent, and statewide supports.

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## **B. Mental Health and Wellness: Students Face Increasing Stress Amid Limited Affirming Resources**

LGBTQ+ students, educators, and mental health practitioners described mental health concerns as both pervasive and accelerating—driven by school climate, community factors, and national narratives that undermine dignity and safety for LGBTQ+ individuals.

### **1. Anxiety, Isolation, and Hypervigilance are Common Experiences**

Students reported:

- Chronic anxiety about being “outed,” misgendered, or targeted
- Fear that seeking help could worsen their situation
- Exhaustion from navigating unsupportive environments
- Isolation due to lack of affirming peers or adults

These experiences have direct academic consequences—missed class time, disengagement, decreased concentration, and increased absenteeism.

A student described the emotional toll: “Sometimes I feel like I am always scanning the room, not learning—but preparing.”

### **2. Mental Health Professionals are Doing Innovative Work—Often Without Clear Statewide Support**

Mental health practitioners shared inspiring examples of affirming care:

- Trauma-informed counseling
- Collaboration with local LGBTQ+ centers
- Proactive student outreach
- Creating safe spaces for identity exploration and peer support
- Leading professional development for school staff

However, they also expressed concern about the absence of clear statewide protocols. As one practitioner put it: “We don’t face resistance—we face uncertainty. Without guidance, every district invents its own system.”

This leads to fragmented supports and inconsistent access across districts.

### **3. Students Need Clearer Access Points for Help**

Interest-holders across groups emphasized the need for:

- A state-supported, one-stop resource hub
- Crisis hotlines tailored to all school-age youth
- Clearer and more widely publicized legal assistance when students face harassment
- Referral pathways for housing, mental health, and community support

Many students said they relied on peers—rather than adults—for emotional support. While peer networks are powerful, they should not be the frontline of mental health care.

### **4. Affirming Mental Health Practices Reduce Harm—But Must Be Scaled**

Affirming care was repeatedly linked to:

- Reduced suicidal ideation
- Improved school attendance
- Increased engagement in academic instruction
- Strengthened sense of belonging
- Healthier relationships with peers and adults

Where these practices exist, students reported transformative experiences. Where they do not, students described school as a source of stress rather than support.

### **5. Early Implementation of AB 5 LGBTQ+ Cultural Competency Training (i.e., PRISM Training) Shows Promise but Highlights Remaining Gaps**

Although training courses were published on July 1, 2025, early adoption feedback shows:

- Increased educator confidence in supporting LGBTQ+ youth



- Improved baseline knowledge of terminology, rights, and best practices
- Appreciation for annual statewide training consistency

However, challenges include:

- Confusion about who must complete PRISM training or which training to complete
- Inconsistent communication about the requirements at the district level
- Lack of access for TK–6 educators, where early identity development occurs
- Concerns about the 2031 sunset date, with recognition that updates will need to be made

These findings suggest that AB 5 LGBTQ+ Cultural Competency Training is a strong start but not yet a comprehensive system.

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### **C. Inclusive Curriculum and Representation: Visibility Matters, and Students Notice the Gaps**

Students, teachers, administrators, and community advocates agreed that inclusive curriculum is one of the most powerful tools for shaping belonging. When LGBTQ+ people, histories, and contributions are taught accurately and respectfully, students feel seen—and peers develop the understanding necessary to reduce stigma and harm. When LGBTQ+ topics are erased, minimized, or treated as controversial, students internalize the message that their identities are optional, marginal, or unwelcome.

#### **1. Implementation of the Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful Education Act (FAIR) Act Varies Widely Across Districts**

Although the FAIR Education Act (2011) mandates the inclusion of the role and contributions of LGBTQ+ people in social science curricula, the Task Force heard consistent reports that implementation remains inconsistent and insufficient. Some districts have adopted inclusive texts and lesson plans, while others have not updated materials or have limited LGBTQ+ content to brief mentions.

A community advocate noted: “We don’t need new laws to begin curricular work—just follow the ones we already have.”

Students observed that LGBTQ+ figures often appear as shortened blurbs or footnotes, rather than integrated into core narratives of history, literature, or civic life. Some teachers shared that a lack of vetted resources or training leaves them unsure how to incorporate content confidently.

## **2. Inclusive Curriculum Reduces Stigma and Increases Engagement**

Where inclusive materials are present, students reported:

- Feeling represented and validated
- Seeing themselves positively reflected in historical and contemporary narratives
- Stronger engagement in class discussions
- Reduced feelings of invisibility or otherness

Educators described how inclusive texts create opportunities for meaningful conversations about diversity, human rights, and citizenship—conversations that strengthen school climate.

