



# Safe Place to Learn

## Consequences of Harassment Based on Actual or Perceived Sexual Orientation and Gender Non-Conformity and Steps for Making Schools Safer

Summary Fact Sheet from a Report by the California Safe Schools Coalition and the 4-H Center for Youth Development, University of California, Davis

This study examines school-based harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity and steps for improving school safety. It analyzes data from two sources: the broad-based 2001-2002 California Healthy Kids Survey, designed by WestEd under a contract with the California Department of Education, and the 2003 Preventing School Harassment survey, carried out by the California Safe Schools Coalition in partnership with Gay-Straight Alliance Network.

### Key findings

#### Harassment and bullying based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are pervasive, according to the California Healthy Kids Survey.

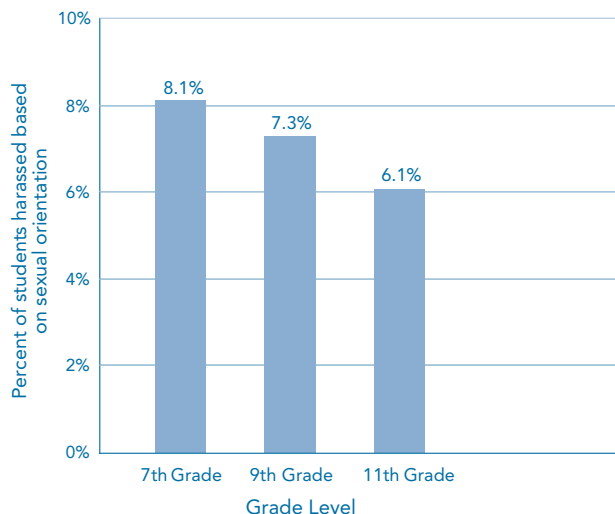
7.5 percent of California students reported being harassed on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation: that translates to **over 200,000 middle school and high school students harassed every year.**

#### Harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation has dangerous consequences for students, according to data from the California Healthy Kids Survey.

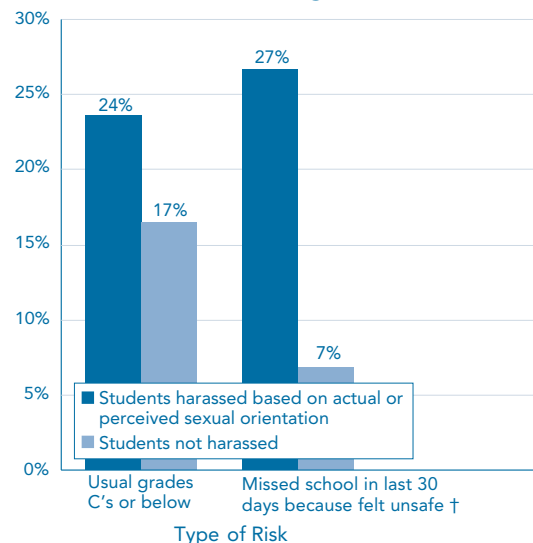
Compared to students who were not harassed:

- Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are **more than three times as likely** to carry a weapon to school, to seriously consider suicide, to make a plan for attempting suicide or to miss at least one day of school in the last 30 days because they felt unsafe.
- Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are **more than twice as likely** to report depression (feeling so sad and hopeless they stopped normal activities for two weeks), to use methamphetamines, or to use inhalants.
- Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are also more likely to have low grades (Cs or below), to be victims of violence, to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, binge drink, or use marijuana.

Harassment based on sexual orientation is more frequent in middle school than high school



Students harassed based on sexual orientation are more likely to miss school and have low grades



†Data on missing school are not directly comparable to data on low grades

## School climates are unsafe for LGBT students, students perceived to be LGBT, and gender non-conforming students, according to the Preventing School Harassment survey.

- 91 percent of students reported hearing students make negative comments based on sexual orientation. 44 percent reported hearing teachers make negative comments based on sexual orientation.
- 46 percent of students said their schools were not safe for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students.
- Two out of every three students who identified as LGBT reported being harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation.
- School climates are also unsafe for gender non-conforming students. 53 percent of students said their schools were unsafe for “guys who aren’t as masculine as other guys,” and 34 percent said their schools were unsafe for “girls who aren’t as feminine as other girls.” 27 percent of students reported being harassed for gender non-conformity.

## Schools can take steps to improve safety and health for all students, according to the Preventing School Harassment (PSH) survey.

The PSH survey reveals that specific steps schools can take that are related to a more positive overall school climate, lower rates of harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity, and stronger student resilience.

- Local school officials and school administrators should establish and publicize district policies prohibiting harassment based on sexual orientation and gender, including gender identity, appearance and behavior; ensure that all school staff are trained to prevent and respond to harassment; support the formation of Gay-Straight Alliances or similar clubs; and treat all forms of harassment and discrimination as serious and preventable.
- Teachers and school staff can make schools safer by responding to slurs and negative comments, by sharing with students where to go for information about sexual orientation and gender identity, and by including LGBT people and information about sexual orientation and gender identity in the curriculum.

The full *Safe Place to Learn* report is available at [www.casafeschools.org](http://www.casafeschools.org).

For more information, contact Molly O’Shaughnessy at (415) 626-1680.

### STEPS Schools Can Take

- Establish and publicize a harassment policy that specifically includes sexual orientation and gender, including gender identity, appearance, and behavior.
- Train teachers and staff to intervene when they hear slurs or negative comments based on sexual orientation or gender non-conformity.
- Support the establishment of a Gay-Straight Alliance or similar student club.
- Ensure that students know where to go for information and support related to sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Introduce curriculum that includes LGBT people and information about sexual orientation and gender identity.

### OUTCOMES for Students and School Environment

- Fewer incidents of harassment and bullying.
- Fewer bias-related comments and less name-calling.
- Greater feelings of safety.
- Improved connections to school, community, and supportive adults