

Understanding the Experiences of LGBTQ Students in California

A new analysis of California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) results from 2017–19 shows that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) **secondary students are at higher risk** for bullying and victimization, chronic sadness, suicide ideation, and poor learning engagement and academic performance than their straight and non-transgender counterparts.

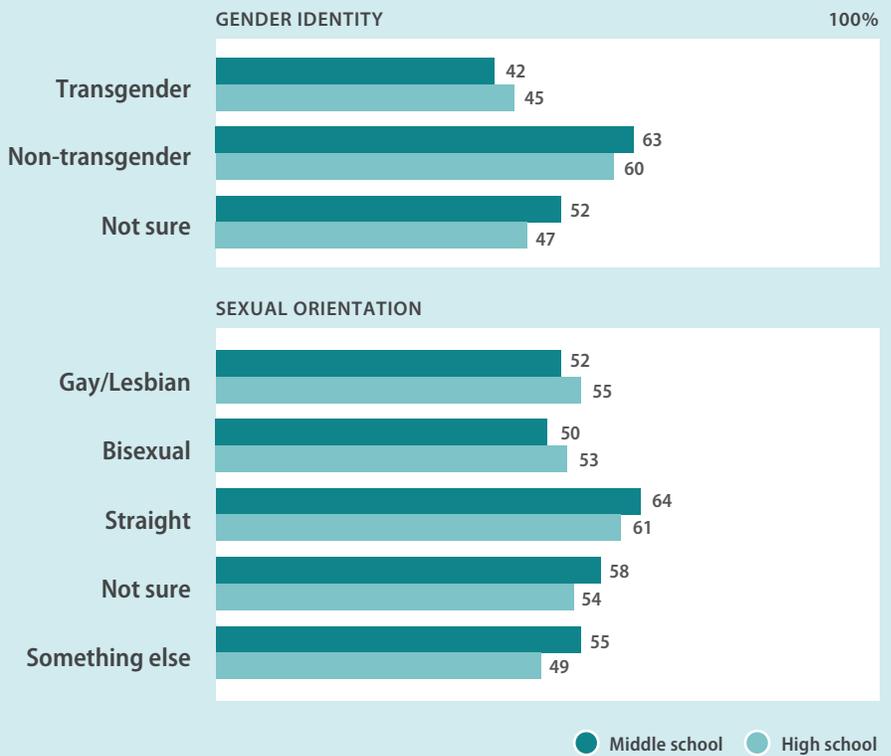
They also are **likely to receive substantially fewer social and developmental supports** from teachers and are **less likely to feel safe** at school.

Group differences are generally greater among middle school students than high school students.

CARING ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

LGBTQ students were **less likely** than students of other gender identities and sexual orientations to report that they have an adult at school who cares about them.

% who agreed that they had an adult at school who cares about them¹



Gender Identity

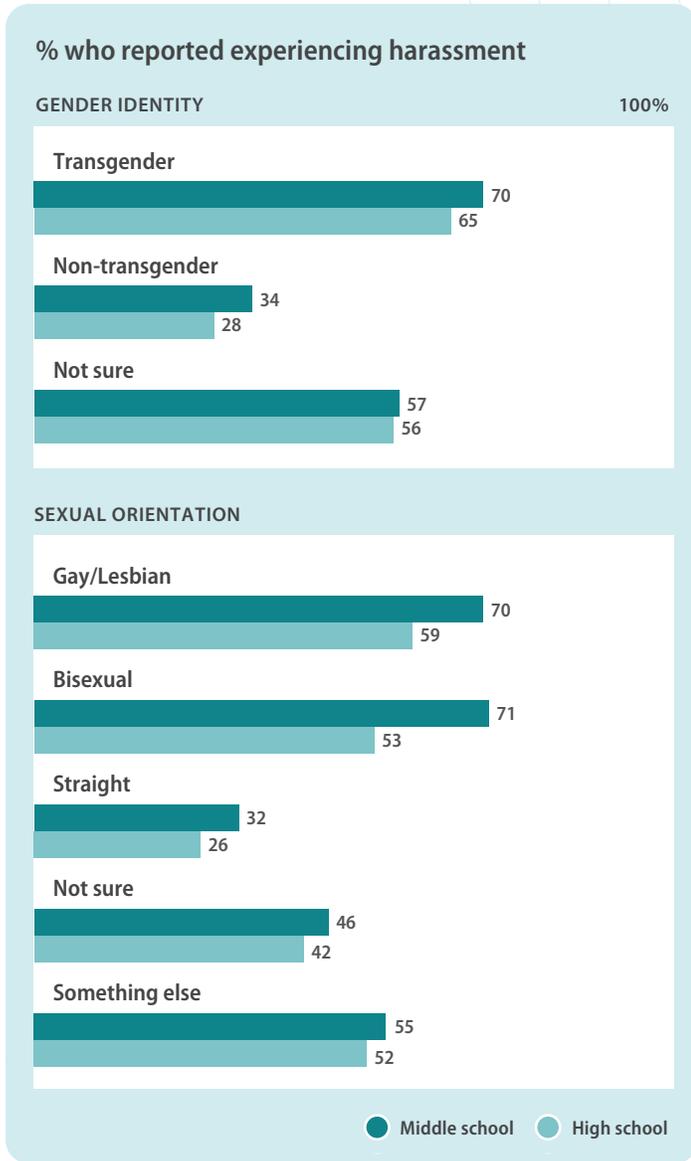
How an individual identifies in terms of their gender.²