## **3. Elementary Inclusion is Especially Impactful**

Teachers across groups stressed that inclusive education must begin in elementary school, where children are naturally open, curious, and compassionate.

As one teacher shared: “Kids aren’t born to hate. If we wait to introduce inclusive language and curriculum until, say, middle school, we’re already undoing harm.”

Teachers emphasized the need for developmentally appropriate resources and training for TK–6 educators—highlighting that excluding elementary grades from required LGBTQ+ cultural competency training (as in AB 5) limits schools’ ability to establish early foundations of respect.

## **4. Pushback and Misinformation Create Uneven Access**

Several educators reported feeling uncertain or fearful about incorporating LGBTQ+ curriculum due to:

- Potential backlash from community members or other school staff
- Misinformation about the legality of inclusive content
- Hesitancy from administrators or boards fearing controversy

This creates uneven experiences for students depending on local context rather than state law.

## **5. Successful Examples Show Scalable Models**

Across districts, the Task Force identified strong practices such as:

- Cross-curricular inclusion of LGBTQ+ scientists, writers, activists, and leaders
- Partnerships with universities and museums hosting inclusive events
- Teacher-created units aligned with FAIR Act content
- Celebrations of LGBTQ+ heritage months and observances
- GSA-led presentations that connect learning to lived experience

These examples demonstrate that inclusive curriculum is both feasible and beneficial when schools receive clear local guidance and statewide support.

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## **D. Staff Training and Accountability: Inconsistent Knowledge and Weak Oversight Undermine Protections**

Across all subgroups, the Task Force found that overall, educators want to support LGBTQ+ students, yet lack consistent, accessible, statewide technical assistance, and professional preparation. This gap undermines students' rights, staff confidence, and district compliance with California law.

### **1. AB 5 (2023) and PRISM Training Represent Meaningful Progress**

Because AB 5 took effect in July 2025, much data predates it; however, early feedback suggests:

- Improved baseline educator knowledge
- Clearer understanding of student rights
- Increased willingness to intervene in discriminatory behavior
- Appreciation for statewide standardization

PRISM is widely described as well-designed, accessible, and affirming.

### **2. Emerging Implementation Challenges Require Attention**

Task Force members identified several early concerns:

- Confusion about which certificated staff must complete PRISM
- Inconsistent district communication
- Uncertainty about whether other trainings meet AB 5 requirements
- The exclusion of TK–6 educators from mandated access
- The 2031 sunset date, which threatens long-term continuity

These concerns highlight the need for clarification, expansion, and sustained investment.

### **3. Staff Consistently Request Deeper Professional Development**

Educators emphasized additional training needs in:

- Nondiscrimination laws
- Trauma-informed practices
- Specific support for transgender and nonbinary students
- Bullying prevention and response
- Navigating politically charged environments

- Implementing inclusive curriculum

Mental health practitioners echoed this need, stressing that without clear statewide parameters, districts develop highly uneven training systems.

#### **4. Accountability Systems Do Not Effectively Protect Students or Staff**

The local Uniform Complaint Process (UCP) was the most frequently cited example of an accountability system that is:

- Confusing
- Delayed
- Inconsistently applied
- Lacking transparency
- Ineffective in addressing repeat violations

Students, families, teachers, and advocates expressed frustration that even when reports are filed with their school district—often about chronic misgendering, discrimination, or harassment—resolutions are uncertain or delayed.

Educators also reported fear of retaliation for supporting LGBTQ+ students, especially in politically contentious districts. Some described being targeted by complaint campaigns or facing administrative pressure for complying with state law.

Without clear, timely, and consistent accountability mechanisms, California’s protections cannot fulfill their intent.

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### **E. Family and Community Engagement: Relationships Beyond the Classroom Shape Student Well-Being**

Family engagement emerged as a complex and essential theme. Students’ well-being is shaped by a combination of home support, school culture, and community resources.

#### **1. Family Acceptance is a Powerful Protective Factor**

Students described feeling profoundly supported when families affirm their identities. Teachers and mental health professionals highlighted that acceptance at home correlates with better:

- Mental health
- Academic success
- Attendance
- Engagement

However, family acceptance varies widely. Some families are unsure how to support their children; others face language, cultural, or religious barriers; still others may hold concerns shaped by misinformation.

