SCHOOL PROFESSIONALS’ PERSPECTIVES ON WORKING WITH TRANSGENDER AND GENDER QUEER YOUTH IN THE SCHOOL SETTING

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TRANSGENDER AND GENDER QUEER YOUTH IN SCHOOLS

ABSTRACT

This qualitative dissertation study focused on the perceptions of school professionals in working with transgender and gender queer students. Twelve school professionals were individually interviewed utilizing a semi-structured format regarding their experiences working with transgender and gender queer students. School professionals were interviewed to determine: what effective practices/policies schools are implementing to support and meet the needs of transgender and gender queer students, what issues arise with these practices/policies, and what is hindering school professionals from utilizing the other practices/policies that past research has shown to be effective in supporting transgender and gender queer students. Three trainers of organizations which help school professionals better understand and support the LGBTQ community, specifically transgender and gender queer individuals, were also individually interviewed utilizing a semi-structured format in order to gather important anecdotal knowledge regarding this community. The primary researcher utilized Grounded Theory to analyze the data. The primary researcher gathered detailed knowledge and identified shared concepts from the participants’ interview responses, discovered themes, and then explored relationships between concepts in order to better understand socially constructed reality (Morse & Richards, 2002). Participants’ responses to the interview questions were transcribed verbatim and then coded using Corbin & Strauss’ (2008) approach to elevate the raw data to a conceptual level. Open coding was utilized to group similar data and categorize concepts, axial coding was utilized to link and organize these categories by discovering relationships among them, and selective coding was utilized to interpret the data through the development of relational conditions, interactions, and thereby explain the storyline (Scott & Howell, 2008). Interview data provided valuable qualitative evidence of school professionals’ experiences working with transgender and gender
queer students and whether their schools have practices/policies in place to support transgender and gender queer students that past research has shown to be effective, such as: utilizing an LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum, having LGBTQ+ safe spaces within the school, offering LGBTQIA-specific professional development trainings for staff, and utilizing an individualized gender transition plan. These data serve as a preliminary evaluation of school professionals’ experiences with transgender and gender queer youth and may inform current as well as future school professionals on how schools can best implement effective practices to hopefully create a safer school environment for these students.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The topic of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning/queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA) community, specifically that of transgender and gender queer individuals is relatively new. Western society has condoned violence towards individuals within the LGBTQIA community based on society’s normalization of a binary system of gender and sexuality and condemnation of individuals who fall outside this binary. Research regarding the LGBTQ+ community follows the framework of queer theory, which is concerned with the cultural and political factors impacting this marginalized group and attempts to convey the experiences of these marginalized and discriminated against individuals within Western society (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The harassment of the LGBTQIA community has a plethora of negative effects for the health of individuals belonging to this community; these individuals are at a greater risk for mental health issues, such as: depression, anxiety, suicide, alcohol/illicit substance abuse (Varjas, Graybill, Mahan, Meyers, Dew, Marshall, & Birckbichler, 2007). This harassment of the LGBTQIA community is not only present within the community, but also within the school environment. This harassment can impede the students’ ability to develop a positive self-identity, and create a hostile learning environment (Wernick, Dessel, Kulick, & Graham, 2013) resulting in the students feeling less attached to and unsafe in their school (Hillard, et al., 2014; Klotz, 2015). As a result of the harassment and victimization LGBTQIA students experience, they are at a greater risk for: suicidal thoughts/ attempts, poor academic performances/lower grade point averages, missing school days due to the fear of possible violence, and lower educational

Within the LGBTQIA community, transgender individuals often experience their own form of discrimination and harassment rooted in transphobia. Individuals who identify as transgender and gender queer experience disparate rates of violence/bullying, overall psychological distress, depression, anxiety, suicidality, and they engage in higher rates of substance abuse as well as risky behaviors compared to their cisgender counterparts (Austin, et al., 2018; Eisenberg, Gower, McMorris, Rider, Shea, & Coleman, 2017). The harassment of transgender/gender queer individuals also occurs within the school environment. School policies fail to respect and support their transgender and gender queer students (Willick, 2014), some schools enforce that transgender/gender queer students use bathrooms/locker rooms associated with their birth sex rather than their gender expression (Barnes & Balingit, 2016), and some schools blame the transgender/gender queer student for their victim status (Varjas et al., 2007).

Fortunately, researchers and practitioners have identified effective strategies to help improve the safety of LGBTQIA students, which some schools have begun to incorporate. Schools can: create and promote anti-bullying policies, specifically for LGBTQIA students (Wernick, et al., 2013), offer professional development for their staff regarding the LGBTQIA community in order to increase understanding/awareness of the community and increase the number of school professionals who are available to support LGBTQIA students (Klotz, 2015; Payne, 2010), provide support for their LGBTQIA students through counseling, developing allies, and the development of a Gay-Straight Alliance/Gender-Sexuality Alliance (GSA) club (Hillard, et al., 2014; Klotz, 2015; Sadowski, 2016; Wernick, et al., 2013), and increase students’ access to LGBTQ related resources (Hughes-Hassell, et al., 2013).
Similarly, schools can instill strategies within their environment to help the safety and overall well-being of transgender/gender queer students. Schools can create school policies which specifically protect the rights and safety of transgender/gender queer students. This can be accomplished by: integrating an inclusive school environment and curriculum, allowing each student’s chosen name to be written on school documents, and instilling anti-bullying/harassment policies. Schools can model positive examples by: intervening with harassment incidents, thereby demonstrating that harassment will not be tolerated, creating the presence of a supportive school staff, and providing school staff members with professional development regarding the transgender/gender queer community.

Most past research has focused on the LGBTQIA community in terms of how to improve the school climate for these students. In addition, most of the current research has focused on transgender/gender queer youth, has been conducted using case studies, and has not been from the perspective of school professionals who work closely with transgender/gender queer students and have a unique position to help these students. Therefore this study seeks to gather information from school professionals as well as LGBTQIA training professionals in order to understand what effective practices/policies schools are implementing to support these students, what issues arise with these practices/policies, and what is hindering school professionals from utilizing the other practices/policies that past research has shown to be effective.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Terminology

Before discussing the issues that Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQIA) youth/adolescents face growing up and in school, it is important to define and explain terminology related to individuals in the LGBTQIA community (See Table 1 for visual representation of important terminology). The pronouns “they” and “their” will be used when referring to individuals as to respect all preferred pronouns.

Gender is comprised of the complicated relationship between an individual’s physical sex characteristics (their sex assigned at birth), their own sense of gender identity, their gender expression, which is better understood as a spectrum, and their gender attribution (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, GLSEN, 2019; Orr, et al., 2015). Gender identity is defined as one’s internal sense of being male, female, or something outside of these binary categories (Earnshaw, Bogart, Poteat, Reisner, & Schuster, 2016). Gender expression is how an individual displays their gender through outward presentation, such as personality, appearance, and behavior (Orr et al., 2015). Gender attribution is how one’s gender expression is perceived by others, or how members of society categorize or assign a gender to a person. One’s sex assigned at birth is the sex that the medical community labeled a person as when they were born based on their primary sex characteristics or genitals (GLSEN, 2019). Gender binary is the social system that constructs gender into two discrete categories, male or female. Conversely, gender expansive, also called gender non-binary, describes individuals whose gender is not exclusively male or female, but rather refers to a broader spectrum of gender identities or expressions, such as gender queer, gender variant, gender fluid, or gender neutral (GLSEN 2019; Orr et al., 2015).
Individuals who identify as transgender have a gender identity that is not aligned with their sex assigned at birth (Earnshaw, et al., 2016). These individuals typically experience gender dysphoria, which is an intense as well as persistent discomfort with the primary and secondary sex characteristics of one’s birth sex (Orr et al., 2015). Primary sex characteristics refer to one’s sexual organs, whereas secondary sex characteristics refer to features that develop at puberty, such as: pubic hair, enlarged breasts, or an Adam’s apple. The term transgender is an adjective and therefore using this term as a verb (transgendered) or a noun (transgenders) is offensive and should be avoided.

Other terminology that describes how someone identifies includes: cisgender, gender queer, gender queer, and sexual orientation. Cisgender refers to an individual whose gender identity and gender expression correspond with their sex assigned at birth sex (Earnshaw, et al., 2016; GLSEN, 2019). Natal sex refers to the sex someone was assigned at birth (Wernick, Kulick, & Inglehart, 2014). Therefore, a natal male is an individual whose sex at birth was male, whereas a natal female is an individual whose sex at birth was female. The terms natal male and natal female are outdated and should be avoided unless used by the transgender individual (D17CounselingPsych webinar, 2021); the more affirming language to use is assigned male at birth (AMAB) and assigned female at birth (AFAB). An individual who identifies as gender non-conforming displays a gender identity and/or gender expression that is not considered typical for their sex assigned at birth (GLSEN, 2019; Orr et al., 2015). Similarly, an individual who identifies as gender queer is questioning their gender identity or identifies outside the gender binary (Earnshaw, et al., 2016). Sexual orientation is defined as who one is attracted to and who one would like to be romantically involved with or has desires for. Individuals represent their sexual orientation using terms such as, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual or straight.
Table 1

*Important Terminology Regarding the LGBTQIA+ Community*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terminology</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender Identity</td>
<td>One’s internal sense of being male, female, or something outside of these binary categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Expression</td>
<td>Display of gender through outward presentation, such as personality, appearance, and behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Attribution</td>
<td>How one’s gender is perceived or categorized by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Binary</td>
<td>Social system that constructs gender into two discrete categories (male or female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Expansive (Gender Non-Binary)</td>
<td>Broader spectrum of gender identities/expressions; Gender is not exclusively male or female (E.g. gender queer, gender variant, gender fluid, gender queer, or gender neutral)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agender</td>
<td>Individual who does not identify themselves as having a particular gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Queer</td>
<td>Individual who’s questioning their gender identity or identifies as neither exclusively masculine or feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender</td>
<td>Individual whose gender identity is not aligned with their sex assigned at birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Dysphoria</td>
<td>Intense and persistent discomfort regarding the primary and secondary sex characteristics of one’s birth sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cisgender</td>
<td>Individual whose gender identity and gender expression correspond with their sex assigned at birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natal Sex</td>
<td>Sex someone was assigned at birth; Sex the medical community labeled a person as when they were born <em>outdated term and should be avoided</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assigned Male at Birth (AMAB)</td>
<td>Someone whose sex assigned at birth is male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assigned Female at Birth (AFAB)</td>
<td>Someone whose sex assigned at birth is female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>An individual’s pattern of romantic and/or sexual attraction (labels include: gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, straight)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>Individual who is sexually or romantically attracted to others regardless of the other person’s sex or gender identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asexual</td>
<td>Individual who has a lack of sexual attraction to others. They may experience romantic attraction, but have a low or absent interest in sexual activity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LGBTQIA Adversity in Society

The bullying of LGBTQIA individuals is stigma-based and therefore it is fundamentally discriminatory in nature (Earnshaw, et al., 2016). Stigma is a socially constructed process, which involves the labeling, stereotyping, and rejecting of human differences in order to gain social control (White Hughto, Reisner, & Pachankis, 2015) and thus is the basis of bullying/harassment.

Western society has normalized a binary system including concepts such as gender and heterosexuality and in turn has deemed that individuals who fall outside this gender binary system are not normal. Therefore, it has become acceptable to hear individuals, especially adolescents, say expressions such as “that’s so gay” in a negative way since individuals receive negative messages from society regarding those who identify outside the gender binary. These expressions carry homophobic undertones, have become extremely common, and are an indirect form of harassment; approximately 90% of 107 surveyed youth have heard such expressions (Hillard, Love, Franks, Laris, & Coyle, 2014). Verbal harassment, such as comments like, “that’s so gay”, is more widespread than physical harassment, although both still occur (Hillard, et al., 2014). Other common forms of bullying/harassment faced by LGBTQIA individuals include: sexual jokes, comments or gestures, and being bullied because of one’s appearance or speech (Hillard, et al., 2014). Due to frequent victimization, LGBTQIA youth are at greater risk than their heterosexual peers for mental health issues such as: depression, anxiety, suicide, use of alcohol/illicit substances, and risky sexual activity (Varjas, Graybill, Mahan, Meyers, Dew, Marshall, & Birckbichler, 2007).
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**LGBTQIA Adversity in School**

In addition to experiencing discrimination within society, several researchers explain that students who identify as members of the LGBTQIA community are more likely to experience bullying, verbal/physical/sexual harassment, social exclusion, isolation, and other interpersonal problems compared to their straight peers in the school environment (Hillard, et al., 2014; Singh & Kosciw, 2017). LGBTQIA students are approximately 1.7 times more likely to report assault by peers at school compared to heterosexual students (Collier, van Beusekom, Bos, & Sandfort, 2013). LGBTQIA youth reports show that there is more bullying in states that do not have laws which prohibit bullying/harassment on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity than in states that do have such laws (Earnshaw, et al., 2016).

The GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network) 2013 and 2017 school climate surveys indicate that anti-LGBTQIA language, bullying, and harassment regarding one’s sexual orientation or gender identity/expression remain a common problem in America’s schools (Klotz, 2015; Kosciw, Greytak, Zongrnone, Clark, & Truong, 2018). For example, according to the GLSEN 2013 school climate survey, 37.8% of LGBT students indicated that they felt unsafe in school due to their gender expression (Klotz, 2015). Similarly, 55.2% of the LGBT students surveyed reported that they had been called names or threatened within the past year due to their gender expression and over half of these students never reported their harassment/assault to school authorities, a parent/guardian, or any other family member (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006). Additionally, The GLSEN 2013 school climate survey reported that 55.5% of LGBTQ students surveyed stated that they heard homophobic remarks from teachers or other school professionals due to students’ gender expression (Klotz, 2015). In places, such as schools, where there are higher rates of hearing transphobic language, there are also lower rates of self-reported
intervention behaviors in response to this type of harassment, indicating that these two factors were negatively related (Wernick, et al., 2014). Similarly, research demonstrates that school professionals are less likely to intervene regarding homophobic comments or remarks about gender expression compared to racist or sexist statements (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006).

Being harassed due to one’s identification with the LGBTQIA community can create a hostile learning environment within the school setting (Wernick, Dessel, Kulick, & Graham, 2013), and adversely impact academic and mental health outcomes. Studies have concluded that the majority of LGBTQ students (over 50%) reported feeling unsafe in school (Hughes-Hassell, Overberg, & Harris, 2013; Klotz, 2015). A negative school climate can affect LGBTQIA students’ access to education (Singh & Kosciw, 2017). Due to the discrimination and victimization LGBTQIA students face, they are at a greater risk for: suicidal thoughts/_attempts, worse academic performances/lower grade point averages, missing school days due to the fear of possible violence, and lower educational aspirations post-graduation (Earnshaw, et al., 2016; Hillard, et al., 2014; Singh & Kosciw, 2017; Varjas, et al., 2007). LGBTQIA students are more than three times as likely to miss/skip school due to feeling unsafe, if they had experienced higher levels of discrimination or victimization (Kosciw, et al., 2018). Similarly, LGBTQIA students who experienced a higher severity of victimization based on sexual orientation or gender expression were less likely to plan to complete any type of post-secondary education compared to those who experienced less severe victimization, 9.6% vs. 4.9%, respectively (Kosciw, et al., 2018). Thus, not surprisingly, the harassment and exclusion LGBTQIA students face are associated with feeling less attached to one’s school (Hillard, et al., 2014).

Additionally, peer victimization, as a result of one’s association with the LGBTQIA community, is negatively associated with all students’, LGBTQIA and non-LGBTQIA, level of
belongingness to their school, with the association being stronger for LGBTQIA students (Collier, et al., 2013). Peer victimization involves a multitude of negative as well as aggressive behaviors among children/adolescents. Peer victimization has two forms: direct (e.g., hitting/insults) and indirect (e.g., spreading rumors). LGBTQIA students who experience peer victimization are at risk for experiencing academic difficulties, dropping out of school, feelings of fear, feelings of powerlessness, feelings of shame, feelings of anxiety/depression, feelings of anger, symptoms of traumatic stress, lower self-esteem, self-injury, and suicidal thoughts/Attempts. LGBTQIA students who perceive their victimization as being due to their sexual orientation can experience internalized homophobia, which in turn can lead to poor psychosocial outcomes. These students may cope with this peer victimization by: cutting class (avoidance strategy), weight training and being vigilant (self-defensive strategies), and using drugs or alcohol (Collier, et al., 2013).