Sexual Orientation

An individual's emotional, sexual, and/or relational attraction to others.³

HARASSMENT

LGBTQ students were **more than twice** as likely as non-transgender and straight peers to indicate they had experienced bullying or harassment.

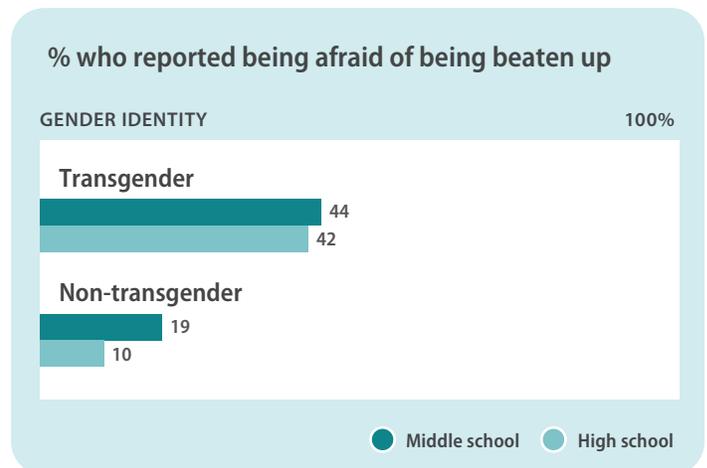
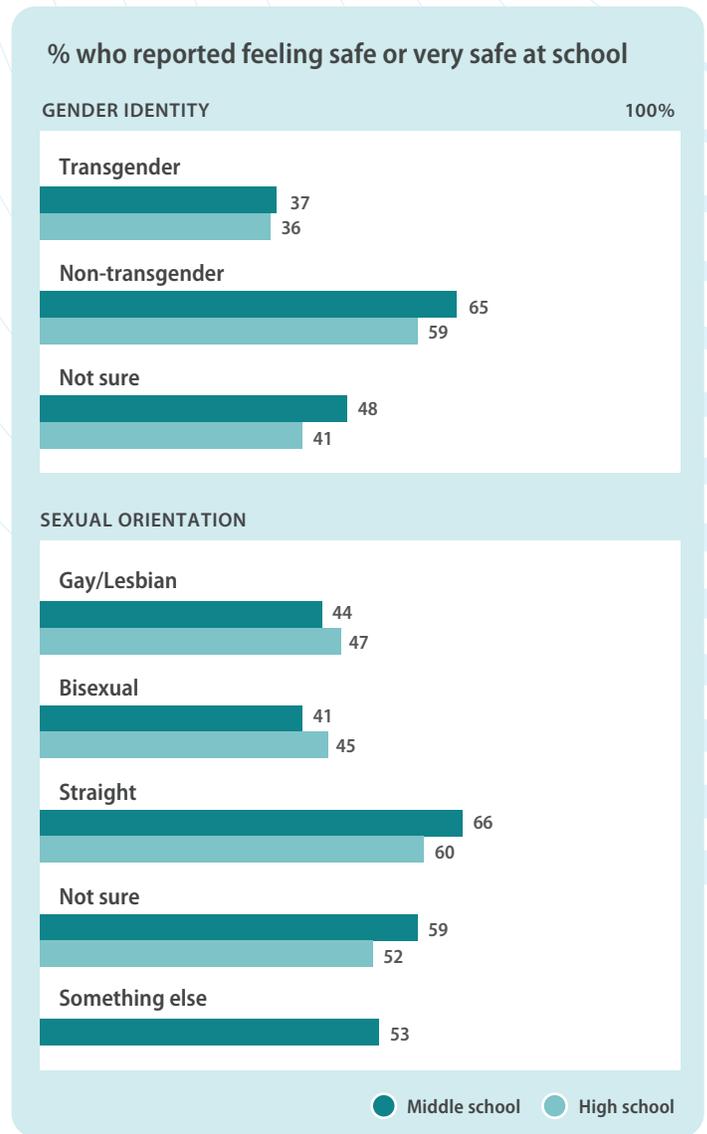