## **2. Community-Based Organizations are Essential Partners**

Across the state, LGBTQ+ centers, youth programs, and advocacy organizations play critical roles by:

- Offering affirming spaces
- Providing crisis support
- Delivering professional development
- Connecting families to resources
- Hosting inclusive community events
- Collaborating with GSAs

These organizations often fill gaps when schools lack internal capacity.

## **3. Schools Need Support in Navigating Community Tensions**

Administrators and teachers reported navigating politically charged environments, where misinformation or organized opposition creates fear and confusion.

Several educators noted that when state leaders publicly support LGBTQ+ students—similar to statewide messaging for immigrant families—districts feel more confident taking a firm stance locally.

## **4. Students Want More Connection Across Clubs, Schools, and Districts**

Students suggested:

- GSA meetups across schools
- Collaboration with other campus clubs
- Inclusive dances, homecoming court structures, and athletic participation
- Recognition of LGBTQ+ cultural observances
- Opportunities for peer-led education

These ideas highlight students' desire not just for safety, but for full participation in school life.

## **5. Successful Engagement Practices Show What is Possible**

The Task Force documented strong examples, including:

- District-wide LGBTQ+ focus groups
- Partnerships with health providers and nonprofits
- Family education nights hosted in multiple languages

- Student-led advocacy campaigns that resulted in policy change

These successes demonstrate that engagement is not only possible but can meaningfully improve school climate when schools invest in it.

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## **IV. Policy Recommendations**

The Task Force offers the following recommendations to ensure full and equitable implementation of California's nondiscrimination protections, strengthen and improve statewide coherence across districts, improve safety and belonging for LGBTQ+ students, and provide educators and district leadership with the clarity and support they need. These recommendations are grounded in the lived experiences of students, educators, administrators, mental health practitioners, and community advocates, informed by the Key Findings in Section III, and aligned with statutory requirements under SB 857.

Recommendations are organized by audience and include The Ask, The Rationale, and the Possible Implementation Pathways:

- California Legislature
  - CDE
  - Local educational agencies (LEAs) and school boards
  - Educator Preparation Programs
  - Mental health providers and community partners
- 

### **A. Recommendations for the California State Legislature**

#### **1. Strengthen Statewide Accountability Systems for LGBTQ+ Student Protections**

##### **The Ask:**

Develop statutory improvements—or direct regulatory action—to increase transparency, timeliness, and accountability in resolving discrimination and harassment complaints, including those involving sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

##### **Rationale:**

Students, families, and educators consistently described the UCP as confusing, slow, and inconsistently applied. Without timely resolution or clear follow-up, legal protections lose their practical meaning.

##### **Possible Implementation Pathways:**

- Clarify required timelines and follow-up communication standards.

- Require annual public reporting of aggregated, de-identified LGBTQ+-related complaints and outcomes.
  - Establish corrective action mechanisms for repeated noncompliance.
- 

## **2. Expand Access to LGBTQ+ Cultural Competency Training (AB 5) to Include TK–6 Educators and Classified Employees**

### **The Ask:**

Amend AB 5 (2023) to extend required LGBTQ+ cultural competency training—currently mandated for certificated educators serving grades 7–12—to all certificated educators and classified employees, including those serving students in grades TK–6.

### **Rationale:**

Students’ earliest experiences with identity, belonging, and family engagement occur in elementary school, and earlier. Teachers in TK–6 and classified employees in TK–12 settings reported feeling unsupported or excluded from PRISM training despite working with students at foundational developmental stages.

### **Possible Implementation Pathways:**

- Expand statutory requirements to include all grade levels and classified employees.
  - Provide state funding to ensure training access for substitute teachers, charter educators, and all other classified school employees.
  - Develop developmentally appropriate elementary modules within PRISM or companion trainings.
- 

## **3. Extend the Operative Period of LGBTQ+ Cultural Competency Training (AB 5), permanently, beyond 2031**

### **The Ask:**

Remove or extend the sunset date in AB 5 to ensure long-term continuity of LGBTQ+ cultural competency training.

### **Rationale:**

Given rapidly evolving national and local contexts, ongoing training is essential to maintain safe and inclusive school environments. Without extension, PRISM risks becoming a short-term resource rather than a sustained statewide standard.

### **Possible Implementation Pathways:**

- Remove the sunset clause entirely.
  - Provide state funding to sustain training updates.
  - Extend the program with periodic legislative review.
- 

## **4. Provide Dedicated Funding for Inclusive Curriculum Implementation**

### **The Ask:**

Allocate state funding and statewide technical assistance to support the consistent implementation and monitoring of FAIR Act-aligned curriculum and inclusive instructional materials across TK–12 settings.