**Transgender Adversity in Society**

Similar to the bullying/harassment of LGBTQIA individuals, the discrimination experienced by transgender/gender queer individuals is also stigma based (White Hughto, et al. 2015). The stigma experienced by transgender/gender queer individuals falls within one of two categories, which are structural stigma or interpersonal stigma. Structural stigma involves societal norms and institutional policies, which limit transgender/gender queer individuals’ access to resources, their opportunities, and well-being, whereas interpersonal stigma describes direct or enacted forms of stigma. White Hughto et al. (2015) demonstrate that stigma is a fundamental cause of adverse health outcomes in the transgender/gender queer population. Stigma directly induces stress in these individuals and indirectly restricts their access to healthcare resources.
Children who are transgender and gender queer experience a multitude of social, cultural, and institutional barriers which impact their well-being and are rooted in transphobia (Austin, Craig, & D’Souza, 2018). Transphobia is defined as the irrational fear or hatred of individuals who identify as transgender and/or the violence, harassment, or discrimination perpetrated against individuals who identify as transgender (Orr et al., 2015). Similarly, socially constructed societal norms regarding masculinity and femininity artificially determine what is normal (Greene & Spivey, 2017). Western society’s understanding is that people are immutably only men or women, and that men should display so-called masculine characteristics and women should display so-called feminine characteristics. Therefore, transgender and gender queer individuals are seen to violate society’s gender norms, and in turn society allows and sometimes encourages hatred for and discrimination against transgender and gender queer individuals.

Many transgender individuals receive messages, both implicit and explicit, from society as well as from their families that there is something wrong with who they are, which in turn can lead these transgender individuals to repress their cross-gender identification due to fear and shame (Orr et al., 2015). Transgender and gender queer youth whose true identity is rejected by their family are: 8.4 times more likely to report a suicide attempt, 5.9 times more likely to report depression symptoms, and 3.4 times more likely to engage in risky behaviors (Luecke, 2011). If transgender individuals fail to have their gender identity respected and affirmed, they can experience significant psychological distress. The longer a transgender individual’s identity is not affirmed, the more severe and long-lasting the negative consequences experienced can become (Luecke, 2011).

Individuals who identify as transgender and gender queer experience disparate rates of violence/bullying, overall psychological distress, depression, anxiety, suicidality, and they
engage in higher rates of substance abuse as well as risky behaviors compared to their cisgender counterparts (Austin, et al., 2018; Eisenberg, et al., 2017). For example, 41% of transgender/gender queer adults have attempted suicide compared to 1.6% of the general population (Shumer, 2018). These individuals experience various forms of discrimination such as, being denied employment, housing, or access to health services due to their gender expression (Bariola, Lyons, Leonard, Pitts, Badcock, & Couch, 2015). Additionally, Bariola et al. (2015) noted that the discrimination that transgender individuals experience appears to be strongly and inversely linked with mental health among these individuals. Furthermore, mental health risks among transgender individuals have been empirically associated with interpersonal harassment/bullying, and victimization due to structural transphobia, such as society’s bathroom laws (gendered bathrooms), and hostile school climates (Austin, et al., 2018).

**Transgender Adversity in School**

The violence and discrimination transgender youth experience occur not only in society but also within the school environment. Genderism is the term used to describe the harassment specifically aimed towards transgender students, often experienced within the school environment (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell, 2010; Wernick, et al., 2014). Within the United States, transgender individuals of color whose sex assigned at birth is male (AMAB) often experience the highest rates of physical violence and are the majority of deadly hate crime victims within the transgender population (Wernick, et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the majority of the transgender/gender queer student population experience discrimination. According to the 2017 GLSEN school climate survey, which reports the prevalence of anti-LGBTQIA language as well as victimization within the school environment, 94% of the 23,001 students, aged of 13-21, surveyed reported hearing negative comments regarding gender expression, such as not being
“masculine enough” or “feminine enough” and 87.4% stated hearing negative comments specifically about transgender individuals (Kosciw, et al., 2018).

Within the LGBTQIA community there may be transphobia or trans-negativity, which may discourage transgender students from accessing the support and resources that the LGBTQIA community and its programs offer (Wernick, et al., 2014). These transphobic attitudes and behaviors are learned aggressive and violent behaviors. Through societal messages and the views of Western society, which normalize a binary system and in turn deem it unnormal/unnatural to not fit in the binary system, members of society receive the message that it is not normal to fall outside the gender binary. In turn, society learns to look down upon individuals who fit outside this binary system. Thus, individuals often learn these transphobic attitudes and behaviors from others such as, peers, family members, authority figures, and these viewpoints are reinforced by cultural messages.

School policy

Many schools have policies which fail to support and respect transgender and gender queer students. For example, a student’s legal name must be written on all legal documents, such as report cards, transcripts, diplomas, and the school’s electronic records (Willick, 2014). Therefore, if a transgender student’s legal name has not been changed, the student’s legal/birth name, which usually does not match their preferred gender, will be written on all legal documents (Beese & Martin, 2018). After a transgender student transitions there are still several ways that the student’s previous name, that which was assigned at birth, can inadvertently appear on school documents, such as the student’s permanent record. The transgender student’s preferred name can be used for documents such as: class rosters, attendance sheets, or identification badges, but for other documents, such as report cards or one’s permanent record,
the student’s legal name, that which was assigned at birth, must be used. This can result in several negative consequences for the transgender student; the student may experience anxiety, bullying, or feel ostracized or unsupported when they are misnamed (“outed”). It is crucial to remember that a single instance of “ outing” a student can create danger and exclusion for that student (P. Connelly, personal communication, March 10, 2020).

Some schools have policies which specifically target their transgender students. The GLSEN 2017 school climate survey, which surveyed 23,001 students aged 13-21 years old from all 50 states as well as the District of Columbia and 5 U.S. territories, found that 22.6% of students were prevented from wearing clothes considered “inappropriate” based on their legal sex. These students were forced to wear clothes which reflected their legal sex. For example, if their legal sex was male they were forced to wear stereotypical masculine clothing and prohibited from wearing feminine clothing. Additionally, 18.2% were prohibited from choosing LGBTQIA topics for school assignments, and 11.7% were prevented from attending a school function with someone of the same gender (Kosciw, et al., 2018). Furthermore, 42.1% of transgender/gender queer students were prevented from using their preferred name or pronoun, 43.6% of transgender/gender queer students had been required to use the locker room of their legal sex, and 46.5% of these students had been required to use a bathroom of their legal sex.

**Bathrooms/locker rooms**

Gendered facilities, such as bathrooms and locker rooms, are frequently and accurately perceived as unsafe places for transgender students (Wernick, et al., 2014). Some schools may enforce that transgender students use the bathroom associated with their sex assigned at birth, which is discriminatory in nature and violates these students’ civil rights (Barnes & Balingit, 2016). In turn, this policy can make the students feel disrespected and possibly put these students
in an unsafe situation. Other schools may provide transgender students with the ability to change or go to the bathroom in a private area or separate section of the school, respectively. While this may seem to be in the best interest of the transgender student, providing this to transgender students might actually ostracize the student, draw attention to the student, and reinforce the notion that this student is different from other students and must change separately (Beese & Martin, 2018).

In May of 2016, the Obama administration enforced a federal civil rights position, which allowed transgender students to use bathroom corresponding to their gender identity, rather than bathrooms associated with their biological sex (Beese & Martin, 2018). However, many states and a variety of school districts disagree with this position and therefore are in violation of this federal position. Similarly, under the Trump administration, the United States Departments of Education and Justice revoked this federal position (Beese & Martin, 2018; Berg & Syed, 2019) and thereby more and more transgender students were forced to use bathrooms associated with their biological sex and were not allowed to use bathrooms associated with their gender identity.

Fortunately, the Biden administration plans to reinstate the Obama administration’s guidance – directing public schools to allow transgender and gender queer students to use and access bathrooms, locker rooms, and sports teams according to their gender identity.

**Barriers to helping LGBTQIA students**

Research shows that there are several factors that can contribute to the occurrence of bullying due to one’s sexuality or gender expression. These factors include: individuals, school policies, school or community climate, religion, blaming the victim, and blindness to LGBTQ students (Varjas et al., 2007).
In regard to the concept of individuals, there may not be individuals such as administrators, teachers, school counselors, school psychologists, or parents, within the school community that identify as allies of the LGBTQIA community (Hillard, et al., 2014; Singh & Kosciw, 2017). Additionally, any one of these individuals may have a negative perception of the LGBTQIA community and be unaccepting of LGBTQ students (Varjas et al., 2007).

In regard to school policies and school/community climate, schools may not have specific policies in place to appropriately protect the rights and safety of LGBTQIA students and in turn the school/community climate may be unwelcoming towards LGBTQIA individuals. Religion may also pose as a barrier if there is a widespread belief that homosexuality/gender non-conformity is unacceptable to certain religious beliefs (Varjas et al., 2007).

Blaming the victim involves the notion that school officials may blame the LGBTQIA student for their victim status and excuse the bully’s behavior, rather than punish the bully for his/her behavior. Additionally, schools often respond to these incidents of bullying by removing the victim (the LGBTQIA student) from the school and moving the victim to a different school, rather than appropriately addressing the bullying issue.

Blindness to LGBTQIA students represents the idea that school professionals may be “blind” to the fact that there are LGBTQIA students present within the school. Finally, researchers describe that there is a significant lack of sufficient training for school personnel regarding LGBTQIA students as well as inadequate resources for LGBTQIA students (Arora, Kelly, & Goldstein, 2016; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Kurt, 2017; Luecke, 2011; Orr et al. 2015; Payne & Smith, 2010; Slesaransky-Poe, Ruzzi, DiMedio, & Stanley, 2013; Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012; Varjas et al., 2007).
Effective Steps to Help LGBTQIA Students

Under Title IX and the Student Non-Discrimination Act, school districts have a legal obligation to not discriminate against LGBTQIA students on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Title IX is a federal law which prohibits sex and gender discrimination in educational programs/activities that are funded by the federal government. The Student Non-Discrimination Act is a federal law which protects LGBTQIA students from bullying and discrimination in school. Thus, school districts also have a legal liability to be able to change school culture which ignores or endorses the discrimination of LGBTQIA students/homophobia in order to promote the safety of these students (Woodiel, Angermeier-Howard, & Hobson, 2003).

Anti-bullying Policies

Schools should create and promote anti-bullying policies/programs, specifically for LGBTQIA students. These policies should include: educating all students regarding the LGBTQIA community, promoting as well as encouraging connections between heterosexual as well as cisgender individuals and LGBTQIA students, creating safe spaces in the school in order to support perspective-taking and empathy, helping the school community understand the impact anti-LGBTQIA language and other forms of discrimination have on LGBTQIA students, and teaching/preparing the school community with the skills/efficacy needed in order to intervene when witnessing an LGBTQIA bullying incident (Sadowski, 2016; Wernick, et al., 2013). The school administration should ensure that the anti-bullying policies include the fact that dress codes, school dances/other school related functions, and school organizations/clubs do not discriminate against LGBTQIA students (Klotz, 2015). It is essential that schools implement and enforce comprehensive bullying and harassment policies in order to protect LGBTQIA students.
Additionally, some schools have incorporated Coordinated School Health Programs (CSHPs), which promote health and offer guidance/structure in helping school districts adjust the school environment, climate, and culture in order to improve the safety and acceptance of the school’s LGBTQIA students (Brener, Demissie, McManus, Shanklin, Queen, & Kann, 2017; Woodiel, et al., 2003). This type of program involves: equal access, equal protection, proactively preventing violence/harassment, and a multi-system approach to improving students’ social/emotional/physical health as well as improving the overall health of the community. The Coordinated School Health Program has a variety of strategies that schools can use in order to best support LGBTQIA students. These strategies include: planned and developmentally appropriate lesson plans, classroom guidelines, neutral language in regard to sexual orientation/gender identity, access to LGBTQIA related resources for the school body as well as for the community at large, acknowledging/accepting the diversity of family structures, and enforcing sexual orientation specific anti-harassment policies with a zero tolerance stance (Brener, et al., 2017; Woodiel, et al., 2003). Other strategies that can be used include: the promotion of Gay-Straight Alliances or Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs), the utilization of peer educators, staff development training, hosting diversity fairs which are inclusive to the LGBTQIA students/community, facilitating LGBTQIA panels, and inviting speakers from LGBTQIA supportive organizations, such as PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network). These types of programs/policies may encourage the notion that all individuals deserve to be respected as well as promote individuals’ tolerance of differences (Woodiel, et al., 2003).
Professional Development

Research shows that professional development regarding LGBTQIA students improves the rates of intervention and increases the number of school professionals who are available to support LGBTQIA students (Klotz, 2015). In regard to this training, it has been shown that having a presenter who can appropriately relate the training content to the reality of the classroom is effective in improving school professionals’ understanding of LGBTQIA related issues, specifically their educational issues (Payne & Smith, 2010). Payne & Smith (2010) have found that there is a lack of available opportunities for school professionals to increase their understanding and awareness regarding LGBTQIA students’ experiences. Additionally, receiving only information is insufficient; school professionals need opportunities to discuss their experiences working with LGBTQIA students, and should be able to process this professional development content with their colleagues.

Furthermore, schools should educate their staff regarding the LGBTQIA community and provide guidance on how to incorporate LGBTQIA related issues into lesson plans/the curriculum (Sadowski, 2016). Incorporating LGBTQIA related issues into the curriculum is referred to as an inclusive curriculum. An inclusive curriculum is one that includes positive representations of the LGBTQIA community, their history, and events in order to promote a positive academic environment for LGBTQIA students (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006). An existing program known as Reduction of Stigma in Schools (RSIS), accomplishes this goal by providing educators with the knowledge and skills that they can integrate into their classroom lessons in order to promote a more affirming school culture for LGBTQIA students (Payne & Smith, 2010). The main purpose of professional development training regarding the LGBTQIA community is to provide school professionals with the necessary skills and resources in order to promote an
accepting school environment which does not condone LGBTQIA related harassment (Woodiel, et al., 2003).

**Be an Advocate/Provide Counseling**

Another way school professionals can support LGBTQIA students is by advocating for these students, and by allowing these students the opportunity to receive counseling, either by talking with a school psychologist/other mental health professional, or by offering group counseling (Sadowski, 2016). Research explains that the more direct contact a school psychologist has with a gay, lesbian, or bisexual (GLB) student, such as through counseling, the less homophobic the school psychologist is likely to be and the more engaged the school psychologist is in proactive behaviors, such as attending workshops and providing information to/educating others (Dayan & Carey, 2001). The role of a school psychologist, or other school professional, as an advocate for LGBTQIA students includes: supporting/advocating for the LGBTQIA student, educating other students and school personnel regarding LBTQIA related topics, addressing structural barriers within the school environment which are negatively impacting the safety and acceptance of LGBTQIA students, and being involved in social and political advocacy within the community (Singh & Kosciw, 2017).

**Developing Allies**

It is important to engage heterosexual youth/adolescents and develop them as allies to the LGBTQIA community (Wernick, et al., 2013). By engaging the straight students this may help in creating a more inclusive and safer school environment, which has shown to be critical for an individual’s well-being as well as effective learning for all students, not just LGBTQIA students. In the process of developing allies for the LGBTQIA community, it is important to foster open discussions and to understand the role that people with heterosexual privilege can play in
working for social justice. The primary principle of allyhood is to motivate people with privilege to interrupt and disrupt the oppressive systems and experiences of discrimination. It is necessary to help allies develop the confidence to be able to disrupt these social norms, which discriminate against the LGBTQIA community.

Research shows that LGBTQIA youth-led, personal narrative-and-dialogue-focused, peer-to-peer, education and intervention can contribute to effective anti-bullying efforts by increasing students’ motivation and confidence (Wernick, et al., 2013). This intervention is also related to students’ increased likelihood of intervening around anti-LGBTQIA bullying and the confidence to successfully do so. Wernick et al. (2013) identify certain experiences that motivate individuals to become allies of the LGBTQIA community. These experiences include: a personal connection and empathy for individuals (referred to as allyhood for self-interest), the desire to act as an ally for moral or other value-based reasoning (referred to as ally for altruism), and the desire to act out of self-interest for the collective liberation (referred to as ally for social justice).