FEAR OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Transgender students were **twice as likely** as non-transgender students to report being afraid of being beaten up.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Fewer than **half** of LGBTQ students reported feeling safe at school.

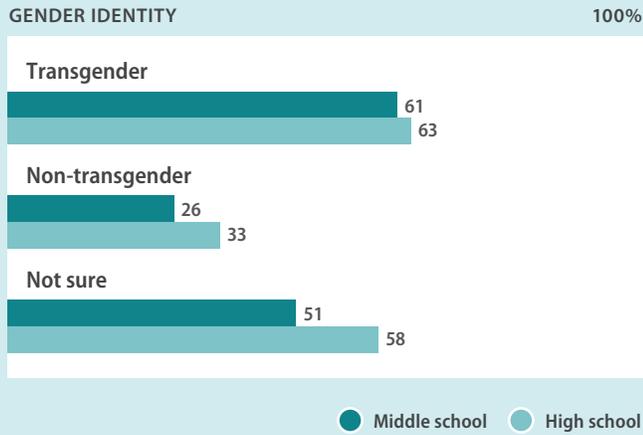


MENTAL HEALTH

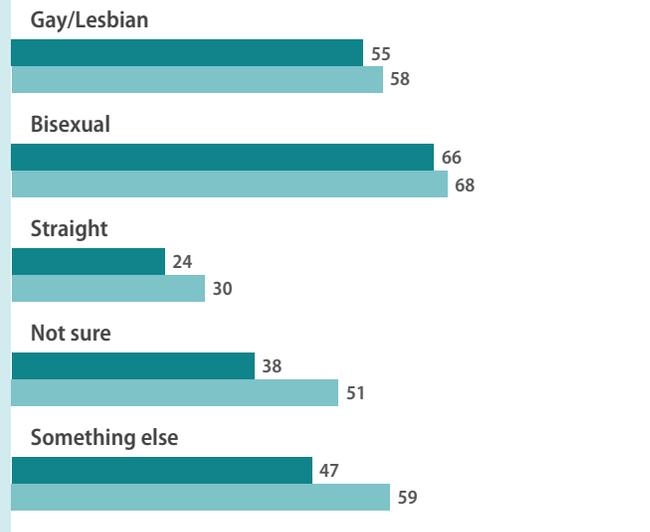
Transgender and bisexual students were **most likely** to experience chronic sadness and to contemplate suicide, followed by gay/lesbian students.