### **Rationale:**

Teachers and administrators reported uncertainty and fear regarding the availability and use of instructional materials, inconsistent adoption across schools, and a lack of vetted, developmentally appropriate resources. Both students and educators noted significant inconsistencies in LGBTQ+ representation within the curriculum, with many teachers expressing concern about potential backlash when introducing inclusive instruction, despite clear statutory requirements.

### **Possible Implementation Pathways:**

- Provide grants for school districts to adopt FAIR Act-aligned instructional materials for curriculum piloting or textbook adoption.
  - Fund ongoing and required professional development for teacher training on inclusive content and integration of LGBTQ+ representation into multiple content areas.
- 

## **5. Establish a Statewide LGBTQ+ Support Infrastructure**

### **The Ask:**

Establish a statewide system of regional LGBTQ+ education support roles—not as single-position burdens within districts, but as a state-supported liaison and technical assistance structure that bridges local practice and statewide expectations.

### **Rationale:**

Educators and school administrators repeatedly stated they need accessible, expert technical assistance when navigating complex issues, misinformation, training, or policy implementation. A statewide liaison structure would support consistency while relieving



individual districts from shouldering specialized expertise alone and would bridge the communication and support gap between the state and the field.

**Possible Implementation Pathways:**

- Regional LGBTQ+ technical assistance specialists housed within COEs, coordinated by a small LGBTQ+ team at CDE.
  - State-funded team within CDE coordinating technical assistance, resources, and communication.
  - Integration with existing equity-focused state initiatives.
- 

**6. Support the Development of Comprehensive Student Health, Wellness, and School Climate Survey**

**The Ask:**

Support the development and statewide implementation of a single, comprehensive, and mandatory student health and school climate survey that collects both aggregated and disaggregated data on student health, wellness, and school climate across all California secondary schools.

**Rationale:**

California currently lacks a consistent, representative statewide data set that school and district leaders can rely upon to inform comprehensive, responsive, and equitable policies related to student health, wellness, and school climate. Existing survey instruments are not universally required, resulting in uneven participation, fragmented data, and limited comparability across LEAs. In addition, the presence of multiple, optional surveys competing for instructional time has led to survey fatigue among schools and students, further diminishing data quality and participation rates. The absence of a single, mandated instrument undermines the State's ability to identify disparities, monitor trends, assess policy impact, and ensure accountability for student well-being statewide.

**Possible Implementation Pathways:**

- Direct the CDE to develop or consolidate existing student health and school climate survey instruments into one comprehensive, developmentally appropriate, and culturally responsive statewide survey, that is inclusive of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) data.
- Establish a mandatory administration framework for LEAs to administer the survey on a regular statewide cycle, with standardized instructions on timing and administration, including opt-out procedures.

- Require the survey to produce both aggregated and disaggregated data, with strong student privacy protections, and mandate standardized reporting formats that support state-level oversight and local decision-making.
- 

## **B. Recommendations for the CDE**

### **1. Issue Clear, Consistent Statewide Messaging on LGBTQ+ Student Rights and Responsibilities**

#### **The Ask:**

Provide technical assistance and regularly update messaging, clarifying existing and new nondiscrimination requirements, student privacy protections; participation in activities; and best practices for implementation of LGBTQ+-related legislation and their requirements.

#### **Rationale:**

Teachers and administrators reported confusion and inconsistent messaging, especially in politically tense environments.

#### **Possible Implementation Pathways:**

- Provide public-facing messaging, outlining statutory requirements.
  - Release multilingual materials explaining student rights and school obligations to families.
- 

### **2. Establish a Regional and Statewide LGBTQ+ Education Support and Technical Assistance Structure (i.e. LGBTQ+ Liaison Model)**

#### **The Ask:**

Establish and coordinate a statewide system of regional and statewide LGBTQ+ education support roles through CDE that provide technical assistance and implementation support to LEAs, aligned with statewide expectations and policy priorities.

#### **Rationale:**

Educators and school administrators consistently report a need for timely, expert technical assistance when navigating LGBTQ+ student protections, policy and training requirements, and community-level challenges. While CDE has established LGBTQ+ support capacity that provides a strong foundation, expanding to a small, dedicated team is necessary to ensure timely and consistent technical assistance. The breadth

and complexity of statewide responsibilities, coupled with increasing field demand, exceed what a single position can sustainably deliver. A coordinated, team-based model would strengthen consistency, improve responsiveness, and more effectively bridge state support and local implementation without placing the burden of specialized expertise on individual districts.