**Gay-Straight Alliance/Gender-Sexuality Alliance (GSA)**

A program being utilized in schools that is commonly called the Gay-Straight Alliance or Gender-Sexuality Alliance (GSA) has been used to support LGBTQIA students, minimize the incidence of LGBTQIA harassment, and decrease the impact of this harassment (Hillard, et al., 2014; Klotz, 2015). The overall purpose of this program is to improve school safety and climate for LGBTQIA students (Klotz, 2014; Porta, Singer, et al., 2017). Schools that have implemented this program have also shown support to the LGBTQIA students by incorporating LGBTQIA related books into the schools’ libraries, specifically LGBTQIA biographies, and by providing staff training on LGBTQIA harassment/bullying (Hillard, et al., 2014). The support for the LGBTQIA community is also demonstrated through organized LGBTQIA family dinner nights.
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and support for events, such as the Day of Silence and World AIDS Day (Hillard, et al., 2014; Klotz, 2014). Similarly, having a GSA in the school setting was strongly related to lower reports of negative treatment towards the LGBTQIA students (McCormick, Schmidt, & Clifton, 2015). Additionally, having GSAs, or a similar type of support group, in schools was strongly associated with greater feelings of safety as well as improved academic achievement for LGBTQIA students (Klotz, 2014; McCormick, et al., 2015). Students in schools where GSAs were in place reported less risky behaviors such as: truancy, smoking, drinking, suicide attempts, and casual sex than students in schools where there were no GSAs in place (McCormick, et al., 2015; Porta, Singer, et al., 2017). Similarly, adults who stated that they had participated in their high school’s GSA program reported significantly lower rates of depression as well as higher rates of educational achievement and self-esteem levels.

Research speculates that GSA groups benefit LGBTQIA individuals because they create a more inclusive as well as tolerant culture and because they improve students’ connections to their peers and the school as a whole (McCormick, et al., 2015). McCormick et al. (2015) interviewed 36 LGBTQ high school students, 21 from high schools with a GSA and 15 from high schools without a GSA, utilizing an in-depth semi-structured format, and asked students how their lives would differ if their schools did not have a GSA, or did have a GSA, respectively. The researchers found that GSAs improve school climate because they fulfill LGBTQIA students’ desire to have a group of people to whom they can count on and to whom they are accountable (McCormick, et al., 2015). GSAs increase school connectedness, which is beneficial since school connectedness has been shown to mitigate the effects of an adverse home environment (McCormick, et al., 2015; Sulkowski, Demaray, & Lazarus, 2012). Additionally, GSAs provide a sense of hope by hearing the success stories of other LGBTQIA students, and
they normalize one’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences (McCormick, et al., 2015). Furthermore, research describes that GSA groups help students to understand and come to admire their unique and individualized characteristics. GSA groups also help students to advocate for the safety and inclusion of other students, not just LGBTQIA students, develop and maintain relationships, as well as end friendships or romantic relationships students realized were unhealthy (McCormick, et al., 2015).

A concept similar to that of Gay-Straight Alliance/Gender-Sexuality Alliance (GSA) programs is that of safe zones (Sadowski, 2016; Sulkowski, et al., 2012). Safe zones are areas within a school that are designated safe spaces for students within the LGBTQIA community (Sadowski, 2016). Safe zones are indicated by a safe zone sticker, usually a rainbow colored sticker. The overall purpose of these safe zones is to support the LGBTQIA school community. Safe zone stickers are typically displayed on the window or door of school professionals who are supportive of the LGBTQIA community. The alliance/respect from these professionals is critical since the presence of these supportive professionals alleviate the negative effects victimization has on the mental health of LGBTQIA students (Sadowski, 2016; Singh & Kosciw, 2017).

Research shows that GSAs, LGBTQ+ safe zones, and specific anti-bullying policies make a remarkable difference in how safe and supported LGBTQIA students feel at school (Sadowski, 2016). They also communicate to the larger school community that LGBTQIA students have adult support in the building (P. Connelly, personal communication, March 10, 2020). This is critical since students’ safety and sense of support are essential before any learning can occur.
Increasing Resources

It is important that LGBTQIA students, just like their heterosexual peers, have opportunities for self-affirmation and socialization in order for them to develop into healthy adults (Hughes- Hassell, et al., 2013). A school’s library resources can provide LGBTQIA students with the ability for self-affirmation by offering books including characters with which LGBTQIA students can identify, thereby helping to decrease feelings of alienation (Hughes- Hassell, et al., 2013). Therefore, it is critical for school libraries to expand their collections and include resources to address students’ social, emotional, physical, and sexual preference needs (Hughes-Hassell, et al., 2013). Additionally, schools can provide access to LGBTQIA resources within the general curriculum. If LGBTQIA students are able to see individuals like them represented, these students will feel validated and better able to succeed academically and socially (Rudolph, 2016).

This poses a serious issue since LGBTQIA students are at risk when they cannot find resources to help them feel included in the school community (Hughes-Hassell, et al., 2013) and due to the fact that 81.7% of 23,001 surveyed students reported that they had never been taught about the LGBTQ+ community, its history, or events in school (Kosciw, et al., 2018). LGBTQIA-related resources and literature provide LGBTQIA students with the capability to explore what it means to be queer, to learn LGBTQ social norms, to experience the “coming out” process, to reassure themselves that they are not alone, to feel related to others, to discover role models, and most importantly to affirm the fact that they are normal (Hughes-Hassell, et al., 2013). When school libraries have limited LGBTQ+ characters portrayed positively in literature, this sends a message to LGBTQIA students that it is not acceptable to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, or anything other than heterosexual (Hughes-Hassell, et al., 2013). Therefore, it
is also critical that school libraries choose books and resources that display positive as well as accurate depictions of the LGBTQ community and its members (Hughes-Hassell, et al., 2013).

**Effective Steps to Help Transgender/Gender Queer Students**

Most of the current research has focused on how to improve the rights and safety of LGBTQIA students as a whole. Therefore, research regarding how to specifically improve the rights and safety of transgender and gender queer students is lacking. However, based on the work that has been done, research has identified educational strategies, which have been associated with improving student safety, especially that of transgender and gender queer students. These strategies include inclusive curriculum content which challenges heteronormativity, clearly defined anti-harassment policies, teacher intervention in gender/sexual harassment, and the presence of student clubs such as GSAs (Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012).

**Inclusive Policies/Curriculum**

As previously mentioned, Title IX prohibits sex and gender discrimination in educational programs funded by the federal government, such as public schools. Therefore, if schools do not follow this law they are at risk for losing federal funding (Kurt, 2017). Thus, schools have an obligation as well as an incentive to protect the rights and safety of transgender/gender queer students. Transgender and gender queer students are also protected under the following acts: The Equal Access Act, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and the First Amendment (Kurt, 2017).

One strategy to protect the rights and safety of transgender and gender queer students, like LGBTQ+ students, is to incorporate an inclusive curriculum within the school. By utilizing an inclusive curriculum, transgender students as well as the whole student body receive the
message that diversity should be accepted and encouraged, and in turn individuals should not judge others based on factors such as race, class, sexuality, gender, family structure, etc. (Orr, et al., 2015). For example, students should be allowed to participate on athletic teams that align with their gender identity (Willick, 2014). Additionally, a school’s dress code should be gender-neutral and gender-segregated activities, such as boys vs. girls’ events/activities as well as gendered dances, should be removed. Inclusive messages and topics regarding the LGBTQ+ community should not be ignored in elementary or middle schools; the messages just need to be presented at an age-appropriate level (Slesaransky-Poe, et al., 2013).

Research demonstrates that a way to incorporate an inclusive curriculum is to provide units or courses within the curriculum which discuss gender diversity; they could be referred to as “gender-complex education” (Luecke, 2011). The purpose of these lessons would be to help students understand gender, gender conventions, and gender roles. Additionally, students would be presented with information regarding the topics of sexual orientation and gender identity in order to help remove the socially constructed stigma against individuals within the LGBTQ+ community. This type of lesson or course would benefit all students within the school, not just LGBTQIA students, because it would improve the knowledge as well as understanding of the complex diversity existing within our society.

School administration should maintain a copy of the transgender or gender queer student’s birth certificate and other identification documents which reflect the student’s birth name and sex under lock and key, while the student’s chosen name and gender are entered into the student information system (Orr, et al., 2015). School officials can then simply switch the student’s chosen name/gender to the student’s legal/birth name/gender just before submitting the information to the department of education’s database. In the event of state testing, the school
administration can pull the transgender/gender queer student’s test booklet prior to testing in order to correct it with the student’s chosen name and gender. Additionally, school officials can connect the electronic student databases at the district level and thereby allow the transgender/gender queer student and their parents to fill out forms with the appropriate name and pronouns. Furthermore, the school administration can collaborate with the student information system provider in order to create a screen, which would allow the district to access the student’s legal/birth name, but also allow the school to create attendance sheets, report cards, and other school-related documents using the student’s chosen/preferred name. If the student has transitioned and was able to change their birth name/gender, the student should be allowed to re-enroll in the school using a passport with the student’s corrected name and gender marker.

**Anti-bullying/harassment policies**

Past research claims that the enactment of inclusive and clear anti-harassment policies is one of the most important first steps to improve the rights and safety of transgender/gender queer students and in turn promote a safer school climate (Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012). Therefore, schools should have a comprehensive and well-defined school policy in order to protect the rights and safety of all students, including transgender and gender queer students (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006). This policy should prohibit all forms of harassment, including verbal and physical. Specifically, this policy should forbid any gender and gender identity/expression-based harassment (Kurt, 2017). Furthermore, this policy should not require medical documentation as proof of treatment. Schools that instilled such policies were shown to have lower occurrences of homophobic remarks, lower rates of verbal harassment, as well as higher rates of intervention actions taken by school professionals (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006). Additionally, school administration should enforce the fact that any harassment or suspicion of harassment
should be reported and will not be tolerated (Kurt, 2017; Luecke, 2011). Furthermore, school professionals should ensure that all staff and students know how to report harassment and where a student can receive help if they have experienced any form of harassment (Kurt, 2017).

The implementation of inclusive curriculum, policies, and practices within the school environment, sometimes referred to as queering of the education system, is related to students perceiving the school environment as safer, specifically for students who deviate from gender and/or sexuality norms, such as transgender and gender queer students (Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012). In addition, research shows that in schools with transgender/gender queer specific anti-harassment policies, transgender and gender queer students are significantly less likely to experience discrimination with the school environment (Kosciw, et al., 2018). For example, transgender and gender queer students are: less likely to be prevented from using their preferred name as well as pronouns of choice, less likely to be forced to use the bathroom or locker room of their legal/birth sex, less likely to be prevented from wearing clothes considered to be “inappropriate” for their gender, less likely to miss school because they felt unsafe, and more likely to feel a greater sense of belongingness to their school community.

Bathrooms/locker rooms

Another step that schools should take to improve the safety and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community, specifically of transgender students, is the implementation of gender-neutral bathrooms (Porta, Gower, et al., 2017). As previously mentioned, bathrooms and locker rooms are often perceived as the least safe spaces in schools for transgender youth, and therefore are often avoided. Negative experiences with gendered bathrooms varied from feeling uncomfortable to being unsafe. Therefore, it is important for there to be gender-neutral bathrooms in schools in order to represent safe spaces within the schools as well as advocacy
successes. For the transgender students, gender-neutral bathrooms are associated with feeling comfortable in the school setting as well as with positive sentiments toward the school itself.

It is critical that all the students, not just LGBTQ+ students, promote the use of gender-neutral bathrooms. The use of gender-neutral bathrooms by all the students will prevent LGBTQ+ students from getting bullied for using gender-neutral bathrooms, because all students can use those bathrooms. When the option of using a gender-neutral bathroom was only made available to LGBTQ+ students, specifically the transgender students, and these bathrooms were in the school’s basement or only in the nurse’s office, the LGBTQ+ students continued to be frustrated and felt further isolated as well as unsafe. Most of the advocacy efforts for gender-neutral bathrooms involved the GSAs at schools, but it is also possible to advocate for the rights of LGBTQ+ students in the community and at the level of the state legislature.

Schools in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, and Washington, as well as a few individual schools across the United States, respect and affirm transgender/gender queer students by allowing them to use the restrooms and locker rooms which match their gender identity (Orr et al., 2015). This illustrates the fact that implementing such bathroom/locker room policies is not only feasible, but also that such policies do not create problems, which some individuals fear will occur. Some parents or non-LGBTQ+ students may fear that they’ll be unsafe if LGBTQ+ students use the bathroom associated with their gender identity or that non-LGBTQ students will be preyed on; this fear is false and not supported by evidence. It is actually the transgender and gender queer students whose safety is at risk and who need to be more fully supported. It is important that any student who may feel uncomfortable about sharing a bathroom or locker room with a transgender student be allowed to use another one of these facilities, such as the bathroom in the nurse’s office. However, it is crucial that a transgender
student **not** be forced to use an alternative facility (bathroom or locker room) in order to make other students comfortable. Being uncomfortable is **not** synonymous with being unsafe; students may still feel uncomfortable even if they are safe. School professionals should try their best to make sure students feel comfortable in addition to ensuring students are safe, however, the main responsibility of school officials is to guarantee the safety of all students, including transgender/gender queer students.

**Witnessing Transgender Harassment? – Say Something and Stop the Hate**

Research shows that students who observe other peers or adults within the school setting intervening with transgender harassment are more likely to state that they would also intervene (Wernick, et al., 2014). In fact, observing intervention behaviors, such as, any action that addresses and extinguishes transgender harassment, by peers and adults, positively predicted the student’s likelihood to intervene; when these students witnessed a peer intervening, the relationship was significantly higher. In other words, higher rates of observing other students intervene were associated with higher rates that the student respondents themselves would intervene when witnessing harassment of a transgender student. Therefore, research expresses that peer-to-peer programmatic interventions within the school environment may be the most effective when witnessing a harassment incident of transgender students. Unfortunately, students report that they were more likely to witness adults, such as teachers, intervene rather than peers/other students. Additionally, cisgender students are less likely to intervene when witnessing a harassment incident than LGBTQ+ students. Finally, studies demonstrate that a high school student’s willingness to intervene when observing harassment of transgender students is impacted by the social context within the school, more specifically by the prevalence of a hostile climate as well as other students’ modeling of intervention behaviors.
Creating Supportive Staff

Research demonstrates that the presence of supportive school professionals has the strongest positive effect on school environment and students’ well-being, and this supportive presence lessened the effects of victimization on transgender and gender queer students’ mental health (Eisenberg, et al., 2017; Singh & Kosciw, 2017). Additionally, the presence of supportive school staff is associated with: greater sense of safety, fewer missed days, a greater sense of school belongingness, and a higher rate of planning to attend college for transgender/gender queer students (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006). It is critical that transgender and gender queer students feel that they have a safe space in the school environment where they can feel accepted without having to defend who they are (Kurt, 2017). This safe space could be as simple as a specific teacher’s classroom. When students perceive teachers as supportive, they are less likely to experience school-related issues (Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012).

Professional development

Staff/professional development is needed to raise awareness and knowledge of gender variance (Slesaransky-Poe, et al., 2013). This staff training will help school professionals understand that transgender/gender queer individuals usually begin questioning their gender identity from a young age, and help them understand what it may be like to grow up as a transgender or gender queer individual (Luecke, 2011). For school professionals to better understand the experiences of transgender and gender queer students and to increase empathy and strategies for working with these students, the utilization of experiential learning exercises is recommended (Slesaransky-Poe, et al., 2013). Additionally, some schools may hire an outside organization that conducts ally training to help with staff development. For example, the Bryson Institute is a nonprofit organization which offers staff development training as well as
educational/ally training for individuals who work with LGBTQ+ youth. Schools may also find it helpful for the parents of the transgender or gender queer child to present to the school staff about what their child is like, what their experiences have been like, and what practices they have tried at home which may be helpful at school. During the professional development training, it may also be effective for school professionals to collaborate together and have open discussions. This format would allow the school faculty to openly discuss transgender issues, the potential for harassment, how teachers can model gender-inclusive language, and how to avoid gender stereotyping in the classroom as well as the overall school setting (Luecke, 2011; Slesaransky-Poe, et al., 2013). The utilization of open discussions may allow school professionals to brainstorm more ideas and strategies than if the faculty thought of ideas independently.