CHRONIC SADNESS

% who reported feeling chronic sadness/hopelessness

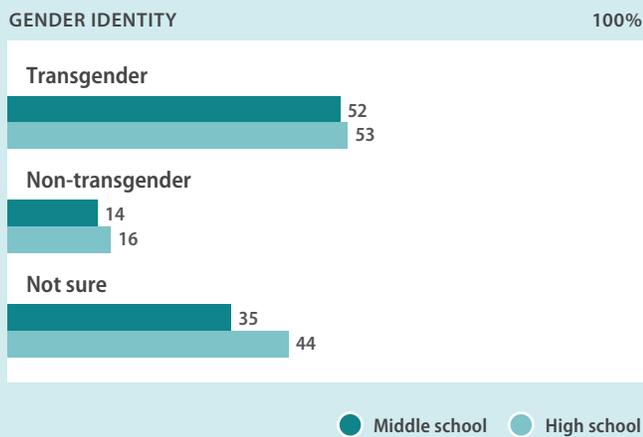


SEXUAL ORIENTATION 100%

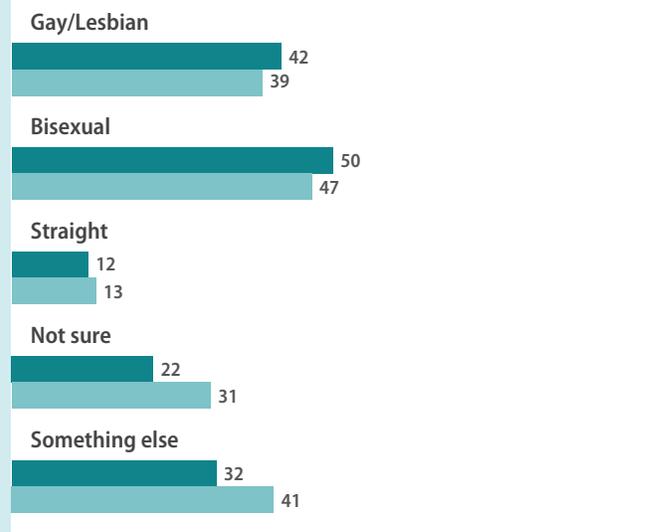


SUICIDE IDEATION

% who reported seriously considering suicide in the past year



SEXUAL ORIENTATION 100%



WHAT CAN SCHOOL COMMUNITIES DO TO SUPPORT LGBTQ YOUTH?

Research shows that relationships with caring adults are key to young people's well-being.

Providing this support and creating an inclusive, affirming, and safe learning environment can help mitigate the challenges that LGBTQ youth face.

SPECIFIC STEPS THAT SCHOOL COMMUNITIES CAN TAKE

Ensure that the language you are using is inclusive of all people.

Adopt an inclusive curriculum (both passive and active).

Post visible Safe Space materials in classrooms and offices.

Create leadership opportunities for LGBTQ students.

Develop and enforce written policies to protect and support LGBTQ students.

Engage campus and district leadership by exploring how existing laws are being implemented and by sharing research and student survey data.

Become involved with local, regional, state, and national organizations by participating in conferences and leadership groups for youth.

Establish and/or support the funding of an on-campus Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA).

Wear a supportive button or a simple rainbow bracelet in support of LGBTQ youth.

Respond to anti-LGBTQ behavior immediately when it occurs or when you hear about it. Doing so will build students' sense of safety that you do not tolerate homophobia or transphobia.

WHO WAS SURVEYED?

California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS)

Administered during 2017–19

2,749 secondary schools

Approximately 800,000 students

Middle school: Grade 7

High school: Grades 9 and 11

Results were disaggregated based on student responses to the following survey items:

- “Some people describe themselves as transgender when their sex at birth does not match the way they think or feel about their gender. Are you transgender?”

(Four response options: No, I am not transgender; Yes, I am transgender; I am not sure if I am transgender; Decline to respond)

- “Which of the following best describes you?” (Six response options: Straight; Gay/Lesbian; Bisexual; I am not sure yet; Something else; Decline to respond)

Data from students who selected “decline to respond” for either item were omitted from this analysis.

To find out how schools can support LGBTQ youth, visit:

- GenderSpectrum.org
- GLSEN.org
- GSANetwork.org
- TheTrevorProject.org
- TransStudent.org

This infographic is based on a study using data from the California Healthy Kids Survey, an assessment from the California Department of Education, developed by WestEd. The study was supported by The California Endowment.

Suggested citation: Hanson, T., Zhang, G., Cerna, R., Stern, A., & Austin, G. (2019). *Understanding the experiences of LGBTQ students in California*. WestEd.

1. Agreement was measured by computing the average percentage of students who agree or strongly agree across all the questions that measure this domain.
2. GLSEN. (2019). *Gender terminology: Discussion guide*.
3. Mental Health Services Act. (2014). *A practitioner's resource guide: Helping families to support their LGBT children*.

For more information about this study, please visit:
<https://www.wested.org/resources/lgbtq-students-in-california/>