**Possible Implementation Pathways:**

- Establish regional LGBTQ+ technical assistance specialists housed within COEs and coordinated by a small, dedicated LGBTQ+ support team within CDE.
  - Create a CDE-led coordination structure responsible for issuing technical assistance developing resources, responding to field inquiries, and facilitating cross-regional alignment.
  - Integrate LGBTQ+ technical assistance into existing CDE equity, student support, and school climate initiatives to ensure coherence, sustainability, and alignment with broader state priorities.
- 

**3. Strengthen Monitoring and Support for LGBTQ+-Related Complaints and Identity-Based Harm**

**The Ask:**

Develop and implement clear, statewide mechanisms within the CDE to monitor LGBTQ+-related complaints, including identity-based harm, through the UCP, while ensuring coordinated resources and support for students, educators, and families.

**Rationale:**

California's UCP structure provides an established framework for addressing discrimination and harassment, including protections for LGBTQ+ students. However, the state lacks a consistent approach to analyzing UCP data to identify patterns of identity-based harm and inform proactive support. Strengthening monitoring and analysis of UCP complaints—paired with clear technical assistance and accessible resources—would enhance accountability, improve student safety, and support consistent implementation of statewide protections across LEAs.

**Possible Implementation Pathways:**

- Establish standardized processes for collecting, analyzing, and reporting LGBTQ+-related UCP complaints, including identity-based harm, with strong privacy protections and clear timelines for resolution.
- Use UCP data to inform targeted technical assistance and professional learning for districts.

- Develop and disseminate clear, accessible resources for students, educators, and families outlining rights, UCP reporting pathways, and available supports.
- 

#### **4. Monitor for Inclusive, FAIR Act–Aligned Curricular Resources and LGBTQ+ Inclusive Statewide Policies**

##### **The Ask:**

Develop and implement formal monitoring mechanisms within the CDE to support the consistent adoption, and sustainability of FAIR Act–aligned curricular resources and LGBTQ+ inclusive statewide policies.

##### **Rationale:**

California has established strong statutory and policy expectations through the FAIR Education Act and related LGBTQ+ inclusive protections. CDE currently provides support that serves as an important foundation; however, the state lacks a systematic mechanism to monitor implementation, identify inconsistencies, and inform targeted technical assistance. Developing structured monitoring processes would enable CDE to move beyond technical assistance alone toward proactive oversight, continuous improvement, and more equitable implementation of statewide expectations.

##### **Possible Implementation Pathways:**

- Establish CDE-led monitoring protocols to assess district adoption and implementation of FAIR Act–aligned instructional materials and LGBTQ+ inclusive policies, using existing reporting or review structures where feasible.
  - Integrate implementation indicators into existing CDE accountability, curriculum review, or school climate frameworks to support consistency and reduce duplicative reporting.
  - Use monitoring data to inform targeted professional learning and technical assistance, prioritizing districts experiencing implementation challenges or community resistance.
- 

#### **5. Provide Messaging to LEAs to include LGBTQ+ Supports in Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)**

##### **The Ask:**

Issue statewide messaging encouraging districts to incorporate LGBTQ+ student safety, well-being, and inclusion into school board policies and LCAP goals and actions, similar to suicide prevention efforts and goals supporting other vulnerable populations.

**Rationale:**

LCAPs shape district funding and priorities; including LGBTQ+ supports creates transparency and sustainability. While statutory regulations exist, some districts and school boards refuse to comply unless specific board policies exist.

**Possible Implementation Pathways:**

- Example LCAP goals and metrics.
  - Highlighting districts already using LCAPs for LGBTQ+ inclusion.
- 

**6. Support the Development and Implementation of a Comprehensive Student Health, Wellness, and School Climate Survey****The Ask:**

Lead the development and statewide implementation of a single, comprehensive, and mandatory student health, wellness, and school climate survey that collects both aggregated and disaggregated data across all California secondary schools.

**Rationale:**

California currently lacks a consistent and representative statewide data set that can reliably inform technical assistance and continuous improvement efforts related to student health, wellness, and school climate. Existing survey instruments are not universally administered, resulting in uneven participation, fragmented data, limited comparability, and reduced usefulness for statewide analysis. The availability of multiple optional surveys competing for instructional time has also contributed to survey fatigue, diminishing participation and data quality. Without a single, standardized instrument, CDE's ability to identify disparities, monitor trends, assess policy impact, and support local decision-making is constrained.