**Advocate and educate others**

Another way school staff can improve the acceptance and safety of transgender and gender queer students, not only in the school environment but also within the community, is by advocating for these students and educating others about the transgender and gender queer community. Research demonstrates that feeling safe in the community can buffer against the poor health outcomes transgender and gender queer students experience (Eisenberg, et al., 2017). School officials, such as school psychologists or counselors, can provide transgender and gender queer students with referrals to community resources in order to best address the emotional needs as well as overall well-being of these students (Kurt, 2017).

Additionally, school professionals need to advocate for transgender and gender queer students’ academic needs as well as the equitable treatment of all students. It may be most effective for the school faculty to join together and develop some common gender-inclusive words or phrases to use with all the students (Luecke, 2011), in order to establish uniformity
throughout the school, reinforce the message of gender inclusivity, and improve the school’s climate. For example, school professionals can create written materials, such as “crib notes”, which provide answers to frequently asked questions (Luecke, 2011), so that all students are receiving the same message, which is that transgender and gender queer students deserve to be respected and accepted.

Furthermore, educators should discuss the LGBTQ+ community with their classes. At an age appropriate level, educators should explain the meaning of each letter within LGBTQIA (Luecke, 2011) and the experiences that individuals within the LGBTQ+ community typically experience. Additionally, educators can present on harassment, at an age appropriate level, and address these three main points: people have a right to their own opinions and identity, harassment of others in school is prohibited, and the empowerment of bystanders can stop harassment (Luecke, 2011). It is critical that school professionals are proactive, consistent, and committed to communicating the message that, “different is not bad” across all grade levels.

**Social-emotional learning**

School officials may want to focus on how to improve the school connectedness for all students, specifically transgender and gender queer students, due to the fact that LGBTQIA students, especially transgender and gender queer students, experience significantly higher rates of discrimination in the school environment and as a result have significantly lower rates of school connectedness and school belongingness. Research shows that social-emotional learning (SEL) programs can reduce an array of risk factors as well as foster protective and resiliency factors for all students (Sulkowski, et al., 2012). In addition, the SEL program can be effectively implemented by educators and school professionals without the support of an outside organization (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011), thereby making this
program easy and convenient for schools to implement. A health-promotion service delivery model has been shown to be effective in facilitating school connectedness by increasing inclusiveness, democracy, and participation in classrooms as well as the broader school community. The utilization of small groups, class discussion, peer tutoring, and cooperative learning activities are incorporated in these SEL programs and aid in enhancing social relationships and overall school connectedness.

**Successful Transitioning**

Developing an individualized gender transition plan for the transgender student is the most effective and influential way for the school to ensure that the entering, or re-entering, process is carefully constructed and accounts for the following factors: the student’s age, personality, current emotional state, current level of family support, the school’s structure, and the time of the year (Gender Spectrum, 2019; Orr, et al., 2015). This transition plan should explain exactly how the student will transition in the school environment and how the school faculty will respond to questions or aggression from others (Kurt, 2017). Some specifics of the transition plan include: a discussion about the student’s preferred name/pronouns as well as the documentation that can be changed, the documentation that cannot be changed, and how to secure the documents which cannot be changed with respect to the student’s new preferred name. Furthermore, the plan should specify what restroom facility and locker room the student can use as well as what athletic teams the student can join, and what support services are present/available within the school for the student to access. The transition plan should also explain how the school staff should and will handle any incidents, or suspicion, of harassment/bullying towards the transitioning student.
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Additionally, the school should collaborate with the student and the student’s parents to determine what private information they want to share and to whom they want to share this information. Different individuals within the school environment can receive different “need to know” information. School officials should also collaborate with the transgender student and their family regarding ways to meet the student’s needs while appropriately navigating the school’s policies so that the transgender student, given age appropriateness, knows what to expect and can develop their transition plan with autonomy. Collaboration between the student’s parents and the school is key for a successful transition, which meets the needs of the transitioning student while also adhering to state/federal laws and the school’s policies (Kurt, 2017; Slesaransky-Poe, et al., 2013). The parents and the school need to be respectful of one another and be in agreement that they are all a part of one cohesive team whose goal is to support the transitioning student.

The other factors that have been shown to be associated with a successful transition plan include: consultation, confidence, courage, change, curiosity, climate, community, commitment, and compassion (Slesaransky-Poe, et al., 2013). School professionals should receive professional development training, consult with one another, and consult with an organization that offers professional development training as well as educational/ally training (consultation). The individuals involved in the transition plan need to have trust in one another as well as the individualized transition plan and the courage to remain proactive, open-minded, and determined during the transitioning process (confidence and courage). The school professionals need to be open to this change within the school and aware that this change occurs at a different pace, depending on the individual. Some staff members may be more accepting of this process than others, but all should keep an open mind (change and curiosity). The school officials need to
maintain careful attention to the school climate and strive to maintain a positive and welcoming school climate for all students, especially for transgender and gender queer students (climate). The school professionals and everyone involved in the transition plan need to be aware that it takes each and every one of these individuals to help educate and support the transitioning student (community). However, it may be beneficial to have one person, or two people, such as the school psychologist and social worker, who can take the lead of this transition plan and be available as a resource for the other individuals involved with the plan (Luecke, 2011). It is important that each and every one of these individuals is dedicated to making this transition a successful experience for all (commitment). Finally, the entire school community should accept, respect, and embrace the transitioning student in their new and chosen gender identity (compassion).

Positive impacts of transitioning.

Researchers express a multitude of positive effects socially transitioned students experience. For example, Shumer (2018) and Olson, Durwood, DeMeules, & McLaughlin (2015) explain that transgender and gender queer youth who have socially transitioned and are supported by their social environments have depression levels approximately equivalent to that of their cisgender counterparts. Similarly, “coming out” to others during high school is related to lower levels of depression and higher levels of life satisfaction (Toomey, et al., 2010). Additionally, these socially transitioned transgender individuals show only slightly elevated anxiety symptoms compared to population averages and substantially lower rates of internalizing symptoms compared to youth with gender identity disorder (Olson, et al., 2015). Furthermore, research shows that support from one’s family, especially in relation to social transitioning, is associated with improved mental health outcomes for transgender or gender queer individuals. In
addition, transgender and gender queer youth who receive support from their family have higher self-esteem and a more positive sense of the future. This support from family is critical since family connectedness is able to buffer against the poor health outcomes transgender and gender queer youth experience (Eisenberg, et al., 2017).

The Current Study

Most research regarding LGBTQIA individuals utilizes an approach referred to as queer theory. This theory is concerned with the cultural and political factors impacting this marginalized population and it conveys the experiences and perceptions of these oppressed individuals (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, this study utilized the framework of this theory in order to convey the experiences of transgender and gender queer youth in the school environment, a significantly discriminated against and marginalized group of students within schools.

Most of research attention has focused on LGB students as well as how to improve school climate for these individuals and less attention has been given to transgender and gender queer students, and how to improve their acceptance and school safety (Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012). Additionally, a majority of the research on how to support and prepare for a transitioning transgender student consists of case studies and/or is from the perspective of a parent, researchers, or existing data, but fails to survey school professionals, particularly school psychologists and/or school counselors. This is problematic because the prevalence of transgender students is rising and since school psychologists and counselors are in a unique position to help LGBTQ+ students, in particular transgender and gender queer students (Arora, et al., 2016). Therefore, this study seeks to interview school professionals in order to determine what effective practices/policies schools are implementing to support and meet the needs of
transgender and gender queer students, what issues arise with these practices/policies, and what is hindering school professionals from utilizing the other practices/policies that past research has shown to be effective in supporting transgender and gender queer students. Furthermore, this study seeks to gather information from trainers of organizations which help school professionals support transgender and gender queer students regarding their training process, populations served, and experience over time. The overall goal of this study is to shed light on the adversity that transgender and gender queer students face, to inform school professionals regarding the effective strategies/policies which help improve the safety and support of transgender/gender queer students, and to identify how to best implement these effective practices/policies, in the hopes that the school environment will become a safer place for these students.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research

This study utilized qualitative methods to gather information regarding school professionals’ experiences working with transgender and gender queer youth. Kazdin (2007) writes that “qualitative research … provides in depth and detailed descriptions of the phenomena of interest” (p. 29). This study sought to understand the participants’ experiences in order to determine: what effective practices/policies schools are implementing to support transgender and gender queer students, what issues arise with these practices/policies, and what is hindering school professionals from utilizing the other practices/policies that past research has shown to be effective in supporting these students. Therefore, conducting qualitative research appeared to be the best approach due to the fact that qualitative methods are used to understand how individuals or groups of individuals perceive, make sense of, and react to situations, such as social problems (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kazdin, 2007). Qualitative research also appeared to be the best fit approach for this study due to its flexible structure, focus on reporting a situation’s complexity, and goal of examining an issue related to oppressed individuals (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), in this case transgender and gender queer youth. Additionally, qualitative researchers will often use a theoretical perspective in order to provide an orienting framework for a given study; one such qualitative theoretical perspective is the queer theory, which involves research that communicates the experiences of individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

The intent of qualitative research is to develop a complex, yet holistic image of the topic being studied by collecting detailed information from participants, broadly exploring the central
phenomenon being studied, and presenting the varied perspectives of the participants in order to enhance one’s understanding regarding the topic of interest (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Morse & Richards, 2002). Researchers often utilize a semi-structured interview format to collect detailed information regarding participants’ experiences (Morse & Richards, 2002). Broad open-ended questions are asked to the participants and either planned or unplanned follow-up probes are used to supplement participants’ responses to the main questions; this process is conducted to understand the varied perspectives of the participants. These varied perspectives are then analyzed in order to inductively form themes and patterns hidden within these perspectives; this form of analysis is referred to as grounded theory (Morse & Richards, 2002).

**Participants**

*School Professionals*

School professionals who have had experience working with LGBTQ+ students, specifically transgender and/or gender queer students, were invited to participate in the study. These school professionals were required to have some involvement with transgender and/or gender queer students, whether that be case managing, counseling, or simply interacting with these students, for at least three months prior to being interviewed. In addition, the school professionals had to voluntarily agree to be audio-recorded in order to participate in the study. A total of (n=12) school professionals were provided informed consent, completed a demographic questionnaire, and were interviewed using the School Professional Interview Protocol (see Appendix). An exclusionary criterion was that school professionals who are retired and no longer working in any capacity would not be included in the study.

*Trainers*

Trainer participants included individuals who currently work for organizations which provide training to others regarding the LGBTQ+ community as well as how to make
environments, such as schools, more inclusive and supportive of the LGBTQ+ community. A small sample size of n=3 trainers was collected as an exploratory portion of the study to gather important anecdotal knowledge. Trainers who have been working for their respective organization and directly involved with the training of others for at least six months prior to being interviewed were invited to participate in this study. In addition, trainers had to voluntarily agree to be audio-recorded in order to participate in the study.

**Measures**

*Interview Protocols*

The primary researcher used the School Professional Interview Protocol and the Trainer Interview Protocol to serve as a framework for the interview process (see Appendix). Both the School Professional Interview Protocol and the Trainer Interview Protocol consisted of a brief demographic questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, and contained a total of 19 question items. In regard to the School Professional Interview Protocol, the demographic questionnaire comprised of 10 items which required a short written response, a rating type response, or a “Yes”/“No” response, and the semi-structured interview consisted of nine questions which requested verbal elaboration. In regard to the Trainer Interview Protocol, the demographic questionnaire comprised of 11 items which required a short written response, a rating type response, or a “Yes”/“No” response, and the semi-structured interview consisted of eight questions which requested verbal elaboration. The question items on the demographic questionnaire and the semi-structured interview for both the school professionals and the trainers were formed to examine the experiences of working with transgender and gender queer students as well as the nature of the school environment in supporting these students. All question items were reviewed by the primary researcher’s committee members as a way of ensuring the content reliability of the interview questionnaires.
Procedures

Participants were obtained using a convenience sampling method. A local expert in working with the LGBTQ+ community assisted with recruiting participants for the study. Due to this expert’s connections with school professionals who have experience working with LGBTQ+ youth, the primary researcher was able to connect with these individuals and ask them if they would be willing to participate in the study. Potential participants were contacted through this local expert directly reaching out to people he knew asking about their interest in the study and through the local expert’s connections reaching out to people they knew asking about their interest in the study. Those interested were asked to contact the primary researcher via phone or email to inquire more about the study. When contacted, the primary researcher introduced herself, the purpose of the study, and determined if the participants would be willing and able to partake in the study. Beyond direct referrals of this expert, snowball sampling was utilized, as needed, to obtain the desired sample size of (12) school professionals and (3) trainers. Four of the participants, three school professionals and one trainer, were obtained by a direct referral of the local expert. Seven of the participants, six school professionals and one trainer, were obtained through networking – using the local expert’s contacts reaching out to their own network of individuals. Finally, four of the participants, three school professionals and one trainer, were obtained using snowball sampling – contacts of already obtained participants.

Interviews occurred at a time and location mutually agreed upon by the primary researcher and the participant. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all but one interview took place virtually utilizing Zoom, an online video platform. The one in-person interview was conducted outside a local school. The primary researcher provided each participant with informed consent, which included consent to audio record as well as transcribe the interview, prior to engaging
participants in the study. Participants voluntarily agreed to participate in a single, one-on-one, interview with the primary researcher, lasting approximately one hour, either in person or over a video-based call.

Given participant consent, audio files were transcribed and then saved on the primary researcher’s personal computer as password-protected electronic documents. All research data, including written notes/responses, audio files, and electronic data files, will be retained for three years following the end of the data analysis, to enable time for publication of aggregate results. At that time, data transcription files, audio files, and written notes will be destroyed; paperwork will be shredded, audio files will be destroyed, and electronic files permanently deleted. During the time prior to three years after study completion, all hard copy data files will be stored in a locked box securely located within the primary researcher’s residence and all electronic data files will be stored in a password-protected file on the primary researcher’s computer. At no time will individual study data be available for public review.

**Interview Data Analysis Plan**

Data will be analyzed utilizing grounded theory to gather detailed knowledge from the participants, identify shared concepts among participants, discover themes, and then explore relationships between these concepts in order to better understand socially constructed reality (Morse & Richards, 2002). Participants’ responses to the interview questions will be coded in order to elevate the raw data to a conceptual level (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Open coding will be utilized to group similar data by coding concepts line-by-line and categorizing these concepts according to analogous words or phrases (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Scott & Howell, 2008). Axial coding will be utilized to link and organize these simplified concepts by identifying higher-level concepts, identifying relationships among them, and discovering emerging themes (Corbin &
Selective coding will be utilized in order to interpret the data through the development of relational conditions, interactions, and thereby explain the storyline (Scott & Howell, 2008). An effective way for novice researchers, such as doctoral students, to understand grounded theory analysis is to utilize specific methods, such as compiling responses to understand the connections among the discovered categories (Scott & Howell, 2008). Therefore, the primary researcher will compile participants’ responses and use the wordage of particular participants which appears to capture the overall thought process of all the participants and the themes discovered within the interviews.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

School Professionals - Participant Characteristics

Twelve school professionals voluntarily agreed to be interviewed for this study. The mean age of these school professionals was 49.3 years old (range: 39 to 72 years old). The sample of school professionals was 75% female (9 individuals) and 25% male (3 individuals). The higher proportion of females interviewed is likely explained by the fact that there is often a higher proportion of females working in the public school environment compared to males within society at large. The sample was 75% White, about 8% Asian, 8% African American, and 8% Hispanic.

The twelve school professionals comprised of seven different school districts (Highland Park, Piscataway, South Brunswick, West Windsor-Plainsboro, Newark, South Orange-Maplewood, and Moorestown) within three different New Jersey counties (Middlesex, Essex, and Burlington). The school professionals’ average length of time employed in the school setting was 17.9 years (range: 3 years to 40 years). Of the 12 school professionals, one is a behavior specialist, one is a school psychologist, one is an Assistant Principal, one is a Teacher Resource Specialist, one is a Director of Curriculum and Instruction, three are teachers (two current and one retired), and four are school counselors.

When asked to rate their amount of training in working with the LGBTQ+ community (particularly in regard to transgender and gender queer individuals), on a Likert-type scale, from “No Training” to “Lots of Training”, two participants reported they had “Minimal Training”, seven participants reported they had “Some Training”, and three reported they had “Lots of Training”. When asked about professional development trainings/workshops, all twelve of the
participants stated that they attended professional development training(s)/workshop(s) in regard to the LGBTQ+ community. However, six of these participants indicated that this training was not provided by the school district for which they work nor was it recommended by the school district; five participants indicated that this training was recommended and provided by the school district, and one participant indicated that this training was recommended by the school district but not provided by the district. Of the participants whose school districts recommended and/or provided staff with professional development training, one was from the Moorestown school district, one was from the South Orange-Maplewood school district, two were from the Highland Park school district, and two were from the South Brunswick school district. When asked to rate their perceived knowledge of transgender/gender queer individuals, on a Likert-type scale, from “Extremely Poor - 1” to “Extremely Good - 7”, six participants rated their perceived knowledge as “Good - 5”, four participants rated their perceived knowledge as “Very Good - 6”, and two participants rated their perceived knowledge as “Extremely Good - 7”.

Trainers – Participant Characteristics

Three individuals who currently provide training to others regarding the LGBTQ+ community voluntarily agreed to be interviewed as “trainers” for exploratory purposes of this study. The mean age of these trainers was 54.3 years old (range: 43 to 68 years old). The sample of trainers was 33.33% female (1 individual) and 66.67% male (2 individuals). Of these three individuals, two identified as “White” and one identified as “European-American”.

Two of these individuals work for an organization that provides training to others regarding the LGBTQ+ community (GLSEN), and one of the individuals provides training to others regarding the LGBTQ+ community, independently, through private practice work as a licensed psychologist. When asked to rate their amount of training in working with the LGBTQ+
community (particularly in regard to transgender and gender queer individuals), on a Likert-type scale, from “No Training” to “Lots of Training”, two of these individuals reported having “Some Training” and one individual reported having “Lots of Training”. When asked about professional development trainings/workshops, all three of these individuals reported that they have attended professional development training(s)/workshop(s) in regard to the LGBTQ+ community. When these three individuals were asked to rate their perceived knowledge of transgender/gender queer individuals, on a Likert-type scale, from “Extremely Poor - 1” to “Extremely Good - 7”, one rated their perceived knowledge as “Good - 5”, one rated their perceived knowledge as “Very Good - 6”, and one rated their perceived knowledge as “Extremely Good - 7”.

Interview Results

Overview

The twelve school professionals’ interviews were closely analyzed utilizing the coding process of Grounded Theory described by Corbin & Strauss (2008) and Scott & Howell (2008). To immerse herself in the data and generate emergent insights, the primary researcher listened to and transcribed each participant’s interview verbatim, as recommended by Patton (2002). Interviews were then closely examined as separate transcripts for notable words, phrases, and concepts, and analogous words/phrases across all the interviews were noted, a process that Corbin & Strauss (2008) as well as Scott & Howell (2008) refer to as “open coding”. The primary researcher created and developed a codebook (See Appendix) in order to further analyze the content of the participants’ interviews, and then compared the interviews amongst one another to identify shared concepts, common themes/sub-themes, and relationships among them,
a process that Corbin & Strauss (2008) as well as Scott & Howell (2008) refer to as “axial coding”.

To account for qualitative reliability, the primary researcher utilized the assistance of a second independent coder when analyzing the interview data, and calculated interrater agreement for each code. The average interrater agreement was 90.80% (range = 86.00% - 93.88%), and consensus was attained through discussion of any initial differences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Although Patton (2002) states that there is no given formula to determine significance of qualitative data or to address qualitative validity, he does provide recommendations for researchers. The primary researcher followed Patton’s (2002) recommendation to accurately represent the data by simply communicating what the data revealed given the purposes of the study, denoting authentic and credible results. Only concepts that were mentioned by multiple, at least two, school professional participants, were salient, and identified by both coders were used in creating the common themes.

Sixteen overarching, common, themes were identified among the school professionals’ interview responses. The sixteen themes can be categorized under queer theory, which was utilized as an orienting framework for this study and, as previously stated, focuses on conveying the experiences and perceptions of LGBTQ+ individuals, such as transgender and gender queer students. This study used queer theory as a framework for explaining the experiences of transgender and gender queer students from the perspective of the participants, school professionals and trainers. The sixteen themes can also be categorized under at least one of the three purposes of this study, which were: the effective practices/policies schools are implementing to support and meet the needs of transgender and gender queer students, issues that arise with these practices/policies, and what is hindering school professionals from utilizing
the practices/policies that past research has shown to be effective in supporting these students. Unless otherwise noted, the themes and sub-themes reported below were present in multiple, at least two, of the participants’ interviews. Although trainers were interviewed for exploratory purposes only, these individuals also identified some of the same overarching themes that the school professionals acknowledged, and thus their interview responses are reported to further support the overarching themes identified by the school professionals, also referred to as the participants.

In regard to the first purpose of the study, the effective practices/policies that schools are implementing to support transgender and gender queer students, participants mentioned two overarching themes: the importance of knowledge/understanding/normalization/education and twelve specific ways that school staff support these students - visibility/representation, inclusive curriculum/inclusive language, creating safe spaces for students – in general and using particular methods, the presence of a GSA or similar type of support group, involving the community and its members, providing counseling, referring these students to outside organizations/services, bringing speakers into the school, having workshops/professional development trainings, school staff members educating each other as well as getting/giving advice from/to each other, having specific plans/policies for transitioning students, and appropriately dealing with bullying incidents pertaining to transgender/gender queer students.

Relatedly, even though these are not necessarily practices/policies, participants described nine other means for how transgender and gender queer students are being supported in schools, composing nine of the sixteen overarching themes. These means of support include: valuing diversity within the school environment, the school community being accepting of the LGBTQ+ community, a school climate and culture described as: good/great, progressing, diverse, or
accepting/welcoming/supportive of the LGBTQ+ community, positive reactions from parents/others in relation to LGBTQ+ community/issues, using one’s power/privilege, LGBTQ+ issues being supported by school leadership, participants’ views regarding the transgender and gender queer community growing, becoming more knowledgeable and aware, positive changes in schools’ views regarding the LGBTQ+ community, and the noticed strengths of transgender and gender queer students. See Table 2 below for an overview of these themes and a quote that defines each theme.
Table 2
Theme Overviews and Related Quotes Pertaining to Purpose #1 of the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Purpose #1: Effective Practices/Policies Schools are Implementing to Support and Meet the Needs of Transgender and Gender Queer Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Knowledge/Understanding/Normalization/Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specific Ways of Supporting Transgender and Gender Queer Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visibility/Representation</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Signs / Signage / Posters / Flags / Stickers</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Advertising / Holding Events About the LGBTQ+ Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>- “Out”-School Staff Members / Employees</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inclusive Curriculum/Resources/Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creating a Safe Space of Support for Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Creating a Support System / Having a “Go-To Person” or Support System</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Making an Effort to Get-To-Know / Understand These Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Honoring the Student’s Identity (Preferred Name/Pronouns, Their Gender Expression)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Taking Students’ Confidentiality Seriously</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Empowering These Students / Giving These Students a Voice</td>
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<tr>
<td>f. Creating an Environment of Respect/Trust/Safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Bathrooms / Locker Rooms</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Handling of Electronic Database / Student Records</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presence of GSAs / SAGA-Type Group / Support Groups and the Benefit of These Groups</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Involving the Community (the town/district) and Its Members with LGBTQ+ Related Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“We also work with the parenting center, who also brings in many speakers to come talk to the community” (Participant #1)</td>
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Providing Counseling Services to Transgender / Gender Queer Students

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I’m also the school psychologist. So ... I see a lot of kids in my office for counseling” (Participant #2)</td>
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Referring Students to Outside Therapist/Organization

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“…I have a whole list of referrals of LGBTQ-friendly therapists and ones that specifically specialize in transgender and things like that” (Participant #9)</td>
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Bringing in Speakers (LGBTQ+ support organizations and/or individuals)

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“We also have Hetrick-Martin... and they'll have a space in the high school for our students to go to, if they feel they need any type of support” (Participant #1)</td>
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Workshops / Professional Development Trainings

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<th>Theme</th>
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<tr>
<td>“I began to do workshops for administrators” (Participant #4)</td>
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School Staff Members Educating Each Other

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<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I have several colleagues who come to talk to me and say, &quot;Is this right...?&quot; And that's good. They're aware of their gaps.” (Participant #6)</td>
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Getting/Giving Advice from/to Each Other

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<th>Theme</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tr>
<td>“That policy really worked in our favor because we could fall back on it and state what we needed to do... before that policy, no one would do it. So, that's why policy is so important.” (Participant #8)</td>
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Having a (Specific) Plan/Policy

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tr>
<td>“...there was some incidences... some kids were getting ugly and that was addressed by administration.” (Participant #2)</td>
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School Appropriately Dealing with Bullying Incidents

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tr>
<td>“...I would say that we have a very good climate and culture related to LGBTQ...&quot; (Participant #9)</td>
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- Changes Over Time

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<th>Theme</th>
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<tr>
<td>“...I would say that we have a very good climate and culture related to LGBTQ...&quot; (Participant #9)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“it's so funny because 10, 20, years ago, they'd [students] be like, &quot;Oh, Dr. [C] has a wife.&quot; [makes disapproving sound]. But now they're like, &quot;Ahh... Dr. [C] has a wife ! [makes giggle sounds]. That's so cool.&quot;” (Participant #6)</td>
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Positive Reactions from Parents/Others in Relation to the LGBTQ+ Community/Issues ➔ Positive Outcomes for Students

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>“I did have someone who... identified as a girl looked very much like a boy and happy as could be. Parents were super supportive, you know &quot;Do your thing&quot;. She lived ....how she wanted to live” (Participant #1)</td>
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Using One’s Power/Privilege

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<tr>
<td>“It's a school district of tremendous privilege, but they... think that they use the privilege to try to do good...” (Participant #5)</td>
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LGBTQ+ Issues Being Supported By the Top-Down (Leadership)

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I think the administration and the district have been very encouraging and proactive at telling teachers [how to send supportive messages / support students]” (Participant #12)</td>
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Growth and Increase in Knowledge/Understanding of Participants’ Views Regarding the Transgender and Gender Queer Population

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Well, I've certainly become more knowledgeable... I'm more knowledgeable, and I'm more supportive as a result of that, I hope...” (Participant #2)</td>
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Positive Changes in Schools’ Views Regarding Transgender and Gender Queer Population

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Oh yeah, yeah, obviously...” (Participant #8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“…So I think, yes, but I'm not sure ... it would have... if... legislation did not happen” (Participant #5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“… I think there may just be a greater awareness and openness” (Participant #12)</td>
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Ways transgender and gender queer students demonstrate strengths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“…gosh... every way possible” (Participant #8)</td>
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</table>
Theme: The Importance of Knowledge/Understanding/Normalization/Learning/Education

The importance of knowledge/understanding/normalization/learning/education theme is composed of two components. These two components are: 1) participants’ comments stating the importance of school staff and students being knowledgeable of, understanding, normalizing, learning, and providing education regarding the LGBTQ community and 2) participants describing in a positive frame of reference, how one enhanced/improved their or others’ awareness/understanding/knowledge regarding these students.

Seventy-five percent of participants (9 of the 12) and approximately 33% of trainers (1 of the 3) mentioned the importance of understanding, being knowledgeable, normalizing, learning, and educating.

“But you have to educate. Yeah. You have to educate. That's the only way to get around this” (Participant #2)

“I think certainly, having the background understanding, helps you when you have a child that you're working with” (Participant #7)

“as folks' understanding and knowledge increase, it's gotten much better” (Participant #6)

“I do think that if we really wanna create that safe environment, we have to start normalizing everything and anything LGBTQ straight from the beginning” (Participant #9)

“... the importance of visibility and having it become part of our natural, normal, discourse, academic curriculum, and all of that is hugely important” (Participant #11)

Approximately 42% of school professionals (5 of the 12) and approximately 33% of trainers (1 of the 3) described in a positive frame of reference, how their or others’ awareness/understanding/knowledge regarding LGBTQ students, particularly transgender/gender queer students, was enhanced/improved. This awareness/understanding/knowledge was improved by learning from others, such as other colleagues, students, or workshop presenters, and by getting the language to use/knowing the appropriate language to use.
“I think having GLSEN come out and do a full day training was super, super helpful.” (Participant #2)

“I was very actually inspired by my students ....I actually probably learned more terminology from them [her students] than anybody else” (Participant #10)

“... once I went through SEED training, I had the language and I felt so much more confident, going outside of even the work I was doing with my staff” (Participant #1)

Theme: How School Staff Have or are Currently Providing Support for Transgender and Gender Queer Students and the Importance of these Supports

The participants detailed several ways of how school staff have or are currently providing support for transgender and gender queer students within the school setting, and the importance of having these supports in place. The current supports present within the participants’ schools for these students include: visibility/representation, inclusive curriculum/inclusive language, creating safe spaces for students – in general and using particular methods, the presence of a GSA or similar type of support group, involving the community and its members, providing counseling, referring these students to outside organizations/services, bringing speakers into the school, having workshops/professional development trainings, school staff members educating each other as well as getting/giving advice from/to each other, having specific plans/policies for transitioning students, and appropriately dealing with bullying incidents pertaining to transgender/gender queer students.

Visibility/representation is the concept of having LGBTQ related topics present and visible within the school environment. Twenty-five percent of participants (3 of the 12) discussed the importance and presence of visibility/representation in general, such as with comments like,

“I think that ... visibility.... is hugely important” (Participant #11).

Participants described three ways in which the school incorporates visibility/representation of the LGBTQ+ community within the school environment. These three ways are through: having
signage/posters/flags/stickers, advertising/holding events for the school community about the LGBTQ+ community, and having “out” faculty members/school employees.

Approximately 92% of the participants (11 of the 12) noted having signage/posters/flags/stickers and the importance these play in supporting LGBTQ students.

“[we’re] very open with the signs” (Participant #10)

“...I have rainbows coming out, coming out the ying-yang in my office… I have a poster-sized Safe Space sign outside my office... I have PRIDE flags, I have trans flags....” (Participant #3)

“…putting a whole display; we've had a little art gallery in the building... So when those things exist... it lets them know that they're part of the norm of what a typical high school looks like” (Participant #8)

Approximately 42% of participants (5 of the 12) indicated that their school advertised and/or held some type of LGBTQ-related event.

“And we built, [person] and I, a LGBT community festival, or some sort of title like that, with workshops, lunch...” (Participant #4)

“this year, we were going to do that big event... ... I had gotten GLSEN New Jersey to come and table at the... you know, it was like, I was trying to get all this stuff...” (Participant #11)

Fifty percent of participants (6 of the 12) noted having “out” faculty members present within the school and how this presence helps to support LGBTQ students.

“So we actually have a gender queer board member, which is huge, right?” (Participant #1)

“we have outwardly gay and lesbian staff members” (Participant #7)

“there's a lot of out faculty, or not a lot, but certainly there are some, and they are, they're helpful.” (Participant #8)

Inclusive curriculum/inclusive language refers to the participants’ beliefs regarding the importance of implementing an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum in schools and utilizing an inclusive language. Participants described how they or other school staff members are:
implementing an inclusive curriculum, providing LGBTQ-related resources for students, and utilizing inclusive language within the classrooms/the school. Approximately 83% of participants (10 of the 12) explained how they or other school staff members are implementing an inclusive curriculum. Twenty-five percent of participants (3 of the 12) mentioned providing LGBTQ-related resources for students, and 25% of participants (3 of the 12) specifically mentioned utilizing inclusive language in the classrooms.