**Possible Implementation Pathways:**

- Develop or consolidate existing student health and school climate survey tools into one comprehensive, developmentally appropriate, and culturally responsive statewide instrument led by CDE.
- Establish standardized practices for survey administration, including timing, frequency, and implementation support for LEAs.
- Ensure the survey produces both aggregated and disaggregated data, incorporates strong student privacy protections, and utilizes standardized reporting formats that support statewide analysis and local continuous improvement.

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## **C. Recommendations for Local Educational Agencies and School Boards**

LEAs and school boards play a pivotal role in translating statutory protections into everyday practice. The Task Force identified numerous opportunities for LEAs to strengthen coherence, improve climate, and ensure consistent implementation of state laws.

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### **1. Adopt Clear, Inclusive, and Legally Aligned Policies**

#### **The Ask:**

Ensure all district policies—particularly those related to nondiscrimination, bullying, student privacy, and participation in activities—are updated and fully compliant with current law.

#### **Rationale:**

Students and educators reported significant variability in policy interpretation and visibility across districts. Clear policies reduce confusion, strengthen accountability, and protect students and staff.

#### **Implementation Pathways:**

- Conduct annual or biennial policy reviews aligned with state laws and best practices.
  - Review and update all district handbooks, websites, and training materials accordingly.
  - Provide staff-facing guidance, including toolkits and sample scripts, for practical implementation.
- 

### **2. Strengthen School Climate Systems and Site-Level Practices**

#### **The Ask:**

Develop consistent protocols for addressing bullying, harassment, and discriminatory behavior—including misgendering, deadnaming, and other forms of harm—at the school site level.

#### **Rationale:**

Students reported uneven responses and lack of follow-up when incidents occur. Educators noted discomfort intervening without clear direction. Clear systems improve responsiveness and trust.

**Implementation Pathways:**

- Implement climate response flowcharts detailing reporting and follow up steps, timelines, documentation expectations, and required communication plans for staff.
  - Ensure fully accessible, supervised gender-inclusive facilities and publicize usage.
  - Implement restorative and trauma-informed practices alongside disciplinary systems.
- 

**3. Ensure All Staff Receive Mandatory and Ongoing Professional Development**

**The Ask:**

Require training for all staff—not just certificated personnel—on key topics including nondiscrimination law, trauma-informed practices, LGBTQ+ student support, and respectful communication.

**Rationale:**

Students interact with a wide range of school adults (bus drivers, office staff, paraprofessionals, etc.). Inconsistent training creates inconsistent experiences.

**Implementation Pathways:**

- Integrate LGBTQ+-affirming content into annual districtwide professional development.
  - Ensure that administrators are trained to support staff navigating complex issues.
- 

**4. Expand and Sustain Genders and Sexualities Alliances (GSAs) and Student-Led Inclusion Initiatives**

**The Ask:**

Support GSAs at every secondary school, including cross-school student collaboration, and explore inclusive clubs and leadership opportunities at the elementary level.

**Rationale:**

GSAs are among the strongest protective factors for LGBTQ+ youth, yet many schools lack them or lack staff capacity or school support to sustain them.

**Implementation Pathways:**

- Provide stipends for GSA and other student club advisors.
  - Use internal funds or grants for student-led events.
  - Create district networks for GSA collaboration, including partnering with COEs of or neighboring districts to coordinate students' efforts and convenings.
  - Invite student leaders to participate in district level work.
- 

## **5. Improve Multilingual and Culturally Responsive Family Engagement**

**The Ask:**

Develop communication strategies that support all families—especially multilingual, immigrant, or culturally diverse households—in understanding LGBTQ+ identities, student rights, district policies and commitments, and available supports.

**Rationale:**

Families expressed confusion about policies affecting their children and their families; students noted that family support increases when families receive accurate information. Families need clear, accurate, and accessible information.

**Implementation Pathways:**

- Provided translated materials on student rights, resources, district commitments, and supportive practices.
  - Collaborate with LGBTQ+ community organizations for outreach and informational workshops.
  - Provide information during enrollment, back-to-school nights and other key transition points.
  - Offer family education nights and listening sessions.
- 

## **6. Incorporate LGBTQ+ Student Support into Local Control and Accountability Goals and Actions**

**The Ask:**



Explicitly include LGBTQ+ student safety, belonging, well-being, and access to supportive and affirming resources within LCAP goals, actions, and metrics.