“It's inclusive in my curriculum; to talk about it. We talk about gender being a social construct.” (Participant #8)

“I will bring in the topic as part of my Spanish curriculum... I will bring in articles or things that are related to LGBTQ issues” (Participant #11)

“I worked with them on embedding… LGBTQ literature. And so for me, I literally spent about $500-$600 on making sure that I had books that represented who they were” (Participant #5)

“And I stopped saying boys and girls, like... when I was teaching... ‘Cause you’d... have kids in the middle who are like, "Where do I go? " ... that made me wake up and be like... "Alright this is, this is not right” (Participant #1)

Another way participants believe that transgender and gender queer students are currently being supported in school is through the use of creating designated safe spaces. Participants mentioned creating designated safe spaces in general as well as particular ways in which they or other school staff members created a safe space for these students. The particular ways in which safe spaces were created for these students include: creating a support system for the student/having a “go-to” person, staff members making an effort to get to know/understand the student, such as through one-on-one conversations, honoring the student’s identity (chosen name and pronouns), taking the student’s confidentiality seriously, empowering the student/giving them a voice, and creating an environment of respect/trust/safety which involves the
bathroom/locker room procedures as well as the handling of students’ information in the electronic database.

Approximately 58% of participants (7 of the 12) mentioned creating safe spaces in general and the importance for these students to have a safe space.

“that really help students who are questioning or transitioning. To have a place.”
(Participant #12)

“I’ve had situations where students were not out to their families at all, and so school was their safe haven” (Participant #6)

Approximately 58% of participants (7 of the 12) discussed how transgender and gender queer student are supported by having a support system or a “go-to” person within the school.

“We have certain people ear-marked and designated as initial go-to people”
(Participant #3)

"... like who's their go-to person... ... If I'm not available, who's the backup person”
(Participant #10)

Approximately 33% of participants (4 of the 12) expressed providing support for these students making an effort to get to know/understand them. Additionally, 50% of the participants (6 of the 12) described how they provided support for these students through one-one-one conversations with them.

“we have really been working a whole lot on, understanding the kids before us”
(Participant #1)

“But I have done a lot of individual conversations.” (Participant #8)

Approximately 67% of participants (8 of 12) explained the importance of honoring students’ identity in creating a safe space for transgender and gender queer students.

“I think just that teachers make a very concerted effort to use their correct name and use the correct pronouns” (Participant #7)
“I am careful to honor their name, and their identity, and their desire to be addressed by their chosen name and gender, and I'm very careful to not mis-gender students”  
(Participant #11)

Two other specific ways in which participants believe safe spaces were created for transgender and gender queer students were through staff taking students’ confidentiality seriously and empowering these students/giving them a voice. In regard to student confidentiality, approximately 17% of participants (2 of the 12) highlighted the importance of student confidentiality and taking it seriously in order to protect the safety of their students.

“...but I have to be, I have to pretend to be somebody else at home [Quoting a student]”, And that's another reason why we take confidentiality very seriously when it comes to working with these students”  (Participant #3)

In regard to empowering students, approximately 58% of participants (7 of the 12) discussed that school staff can support transgender and gender queer students by giving them a voice/listening to their voice as well as what they have to say, and letting them direct their transitioning process.

“I think what's happening now is...thankfully, there's a way of like, "Wow, we can actually ask the students what they think, and actually take their thoughts”  
(Participant #5)

“you just have to kinda again, amplify that child's voice”  (Participant #10)

“We... 100% follow a student wishes. So they [the students] have complete control and are in the driver seat”  (Participant #9)

Another way participants believe safe spaces were created for transgender and gender queer students was through creating an environment of respect/trust/safety. Approximately 58% of participants (7 of the 12) described making school an environment of respect/trust/safety, and the importance of doing so, in order to support as well as protect these students. This environment of respect/trust/safety was established by staff members respecting and building rapport with their students, being focused on protecting their students, creating a trusting
relationship with their students, and ensuring that their students feel safe and supported within the school.

“create an environment of respect and rapport with your students” (Participant #1)

“Like that was my main thing... How do we protect her?” (Participant #2)

“I know... that different students feel safe in sharing about their, you know, journey or coming out. I think often times it’s someone here in this building that is the first person that a student comes out to” (Participant #12)

Specific ways in which participants’ respective schools created an environment of respect/trust/safety for transgender and gender queer students comprised of the school’s inclusive bathroom/locker room procedures as well as their methods for handling students’ information in the electronic student database system.

In regard to the bathrooms, approximately 58% of participants (7 of the 12) indicated that their school has one or more gender neutral, all gendered, bathroom(s), one participant indicated that their school has unisex stalls, and one participant indicated that transgender and gender queer students can use the bathroom where they are most comfortable. Approximately 42% of participants (5 of the 12) stated that these students utilize the nurse’s office and three of these participants had also indicated that their school had gender neutral bathrooms.

“We have all gender restrooms for everyone to use” (Participant #10)

“we always used the nurse’s office as a transgender bathroom. So any kid can use it.” (Participant #7)

In regard to the locker rooms, approximately 17% of participants (2 of the 12) mentioned gender neutral locker rooms; one of these participants’ schools already has gender neutral locker rooms in place and the other’s school is in the process of creating gender neutral locker rooms. Twenty-five percent of participants (3 of the 12) stated that transgender and gender queer students are allowed to use the locker room associated with their gender identity and 25% of
participants (3 of the 12) declared that these students are allowed to use whatever locker room facility where they are most comfortable.

“...They have gender neutral locker rooms” (Participant #2)

“I'm 99% sure that they go to the locker room that they identify as” (Participant #1)

“And it also even comes down to bathrooms and locker rooms too. I'll say to student, "Okay, here's what you can do. Your bathroom, based on your biological sex, bathroom based on your gender identity, or a neutral bathroom for you to use...” (Participant #3)

In regard to the methods for handling students’ information in the electronic student database system, 50% of participants (6 of the 12) specified that transgender and gender queer students are able to have their chosen name in the school’s electronic information system and approximately 17% of participants (2 of the 12) expressed currently trying to have students’ names on Zoom reflect their chosen name rather than their legal name given school’s continued remote format.

“... we have a document record system, and you can update their gender identity for that, you don't need to match, which is good in New Jersey, you don't need to have the birth certificate or any other matching documentation match... Technically you do not [need parent permission]” (Participant #10)

The presence of a Gender-Sexualities Alliance (GSA) or similar type of group is yet another way participants noted that school is supporting transgender and gender queer students. When asked how transgender and gender queer students are supported in school, seven of the twelve participants (approximately 58%) mentioned the school having a GSA. Furthermore, 25% of participants (3 of the 12) and approximately 67% of trainers (2 of the 3) highlighted the supportiveness of a GSA and its helpfulness for these students.

“there is a GSA” (Participant #8)

“we have an active GSA” (Participant #9)
“the supportiveness of... our GSA was amazing” (Participant #5)

“a lot of teachers came and said, ... "Oh, that's such a great thing that you're doing [starting the GSA] because... my child, when they went to high school there was nothing like this for them... my child did not have the advantage of having [a GSA]” (Participant #11)

Another way participants explained that transgender and gender queer students were being supported was through the involvement of the community (the town/district) and its members. Involvement of the community and its members entailed the school having the community aware and involved with LGBTQ-related issues, the school community spreading the message regarding the importance of LGBTQ issues to the community, and the school staff communicating with and providing support to students’ parents thereby supporting the students. Twenty-five percent of participants (3 of the 12) described making the community aware of/involved with LGBTQ-related issues and spreading a positive LGBTQ message throughout the community, and approximately 42% of participants (5 of the 12) mentioned supporting their transgender and gender queer students by communicating with and providing support to parents/the students’ family.

“We also work with the parenting center, who also brings in many speakers to come talk to the community” (Participant #1)

“when our local library, was open... they even have a GSA at the local library. So it's not just a school thing, it's a community thing.” (Participant #3)

“I always offer to talk to the parents for them...” (Participant #7)

“we always... we try to get them to a place where we can partner with the family, 'cause then we can provide services too” (Participant #9)

Another current outlet of support participants stated that transgender and gender queer students have within the school setting is the opportunity to receive counseling services, either in individual or group format. Fifty percent of participants (6 of the 12) noted how they or some
other school mental health professional (social worker, psychologist, or counselor) supported these students by offering counseling services.

“I'm also the school psychologist. So ... I see a lot of kids in my office for counseling” (Participant #2)

“I offer on need” (Participant #10)

Similarly, participants discussed that another way they and other school professionals support these students is by referring them to LGBTQ-based organizations/for outside therapeutic services. This method of support was acknowledged by 50% of participants (6 of the 12).

“I also refer students to the HiTOPS in Princeton, because the HiTOPS in Princeton runs... runs groups.” (Participant #3)

“...I have a whole list of referrals of LGBTQ-friendly therapists and ones that specifically specialize in transgender and things like that” (Participant #9)

Participants also expressed that an additional way the school supports these students is by pairing up with an LGBTQ organization, having the respective organization, or having individual speakers come to the school to speak to/provide training for staff/students. Two participants (approximately 17%) explained how their schools paired up with LGBTQ organizations, Hetrick-Martin and HiTOPS, respectively, and have given these organizations a space within the school in order to support their LGBTQ students. Approximately 33% of participants (4 of the 12) described how their school had an LGBTQ organization come into the school to conduct trainings for staff/speak with staff/students, and approximately 33% of participants (4 of the 12) stated how they had organized for individual speakers to come into the school to talk with students and hold trainings for staff members.

“We also have Hetrick-Martin... they've paired up with us. And their whole job is to support LGBTQ students... and they'll have a space in the high school for our students to go to, if they feel they need any type of support” (Participant #1)
Relatedly, participants highlighted the importance of professional development trainings/workshops for staff members in order to support transgender and gender queer students. The importance of professional development workshops/trainings for the entire school staff was also emphasized by all three of the trainers. The school professional participants mentioned themselves attending trainings/workshops, running trainings/workshops for their fellow colleagues, and the school staff, or subdivisions of the school staff receiving training regarding the LGBTQ community. Approximately 33% of participants (4 of the 12) talked about them, personally, attending trainings/workshops regarding the LGBTQ community, approximately 42% of participants (5 of the 12) spoke about themselves being responsible for running trainings/workshops for their school staff, and approximately 42% of participants (5 of the 12) talked about the school staff, or certain subdivisions of the school staff (e.g. administrators, guidance department, etc.) receiving training regarding the LGBTQ community.

“So I will attend workshops as they come up, I will attend trainings as they come up, I will talk to people, I will listen to people...” (Participant #3)

“I did a whole year of SEED training with administrators” (Participant #1)

I began to do workshops for administrators” (Participant #4)

“We're really good at doing professional development, period” (Participant #10)

“We've definitely had training. We even had GLSEN in one day for a full-day training” (Participant #9)

Another way participants identified that they or other school staff members are supporting transgender and gender queer students is by the staff educating each other through
getting/giving advice from/to each other on how to work with these students. Participants noted four methods for how they educate each other. These four methods are: asking questions on how to handle certain situations, giving staff members examples of what gender-neutral language/phrases they could say and how to treat these students, staff members collaborating with each other in order to support these students, and staff knowing what staff member(s) are knowledgeable regarding LGBTQ issues/what person to go to with any questions or concerns. Approximately 33% of participants (4 of the 12) described staff members asking questions on how to handle various situations and giving staff members examples of gender-neutral language/phrases that they could use. Two of the participants (approximately 17%) discussed staff members collaborating with one another to help support transgender/gender queer students, and 25% of participants (3 of the 12) mentioned knowing what staff member(s) to go to with LGBTQ-related questions/concerns.

“I have several colleagues who come to talk to me and say, "Is this right…? And that's good. They're aware of their gaps.” (Participant #6)

“we try to do as much modeling of the... just gender-neutral speech...” (Participant #3)

“I've done conversations with teachers who've had a trans student where I said change your language” (Participant #8)

“teachers come together and kind of clue, each other in, just so that we can be aware of a variety of issues when students come in” (Participant #12)

“they [teachers] know right away to let a guidance counselor know, so the guidance counselor can reach out to the student and the family and try to get our procedure in place” (Participant #9)

Another means of support participants stated that transgender and gender queer students have within the school setting is through the develop and implementation of specific plans/policies for how the student will transition within the school environment. Approximately 42% of participants (5 of the 12) discussed the use of a gender (identity) support plan and
specific policies in place to support these students. Participants emphasized the helpfulness of these plans, ensuring that staff members knew about these plans/policies, and the need for having such plans/policies. The helpfulness of having a specific policy and school staff, students, and parents knowing about these policies was also highlighted by one of the three trainers.

“We have gender support plans...It's a very thorough plan - to talk about how that experience is gonna go for them... so this is from gender spectrum... like a day-to-day plan and it includes very different scenarios” (Participant #10)

“That policy really worked in our favor because we could fall back on it and state what we needed to do.... before that policy, no one would do it. So, that's why policy is so important.” (Participant #8)

“we can make sure that teachers are informed, that they include the preferred names and appropriate pronouns in the sub-plans... This way any substitute for that class is going to... is going to utilize the correct name and pronouns” (Participant #3)

“policy is always there, but because legally, you have to be there. So that's a really good thing” (Participant #6)

“...we showed a video ... and it was the perfect balance of explaining it and showing both sides, but making you see why you need to have these policies and support transgender students” (Participant #9)

A final way participants expressed that transgender and gender queer students are currently supported in school is by how the school deals with and reports bullying incidents of these students. Twenty-five percent of participants (3 of the 12) mentioned bullying incidents and how they believed that the bullying incidents were handled/addressed by administration/the filing of HIB reports appropriately.

“We have the HIB and they follow up on it…” (Participant #2)

Theme: Diversity: Its Importance and Need to be Discussed in School

The theme of valuing diversity and its importance was represented by participants discussing liking diversity, such as with comments indicating positive associations with high levels of diversity and more negative associations with lower levels of diversity. Seventy five
percent of the participants (9 of the 12) mentioned diversity and its importance. Some participant quotes that highlight this theme include:

“We are very racially diverse, economically diverse, socially diverse...I don't find it to be a place where people are outwardly hostile to people who look different, who express themselves in any way in a different manner” (Participant #9)

“One thing that’s nice about [participants’ school’s town] is the huge diversity that we have” (Participant #11)

“we're a pretty diverse community to start with, and we have every bit of diversity that you can possibly think of... I think ... people choose to come to the community that we're in because of the diversity and how comfortable they feel within it” (Participant #1)

“... And all your recognition is White, Anglo-Saxon, men, with privilege. Is that your gold standard? ... this is something you need to address, this is something you need to honestly address... because we all think we're White, and you're not... look at who’s in your building... How your school is set up.” (Participant #4)

*Theme: The Acceptance of the LGBTQ Community: The Need for it and Its Importance*

The theme of acceptance and its importance was represented by: participants mentioning the school community’s acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community utilizing terminology such as “acceptance”, “recognition”, “supportiveness”, “openness”, positive comments regarding acceptance, such as liking acceptance, being pleased with the level of acceptance/improvement in the level of acceptance, and stating a positive change (improvement) in the level of acceptance within society overall. Approximately 83% of participants (10 of the 12) addressed this theme of acceptance in terms of the school community, staff and students, accepting/supporting LGBTQ+ students, and approximately 33% of these participants (4 of the 12) described the level of acceptance/support in a positive manner, such as by using terminology like “great” and “best”.

Some of the participant quotes that highlight this theme include:

“we didn't have a policy at that point, but we still knew that it was our duty as a school and as a community to be accepting and be accommodating of the needs of the students” (Participant #3)
“I think we're just kind of an environment where, it's just, there's a feeling I think of being more accepting” (Participant #7)

“... I think overall the staff is supportive of all of our students” (Participant #8)

“... to be crowned Mr. SBHS, as a transgender male, and the level of acceptance that that shows within the school and within your peer group... that your peers would look at you and they see you as a male, and they put a crown on you...” (Participant #9)

“...The best thing was that the kids accepted me... right away, and I didn't understand it, but I accepted it” (Participant #4)

Also within the theme of acceptance, some participants described a positive change in the level of acceptance, an improvement, not only within the school community but within society. This subtheme of improved acceptance levels of LGBTQIA students/the LGBTQ+ community was acknowledged by approximately 33% of the school professionals (4 of the 12) and approximately 33% of the trainers (1 of the 3). Participant quotes that highlight this subtheme include:

“so the national conversations gotten bigger in addition to these micro-environments” (Participant #2)

“So that's why I say things got better because there's so much out there... Social media has exploded, articles, we've got a lot of queer families in the district.” (Participant #8)

“And it's generational too, the more younger people come into the profession and administrative positions, and the more diverse people you get into those positions, the more you see things loosened up or being accepting of what's going on..” (Participant #11)

Theme: The Schools’ Climate and Culture in Relation to the LGBTQ+ Community

The theme of climate and culture in relation to the LGBTQ+ community refers to participants responses when asked to explain the climate and culture of the school environment in relation to the LGBTQ+ community. Participants’ responses were varied, however certain commonalities were present.
Twenty-five percent of participants (3 of the 12) referred to the climate and culture of the school as good or great.