**Rationale:**

LCAPs are the state's primary funding and accounting mechanism and illustrate how districts determine their priorities. LGBTQ+ student needs are directly connected to state priorities for school climate and accessibility, student engagement, and addressing disparities among student groups. Students and stakeholders emphasized that LGBTQ+-affirming initiatives often rely on individual champions; embedding support into the LCAP ensures long-term stability, transparency, measurable progress, and systemwide coherence.

**Implementation Pathways:**

- Add LGBTQ+ inclusion under School Climate or Engagement goals.
- Create LCAP actions that fund GSAs, school climate initiatives, mental health services, inclusive curriculum training and development, and staff professional development.
- Review LCAP annually and use school climate indicators, student health and wellness surveys, and family feedback to track progress and refine actions.

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**D. Recommendations for Educator Preparation Programs**

Educator Preparation Programs are essential to building long-term statewide capacity. Future teachers, administrators, and other school staff must enter the workforce equipped to support LGBTQ+ students from the first day they serve in California's schools.

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**1. Integrate LGBTQ+-Affirming Pedagogy and Legal Requirements into Coursework**

**The Ask:**

Embed LGBTQ+-affirming practices, nondiscrimination laws, trauma-informed care, and inclusive curriculum design into teacher preparation coursework and administrator credential programs and assess through program evaluation.

**Rationale:**

New educators reported limited exposure to LGBTQ+-related content in preparation programs, leaving them uncertain in real-world contexts. Educator preparation programs

shape the pipeline; readiness at entry affects the consistency of support students receive statewide.

### **Implementation Pathways:**

- Coursework syllabi to include LGBTQ+-affirming classroom and campus strategies, case studies, and legal frameworks.
  - Integrate LGBTQ+-related competencies into educator preparation program rubrics.
  - Incorporate practice-based assessments demonstrating readiness to support LGBTQ+ students, during coursework and supervised practice.
- 

## **2. Prepare Administrators to Lead Schoolwide Implementation**

### **The Ask:**

Ensure administrator preparation programs include explicit training on LGBTQ+ student rights and protections, legal compliance, effective policy implementation, professional development design, and transparent leadership communication.

### **Rationale:**

Administrators play a central role and are often responsible for clarifying policy, setting expectations, supporting staff, resolving conflict and ensuring legal compliance, yet many receive no pre-service preparation on LGBTQ+ issues.

### **Implementation Pathways:**

- Incorporate leadership modules addressing school climate, inclusive policy communication, and conflict navigation.
  - Partner with other education sources, such as COEs or CDE for real-world administration practices and inclusive leadership.
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## **E. Recommendations for Mental Health Providers and Community Partners**

Mental health professionals and community-based organizations are critical partners in supporting LGBTQ+ youth, particularly in districts with limited internal capacity or higher levels of community tension.

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## **1. Strengthen School-Based Mental Health Services**

### **The Ask:**

Increase availability of LGBTQ+-affirming mental health practitioners through district hiring, community partnerships, and telehealth options.

### **Rationale:**

Students consistently reported needing support from adults trained in trauma-informed, gender-affirming practices, to understand LGBTQ+ identity and concerns.

### **Implementation Pathways:**

- Increase Partnerships with county mental health agencies and LGBTQ+ centers for co-located services.
  - Use telehealth options to support rural or resource limited districts.
- 

## **2. Build Sustained Partnerships with Local LGBTQ+ Organizations**

### **The Ask:**

Formalize partnerships with LGBTQ+-affirming organizations, including community centers, youth organizations, cultural institutions, and advocacy groups to support training, crisis response, youth programming, and family engagement.

### **Rationale:**

Community organizations serve as essential partners by providing specialized expertise, cultural competence, and continuity of support beyond the school day, particularly in districts with limited internal capacity.

### **Implementation Pathways:**

- Develop formal agreements for ongoing collaboration, training, and resource sharing.
  - Integrate community partners into wellness center programming and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support structures.
- 

## **3. Develop Crisis and Referral Pathways Tailored to LGBTQ+ Youth**

### **The Ask:**

Collaborate and create streamlined, youth-centered referral systems for responding to safety concerns, harassment, legal aid, housing instability, immigration support, or mental health services.

**Rationale:**

Students and advocates emphasized the need for a “one-stop hub” when safety concerns arise.