“I have to say that the climate supporting our LGBT kids has been pretty good” (Participant #2)

“from what I'm told, is that it's a great climate and culture for LGBT students....” (Participant #8)

“I'm in three buildings. I'm in two middle schools and a high school. And I would say that we have a very good climate and culture related to LGBTQ…” (Participant #9)

Approximately 33% of participants (4 of the 12) described the climate and culture of the school as accepting/welcoming/supportive of the LGBTQ+ community.

“I find it to be generally, in certain spaces, accepting…” (Participant #11)

“the climate overall is... very uh aware... And, I would say very welcoming” (Participant #12)

“Our school does anything and everything that we can in order to provide an inclusive environment for any student in the LGBT community” (Participant #3)

Approximately 17% of participants (2 of the 12) expressed that the climate and culture of their school in relation to LGBTQ+ students are better than other places, and 17% of participants (2 of the 12) described the climate and culture as progressing or “a work in progress”.

“… I grew up in Jackson, New Jersey… compared to Jackson, it's like a thousand times better....” (Participant #5)

“I think overall, we're a lot better off in a lot of other districts in terms of acceptance and resources” (Participant #7)

“I guess the best way to describe it is that it's a work in progress...” (Participant #6)

“…I'm very happy with the progress.” (Participant #10)

Twenty five percent of participants (3 of the 12) explained the school’s climate and culture as very diverse, open to the diversity of the student body, or appreciative of the diversity within the school.
“the climate and culture... it's very diverse…” (Participant #10)

“...I think that we have just created ... a very open climate for diversity” (Participant #9)

Of these three participants, one also described the climate and culture as accepting/welcoming/supportive, one also described the climate and culture of the school as progressing/a work in progress, and one also described the school’s climate and culture in relation to the LGBTQ+ community as very good.

Within the theme of the school’s climate and culture in relation to the LGBTQ+ community a subtheme of changes over time was noted in several of the participant’s responses. The subtheme of changes over time refers to how the climate and culture of the school environment in relation to the LGBTQ+ community has positively changed compared to how it was in the past. Fifty percent of participants (6 of the 12) described how the climate and culture of the school has improved over time for the LGBTQ+ community. Furthermore, 25% of the participants (3 of the 12) elaborated that this change/these improvements have occurred within the past 10 years. Some participant quotes that highlight this subtheme include:

“So I would say, in the last 10 years, there's been an improvement... this one student kind of opened our eyes to it.... After A, you could be whatever, that was it” (Participant #2)

“There is some improvement, there really was...” (Participant #4)

“Like I don't know if 10 years ago, a student would have sent me an email saying, "Oh, I'm this student on your roster, but please call me this because I'm trans"... And that's great... that someone feels comfortable in doing that.... Whereas, I don't know if 10 years ago, a student would have felt that comfortable doing that” (Participant #11)

“it's so funny because 10, 20, years ago, they'd [students] be like, "Oh, Dr. [C] has a wife." [makes disapproving sound]. But now they're like, "Ahh... Dr. [C] has a wife ! [makes giggle sounds]. That's so cool."” (Participant #6)
Theme: The Positive Impact and Influence Parents'/The Community Have on the School

Parents’/the community’s impact and influence on the school represents the idea that the reactions and beliefs of parents/community members can positively impact the students’ well-being and the school’s ability to support the students. In other words, participants explained how positive reactions from parents/others led to better outcomes for the student, such as: student being happier, being able to use their chosen identity/pronouns, and being supported by school staff. Fifty percent of participants (6 of the 12) mentioned positive experiences with parents and how these positive experiences were connected to positive outcomes for the student.

Positive Experiences → Positive Outcomes

“I did have someone who... she identified as a girl looked very much like a boy and happy as could be. Parents were super supportive, you know "Do your thing". She lived ....how she wanted to live” (Participant #1)

“Some parents were like, "Whatever, we support you, whatever you wanna do"” (Participant #2)

“One of my very first students that identified as transgender... the parents approached me and said, "Okay, what do we do to get the teachers to start using the male pronouns and things like that'"”? (Participant #3)

“...her parents were very supportive, her parents were very proactive. They got us to workshop for the district” (Participant #7)

“the parent was very supportive of their child, they were completely... they were actually lobbying heavily for their child's ID to be changed to their chosen name” (Participant #11)

Theme: The Impact of One’s Privilege / Power

The theme of privilege/power and their impacts refers to concept that an individual or group of individuals can use the power/privilege that they have within society to help others, in this case the LGBTQ community. Twenty-five percent of participants (3 of the 12) explained
how their or others’ status in certain dominant/non-minority groups allowed them to help others with less privilege/power and improve the situation for those with less privilege/power.

“And I know my role as a privileged white woman, straight white woman, what I can do for other people, and so I have been, really, the voice of our marginalized groups.” (Participant #1)

“It's a school district of tremendous privilege, but they... I think that... they use the privilege to try to do good...” (Participant #5)

“You're getting to a point where there's people in positions of power who are using that power to try to make it safer and lift up others” (Participant #6)

Theme: The Importance of LGBTQ Issues Being Supported By the Top-Down

The importance of LGBTQ issues being supported by the top-down refers to participants expressing how helpful and crucial it is for school staff to receive support from individuals higher up within the school district, such as administrators, in order to effectively support transgender and gender queer students. This theme is composed of participants discussing how administrators have been helpful in supporting transgender and gender queer students and the appreciation for this helpfulness and support as well as participants explaining that supportive administration set a positive tone for the school/district in supporting LGBTQ students.

Approximately 67% of participants (8 of the 12) discussed how administrators have been helpful in supporting transgender and gender queer students and the appreciation for this helpfulness and support.

“...There’s .... no superintendent that I've seen, and I've been there for a long time, who has committed to making the lives of our LGBTQ community easier, and feeling more a part of the community. It's actually really amazing.” (Participant #1)

“...when this one student came out, administration was like, "Whatever we need. What do we need?" And they, they were wonderful” (Participant #2)

“So while they [administration] didn't have all the background, they found the tools that they could use to help the students” (Participant #10)
In regard to administration setting the tone for the school/district in supporting LGBTQ students, participants explained how when there was LGBTQ-supportive administration this led to the school staff being more comfortable and better able to support these students. Fifty percent of participants (6 of the 12) explained instances of how LGBTQ-supportive administrators helped to set an LGBTQ-supportive tone within the school by themselves stressing the importance of educating others regarding LGBTQ issues, and supporting the staff in supporting these students.

**LGBTQ-supportive administrators → Positive Outcomes (Support for students)**

“...Our CURRENT superintendent has been absolutely AMAZING with helping us to just continue to be progressive in these areas...” (Participant #3)

“I think the administration and the district have been very encouraging and proactive [at telling teachers / how to send supportive messages / support students]” (Participant #12)

“.... a top-down thing. The principal is like, "You don't have a job in our district, if you're not down with this. This is not a preference... This is what we do, and if you're not comfortable with it, then please seek employment someplace else" (Participant #9)

**Theme: The Growth and Increase in Knowledge/Understanding of Participants’ Views Regarding the Transgender and Gender Queer Population**

Transgender and gender queer students are better supported given the fact that school professionals’, the participants’, views regarding this population have grown, increased in knowledge-base, understanding, and awareness. When asked about how their views regarding the transgender and gender queer population have changed since they entered the school environment, all 12 of the participants and all three of the trainers exclaimed that their views have not changed but rather that the participant had grown, become more knowledgeable, became more aware, learned more about these students, and/or are continuing to learn. Two participants (approximately 17%) and one trainer mentioned how their views have grown, two
participants mentioned how they have become more aware, and two participants mentioned how they are continuing to learn. Approximately 58% of participants (7 of the 12) and two trainers expressed how they have learned more and have become more knowledgeable regarding the LGBTQ community, particularly transgender and gender queer students. Additionally, 50% of participants (6 of the 12) expressed how they have learned to understand more about the students they work with, learning from the students’ experience/struggles and working with them through their experiences/transition. Furthermore, approximately 42% of the participants (5 of the 12) noted how helpful this increase in understanding/knowledge has been and how appreciative they are for their learning experiences.

“I think they've grown...” (Participant #1)

“I've become more aware of things” (Participant #10)

“I was blessed to have this good training and... I'm not an expert by any means.... I still have a lot to learn” (Participant #9)

“Well, I've certainly become more knowledgeable... I'm more knowledgeable, and I'm more supportive as a result of that, I hope…” (Participant #2)

“Umm... Not in terms of... my acceptance. I've always accepted queer people. What has changed... is my knowledge base of it” (Participant #11)

“once I started having students, I guess, I've seen the struggles that they have and that has helped me understand where they're coming from...” (Participant #7)

“I learned a lot just hearing their story and their struggle and just learning from them about their experience” (Participant #12)

Theme: The Positive Change in the School’s Views Regarding the Transgender and Gender Queer Population

When asked about how the school’s views regarding the transgender and gender queer population have changed since they entered the school environment, approximately 67% of participants (8 of the 12) and all three of the trainers stated that they believe the schools views
transgender and gender queer youth in schools

have positively changed/improved. In regard to the change in the school’s views, four participants and two trainers noted that they believe this change was due to the demands from others, specifically state mandates/guidelines and the community; two participants and two trainers mentioned state mandates and two participants mentioned the community.

“...So I think, yes, but I'm not sure ... it would have... Would be per se if... legislation did not happen” (Participant #5)

“I think they've [the changes in the school] gone faster, because the community demands that they get it together” (Participant #1)

Fifty percent of participants (6 of the 12) and one trainer stated how the school’s views regarding transgender and gender queer students have increased in their learning, knowledge, and awareness level of LGBTQ+ issues, and in their openness to transgender and gender queer students as more students are transitioning and as the school has experience working with these students. Additionally, two participants (approximately 17%) mentioned how conversations regarding LGBTQ topics are occurring more within the schools, and two participants discussed how the school’s views regarding transgender and gender queer students are improving/making progress.

“I don't know if they've changed. I think there may just be a greater awareness and openness” (Participant #12)

“I even think of when I was a student there, like none of these conversations would have been happening.” (Participant #1)

“Uh, I would say we're getting there” (Participant #10)

theme: The Way(s) Transgender and Gender Queer Students Demonstrate Strength

Another way transgender and gender queer students are supported in school is through school professionals acknowledging the many strengths of these students. Participants discussed ten different ways in which these students display strengths; these ten forms of strength include:
patience/understanding, vulnerability/openness, continuing to show up for/go to school, coming out/transitioning in general, insisting on who they are/asserting themselves especially in an environment that may not be so open to the LGBTQ community, sharing with others what they are going through/what they need, having resiliency/bravery, having a support network/being around the right people, learning and being who they truly are (changing their lives), and having their own unique skills/talents.

One participant mentioned twice the strength of patience and understanding that these students display in terms of their mindset and overall demeanor, when she stated that they have, “a certain positive mindset… [and] just [their] learning to deal with disappointment in life” (Participant #10).

Two participants (approximately 17%) and one trainer described the vulnerability and openness that these students display in terms of being comfortable sharing their story and being open with others about their process.

“The vulnerability that they share...and the vulnerability and the... openness and the curiosity that they had to realize that they can go through this....” (Participant #5)

Fifty percent of participants (6 of the 12) and one trainer explained how that these students show strength by continuing to show up for school, continuing to go back to school, and staying focused on their schoolwork.

“they just keep getting up and they keep going” (Participant #8)

“They're consistently coming to school and trying their best” (Participant #12)

Approximately 33% of participants (4 of the 12) stated that these students demonstrate strength simply by coming out and transitioning in the school/in front of their peers.

“I think coming out is a sign of strength” (Participant #2)
“...to transition in front of peers, just the resiliency and the bravery and the courage that it takes in order to... do that” (Participant #9)

Approximately 58% of participants (7 of the 12) and one trainer highlighted the strength that these students insist on who they are and assert themselves, even in environments that may not be so open or supportive of the LGBTQ community or when they do not receive acknowledgement for who they truly are.

“they've kind of made a declaration that this is who I am, and they are not afraid to say it... they're not afraid to show who they are” (Participant #7)

“Even though we are in a political climate where it feels like every turn of the corner, something is... being taken away from the LGBTQ community. At the same time, I think that is fueling this desire to be completely out and in your face and proud” (Participant #11)

Approximately 33% of participants (4 of the 12) and one trainer stated that these students demonstrate strength by discussing and sharing with others who they are, what they are going through, and what they need.

“They really were able to teach people about who they were and what they needed, better than others who were adults in those positions to help” (Participant #4)

Approximately 42% of participants (5 of the 12) and one trainer discussed the strength that these students have in terms of the resilience and bravery that they display through their transitioning process, showing up, living, and being able to take disappointment.

“resilience just to show up every day” (Participant #1)

“You're talking a miserable kindergarten through fifth grade... then another three years of not much better in a middle school, and now thriving. I mean that's the definition of resilience” (Participant #8)

Approximately 58% of participants (7 of the 12) and one trainer talked about the strength these students show by having a support network and by finding/being around the right people, people that will support them and make them feel safe.
“they have found their person to anchor them, and to be there with them for whatever they need” (Participant #6)

“They find a lot of strength from each other” (Participant #11)

Approximately 58% of participants (7 of the 12) and all three of the trainers described the strength these students show by learning about themselves, being/affirming who they truly are and as a result change their lives.

“Just by... really... just by being themselves” (Participant #3)

“...a willingness to educate themselves and learn...” (Participant #2)

Approximately 42% of participants (5 of the 12) and one trainer mentioned the strength these students demonstrate by having their own unique talents/skills, such as being: outspoken/vocal, able to manage and deal with the challenges/disappointment they face, academically high performing, and creative.