**Implementation Pathways:**

- Create district-level flow charts, referral guides, and communication protocols for rapid response to LGBTQ+ student and family concerns.
  - Ensure students and families receive clear, culturally responsive information on available hotlines, legal, and crisis supports.
- 

#### **4. Support Family Education and Engagement Efforts**

**The Ask:**

Partner with districts to provide culturally responsive, multilingual family education opportunities and facilitated conversations on LGBTQ+ identity, student rights, and available resources, to increase understanding and support.

**Rationale:**

Family understanding is one of the most powerful protective factors for LGBTQ+ youth; families often want to support their LGBTQ+ children but lack information or access to affirming resources.

**Implementation Pathways:**

- Host school family nights co-facilitated by mental health staff and LGBTQ+ community organizations.
  - Systematically incorporate feedback from LGBTQ+-headed families to inform student supports and recognize diverse family structures.
  - Update and provide community resource lists, local support group information, and translated family support guides.
-

## V. Conclusion

California stands at a defining moment in its commitment to educational equity. LGBTQ+ students across the state continue to show extraordinary resilience in the face of inconsistent protections, community-level hostility, and rapidly shifting national conditions. Their courage—and the dedication of educators, administrators, mental health professionals, and community advocates who support them—demonstrates what is possible when schools embrace inclusion not as an optional practice, but as an educational, ethical, and equity-driven imperative.

The Task Force's work over the past eighteen months makes one truth unmistakable: California's policies provide a strong foundation, but students need more than statutes—they need systems that ensure those protections are implemented consistently, sustained over time, and reinforced across future administrations. The gaps between policy and practice identified in this report are not failures of belief or will; they are symptoms of uneven infrastructure, inadequate accountability, and the absence of clear, accessible statewide technical assistance. These conditions leave LGBTQ+ students disproportionately vulnerable and place the burden of implementation on individuals rather than systems.

The Task Force also documented powerful examples of what is working. Schools across California are building GSAs that anchor student belonging, crafting inclusive curriculum that brings LGBTQ+ histories into the narrative, issuing courageous public statements during moments of local and national fear, and developing solid partnerships with mental health providers and community organizations. These bright spots—rooted in creativity, compassion, and leadership—show that even modest, well-supported efforts can transform school climate and student well-being. They demonstrate that progress is not hypothetical; it is already happening, and it can be scaled.

The moment now demands not only protection, but progress. With LGBTQ+ rights under attack across the country, California must remain steadfast and future-focused. The state's current protections must be treated as a **floor**, not a **ceiling**. As identity, language, community needs, and political landscapes continue to evolve, so too, must California's training systems, curriculum models, accountability structures, and statewide support networks. Sustained investment, innovative policy design, and ongoing responsiveness are essential to ensuring that future generations of students inherit stronger, more inclusive, and more resilient systems than those that exist today.

This report from the appointees of the Task Force calls upon the Governor of California, the California Legislature, the SSPI, LEAs and school boards, educator preparation programs, and community partners to move forward with clarity and collaboration. The recommendations offered here—grounded in student voice, professional expertise, and community lived experience—represent actionable steps to ensure that every LGBTQ+ student in California attends a school that is safe, affirming, and fully aligned with the values of equity and dignity.

California has the opportunity—and the responsibility—to continue leading the nation by demonstrating that inclusive education is not a political distraction, but a cornerstone of academic success, mental health, and civic well-being. By strengthening accountability, expanding training and infrastructure, embedding LGBTQ+ supports into district planning, and elevating data-driven and LGBTQ+-affirming practices statewide, California can ensure that every student not only learns, but thrives.

The work ahead is substantial, but the foundation is strong. With focused action and sustained commitment, California can fulfill the promise of its laws and create schools where every LGBTQ+ young person is seen, supported, and able to envision a future defined not by fear, but by possibility.

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## VI. Appendix

### Appendix A. Task Force Representation

#### **Task Force Acknowledgement and Membership Composition (as mandated by Senate Bill 857 [California *Education Code* Section 219] and expanded by the California Department of Education)**

The Principal Consultant for the SB 857 LGBTQ+ Statewide Advisory Task Force extends sincere and heartfelt appreciation to the Task Force members for their service, expertise, and sustained participation throughout this advisory process, convened pursuant to SB 857. Members shared professional knowledge, lived experience, and community-informed perspectives that deeply informed and strengthened the findings and policy recommendations contained in this report. Beyond their service on the task force, members continue to advance equity, safety, and belonging for LGBTQ+ students and families through dedicated leadership and service in schools, agencies, and communities across California. Their commitment, generosity, and leadership were foundational to this report and made the work deeply meaningful to those involved in this process and to the broader communities reflected in this report.

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