“I think maybe sometimes they utilize a strength that they may have and it becomes maybe a little bit more pronounced because maybe that's what they wanna be identified as” (Participant #7)

“...participating in creative environments. I feel that they find a lot of strength in that...” (Participant #11)

In regard to the second purpose of the study, the issues that arise with the practices/policies that past research has shown to be effective in supporting transgender and gender queer students, participants revealed six overarching themes. These themes include: 1) the need for more of an understanding/knowledge-base of the LGBTQ+ community and the lack of understanding and ignorance regarding transgender and gender queer students and the problems this poses, 2) challenges with the way in which schools are currently providing support for these students in terms of inclusive curriculum, GSA clubs, the handling of bullying incidents, the schools’ bathrooms, and the handling of student information in the school’s
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electronic system, 3) the lack of/need for more acceptance for LGBTQ+ students within the school, 4) concerns regarding the school’s climate and culture, 5) not addressing LGBTQ+ related topics in the younger grades, and 6) the overall need to see more of 10 concepts that can make these students feel more safe in school. See Table 3 below for an overview of these themes and a quote that defines each theme.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Purpose #2: What Issues Arise With These Practices/Policies</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Understanding, Lacking Knowledge, or Being Ignorant Regarding the LGBTQ+ Community, Particularly Transgender and Gender Queer Students</td>
<td>- “We don't have the common language and framework to start from... And that's part of the problem” (Participant #6)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- “Like a lot of people don't have the intention of hurting somebody, but when you don't know and you don't understand and you haven't educated yourself, and grown yourself, you don't realize you're hurting somebody” (Participant #1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges with the Way in Which Schools are Currently Providing Support for These Students</td>
<td>“how to implement this new curriculum... about I think ... they [teachers] have more questions about that” (Participant #10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Challenges with Inclusive Curriculum</td>
<td>“When I first took over the GSA, there was a lot of pushback...And there's still a little of that today.” (Participant #11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lack of Support for GSA club</td>
<td>“I've heard kids say teachers don't do anything, teachers don't hear it, they're never around when it happens.” (Participant #7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Not Handling of Bullying Incidents Appropriately</td>
<td>“The only like gender neutral rooms we have are in the nurse's office, unfortunately” (Participant #9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bathrooms</td>
<td>“Genesis has to reflect their birth certificate name...” (Participant #11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Unsure of How Student Information is Handled in Electronic System/Not Knowing the Proper Way of Handling Student Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of Acceptance of LGBTQ+ Community</td>
<td>“…over time, I began to realize the LGBT was not mentioned, was not recognized.” (Participant #4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns Regarding Climate and Culture of School</td>
<td>“People say it’s good... but it's not good if you're not listening to the adult teacher telling you how to handle the situation, if that adult teacher happens to be trans” (Participant #8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Addressing LGBTQ+ topics at the Younger Grades Enough Thinking Kids are Too Young</td>
<td>“I think that's how you're gonna fix this... when little kids hear about this at a young age, just get educated on it...” (Participant #2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3 - continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What We Want and Need to See More of to Support Transgender and Gender Queer Students</th>
<th>One thing is cultural competency” (Participant #4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Cultural Competence</td>
<td>“I really, really think that we need to continue to focus on building community in general” (Participant #1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Building a Community</td>
<td>“create classroom cultures where they are safe, where there can be mutual respect and openness...” (Participant #12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Making Students Feel Safe</td>
<td>“it's gotta be led by kids, it's got to be led by kids...” (Participant #5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Giving these Students a Voice</td>
<td>“I think we should have... more continued training for staff as a whole” (Participant #8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Education/Training for Staff</td>
<td>“and so I think there's room for us to be doing more education-wise on kids and explicitly talking about that” (Participant #9)</td>
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<td>- Education for Students</td>
<td>“... I just say to parents ... get information... get educated” (Participant #2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Education / Learning for Parents</td>
<td>“provide...safe spaces or forums to have conversations that might be difficult... for the staff... for the community” (Participant #6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Having Open, Safe, Conversations for Staff/Community</td>
<td>“Need for making classrooms more inclusive and how to do so” (Participant #11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Implementing Inclusive Curriculum</td>
<td>“I think it's just representation... I think... on some levels... the trans community is quite often... The last to be kind of incorporated” (Participant #5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Visibility / Representation of LGBTQ+ Community</td>
<td>“A lot can be done from the administration. I believe that it works from the top down... and I think it needs to start there, because for me, superintendents set the tone for the entire district.” (Participant #4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Support from Leadership (Top-Down)</td>
<td>“I would like our like bathrooms to be labelled neutral or gender-neutral... when you say &quot;gender-neutral&quot;, that's an outward statement that you're supporting this community” (Participant #2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gender Neutral Bathrooms</td>
<td>“I feel like there need to be more protocols established for this [how to work with/support these students]” (Participant #2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Specific Plans/Policies/Protocols</td>
<td>“putting the policy out there and making sure the students are aware of it” (Participant #9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme: Not Understanding, Lacking Knowledge, or Being Ignorant Regarding the LGBTQ+ Community, Particularly Transgender and Gender Queer Students**

One issue with the practice/policy of the importance of understanding is comprised of two components. These two components are: 1) participants expressing a need or desire to increase one’s or others’ awareness/understanding/knowledge/learning of transgender/gender queer
students and explaining how this increase in awareness/understanding/knowledge will be helpful for these students and 2) participants noting incidents of individuals not understanding or lacking knowledge (being ignorant) regarding the LGBTQ community, such transgender and gender queer students, and how this poses problems or challenges.

Approximately 83% of participants (10 of the 12) expressed a need to build one’s or other staff members’/students’ awareness/understanding/knowledge/learning regarding transgender/gender queer students and/or the importance and helpfulness of awareness/understanding/knowledge. Participants noted that this awareness/understanding/knowledge/learning could be gained through: learning from others, such as other colleagues, trainings, or students, by getting the language to use/knowing the appropriate language to use, and by going through the experience with a transgender/gender queer student (being able to witness the human factor). One of the trainers also highlighted the importance/helpfulness of building one’s understanding through hearing about the experience of the transgender/gender queer student.

“we need to get training for our staff.” (Participant #2)

“there's a lot more to be done, there's a lot more education” (Participant #5)

“They [staff] felt like they needed maybe more training and how to infuse it [inclusive curriculum]” (Participant #7)

“I think even in the places where they [staff] weren't as educated on the subject, they recognized the need for it” (Participant #10)

“in terms of training or professional development that's an area that we could grow in... especially for the transitioning students, not just questioning gender identity, but actual transitioning” (Participant #12)

“We don't have the common language and framework to start from... And that's part of the problem” (Participant #6)
“I always say with any type of transgender training...You need the human factor, for people who don't get it, to get it. You need to see the pain of somebody talking about their experience... in order to make it make sense” (Participant #9)

Fifty percent of participants (6 of the 12) noted incidents of individuals not understanding, lacking knowledge, or being ignorant regarding the LGBTQ community, particularly transgender and gender queer students and how this poses problems or challenges for the student, whether the individual lacking understanding/knowledge consciously is aware of the problems they have caused or not. Approximately 67% of the trainers (2 of the 3) also emphasized the concept that many school professionals do not understand LGBTQ+ topics and how this lack of education/awareness can create challenges, or even danger, for these students.

“like a lot of people don't have the intention of hurting somebody, but when you don't know and you don't understand and you haven't educated yourself, and grown yourself, you don't realize you're hurting somebody” (Participant #1)

“They [school staff] just don't know that they're not being supportive because they're ignorant to some things. They desire to be supportive” (Participant #8)

“You [a school administrator] don't understand the root of the problem. And this was the same situation, it's like, "all spaces are safe spaces"... No, they're not. For some students, you have to deliberately make that statement...” (Participant #11)

Theme: Challenges with the Way in Which Schools are Currently Providing Support for These Students (Inclusive Curriculum, GSA clubs, Bullying Incidents, Bathrooms, Electronic System)

Another issue with the practices/policies that have shown to be effective in supporting these students deals with the challenges that school professionals have had with implementing an inclusive curriculum. Approximately 67% of participants (8 of the 12) and approximately 33% of trainers (1 of the 3) described various challenges teachers have with providing an inclusive curriculum within the classroom. These challenges are that teachers are unsure about exactly how to go about implementing an inclusive curriculum/inclusive language, staff members feel like it is easier to implement an inclusive curriculum in some subjects compared to others, and in
turn some teachers/classes are incorporating LGBTQ-related curriculum while others are not. Of the participants that mentioned certain subjects, all noted how LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum seems to be easier and is getting implemented within subjects of English and history, rather than in math and science.

“But there weren't specific guidelines on how much to do it [incorporating an inclusive curriculum]. It is very like... teachers were struggling with it 'cause there wasn't a lot of specifics, it was just more resources” (Participant #7)

“how to implement this new curriculum, about LGBT history. I think there, they [teachers] have more questions about that” (Participant #10)

“So I know the history teachers and the English teachers have said, "Okay this is pretty easy to incorporate ..” But then, I know, math and science, it's a little bit harder... .. It's like, how... "How do I bring this into discussion within the content and curriculum”” (Participant #12)

Participants also mentioned issues with regard to GSA clubs, the school’s handling of bullying incidents, the schools’ bathrooms, and the handling of students’ information in the school’s electronic system. In terms of the GSA club, it is interesting and important to note that two participants from the same school both mentioned instances of some school staff members not supporting the GSA. In regard to the handling of bullying incidents, two participants (approximately 17%) described how they felt like bullying incidents were not addressed or handled appropriately by the school staff. In terms of the schools’ bathrooms, one participant was unaware that there was a gender neutral/unisex bathroom facility for students, and one was upset by the fact that the only gender neutral area in the school was the nurse’s office. In regard to the school’s electronic system, 25% of participants (3 of the 12) were unsure of how students’ names were handled in the online information system and/or whether parent permission was needed for a name change, and approximately 17% of participants (2 of the 12) stated that the
electronic system reflects the students’ legal name and thus these students are not able to have their chosen name in the school’s electronic system.

“When I first took over the GSA, there was a lot of pushback...And there's still a little of that today.” (Participant #11)

“I’ve heard kids say teachers don't do anything, teachers don't hear it, they're never around when it happens.” (Participant #7)

“The only like gender neutral rooms we have are in the nurse's office, unfortunately” (Participant #9)

“Genesis has to reflect their birth certificate name...” (Participant #11)

Theme: Lack of/Need for More Acceptance of the LGBTQ+ Community

One of the challenges participants found with the support of transgender and gender queer students in school is the notion that participants have noted a lack of acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community within the schools. Participants discussed incidents demonstrating a lack of acceptance and expressed the need for more acceptance of LGBTQ+ students within the schools. This concept of schools displaying a lack of acceptance and the notion that tolerance is not enough - there is a need for more acceptance was acknowledged by approximately 42% of the participants (5 of the 12). Participant quotes that highlight this subtheme include:

“…over time, I began to realize the LGBT was not mentioned, was not recognized.” (Participant #4)

“one of the kids had taken out "George"[a novel about a transgender girl] and so the teacher... the classroom teacher took it away from him.” (Participant #5)

“I find that a lot of people are tolerant, which that's another issue. and I get that you're tolerant, but it needs to go beyond just tolerance” (Participant #11)

Theme: Concerns Regarding Climate and Culture of School

Participants also highlighted issues with the climate and culture of the school and how this negatively impacted the support of transgender and gender queer students. Approximately
17% of participants (2 of the 12) mentioned how the climate and culture of the school in relation to the LGBTQ+ community was not good or expressed concerns regarding the school’s current climate and culture in relation to this community. Interestingly, one of these participants also stated how from what he has been told, his school has a great climate and culture for LGBTQ+ students, but he clarified that he feels that it is not good.

“People say it’s good… but it's not good if you're not listening to the adult teacher telling you how to handle the situation, if that adult teacher happens to be trans” (Participant #8)

“…I think that in general, on the apparent surface, it tends to be accepting. I don't know how deep that really runs...” (Participant #11)

Theme: The Need for Discussing LGBTQ+ Topics in the Younger Grades – It’s Not Being Done Enough

The theme of discussing LGBTQ topics/issues in the younger grade levels addresses the participants beliefs that conversations regarding LGBTQ+ issues should be occurring at the younger grade levels, even at the elementary level. Approximately 58% of participants (7 of the 12) and approximately 33% of trainers (1 of the 3) noted this theme. Participants described the need and importance for these conversations and the education regarding the LGBTQ community to start at the elementary level, to give the students the language at this grade level, and the wish/hope that these conversation around LGBTQ issues, such as understanding identity, would happen earlier rather than only addressing it at the high school or middle school level. Similarly, two of these seven participants highlighted the notion that individuals feel like students at the elementary and even middle school level are too young to learn about LGBTQ-related topics.

“I think that's how you're gonna fix this... when little kids hear about this at a young age, just get educated on it...” (Participant #2)
“I wish conversations around any issue that deals with identity would happen earlier in schools.... conversations around LGBTQ... And then hopefully, the awareness starts earlier and then the advocacy can build earlier as well” (Participant #5)

“... need to extend to the lower grades as well” (Participant #11)

“...it doesn't seem like there's enough formal training at the elementary level” (Participant #9)

“people believed that middle school was too young. -- You can't talk about that stuff in middle school” (Participant #4)

“And I think at that time, that was two and a half years ago. The conversation was like, "Well, they might be a little bit too young or whatnot" ....” (Participant #5)

Theme: What Can Be Done To Help Transgender and Gender Queer Students Feel More Safe In School: What We Want and Need to See More of

Participants emphasized 10 concepts of what can and should be done to help transgender and gender queer students feel more safe in schools. Participants mentioned that while some of these concepts are currently being done in schools, some are not, and thus they wish to see more of all these concepts within the school setting. These 10 concepts include: cultural competency, building a community, making students feel safe, giving these students a voice, learning opportunities, inclusive curriculum, visibility/representation, support from the top-down, gender neutral bathrooms, and specific protocols/plans.

Two participants (approximately 17%) mentioned the need for more cultural competency within the schools by directly mentioning the need for more cultural competency or by mentioning the desire for the school to celebrate various cultural groups.

One thing is cultural competency” (Participant #4)

“Our district, as diverse as it is, we don't explicitly celebrate any one group... We don't even do Chinese New Year. Like we don't... And I know that's so... basic. Celebrating holidays is so basic with food... But... It's is step in the right direction” (Participant #6)
Two participants (approximately 17%) mentioned the need to make LGBTQ issues a community effort through wanting to build a sense of community within the school and wanting to involve the community regarding LGBTQ issues – receiving community buy-in.

“I really, really think that we need to continue to focus on building community in general” (Participant #1)

“...recognition of LGBT issues and concern, for parents, for community leaders, so that we have a buy-in, rather than... "Oh, well, that's not me”....” (Participant #4)

In regard to making students feel safe, participants emphasized creating/having a specific place within the school for these students to go, building relationships with these students by doing check-ins and respecting them, and having a Gender-Sexualities Alliance (GSA) within the school building. Fifty percent of participants (6 of the 12) and one of the trainers discussed the need for making students feel safe within the school; two of these participants and the one trainer mentioned having a specific place within the school, three of these participants mentioned relationship building/respecting these students/making these students feel comfortable talking with a staff member, and two of these participants mentioned having an active GSA.

“I think there has to be a place for our students to feel safe” (Participant #1)

“create classroom cultures where they are safe, where there can be mutual respect and openness in talking about, talking about these issues” (Participant #12)

“think having an active GSA or some variation of that” (Participant #9)

Two participants (approximately 17%) and two trainers mentioned the need to give these students a voice, indicating the need for these students to direct their transitioning process and to be involved/in control of this process.

“it's gotta be led by kids, it's got to be led by kids...” (Participant #5)

“We need them to be as much a part of this process as the staff, because they're the ones that are living it” (Participant #3)
All twelve of the participants emphasized the need for more learning opportunities within the school regarding LGBTQ-related topics. These learning opportunities included the need for: more training/education/knowledge-gathering opportunities for staff members, more education for the students, education/learning opportunities for parents, and having more open, safe, conversations for the school staff and community regarding LGBTQ issues.

Approximately 92% of participants (11 of the 12) and two of the trainers highlighted the need for the school to have more trainings/education/knowledge-gathering opportunities for the school staff. Five of these participants specifically mentioned the need for more trainings/workshops/professional development, four of these participants generally mentioned the need for more education/understanding/learning opportunities for staff, and two of these participants mentioned the need for more specifics/deeper level of understanding/knowledge.

“Well I think professional development for faculty and staff would be helpful.” (Participant #7)

“I think we should have whole-school training... more continued training for staff as a whole” (Participant #8)

“there has to be a lot more teacher education and understanding” (Participant #1)

“More, more learning on our part. Because... we do understand that we don't know it all.” (Participant #3)

“we’ve been educated... So that's what I'm saying, we're looking to take it to the next level...We have to monitor ongoing” (Participant #10)

Approximately 33% of participants (4 of the 12) and one trainer highlighted the need for schools to provide more education to the students regarding LGBTQ topics, and two of these participants mentioned in particular the need for more student education in the lower grade levels.

“and so I think there's room for us to be doing more education-wise on kids and explicitly talking about that” (Participant #9)
Twenty-five percent of participants (3 of the 12) discussed the need for schools to provide more education and learning opportunities for parents regarding LGBTQ topics, and 25% of participants (3 of the 12) as well as all three of the trainers emphasized the need and importance of the school having more opportunities to have open, safe, conversations for the school staff and community regarding the LGBTQ community, particularly the transgender/gender queer community.

“... I just say to parents ... get information... get educated” (Participant #2)

“provide...safe spaces or forums to have conversations that might be difficult... for the staff ... for the community” (Participant #6)

Another matter participants discussed that they would like to see more of within the school to support transgender and gender queer students is the implementation of inclusive curriculum. Approximately 67% of participants (8 of the 12) and all three of the trainers mentioned the need for LGBTQ-topics to be integrated more into the curriculum, for LGBTQ issues to be discussed more in the classrooms, and for teachers to infuse these topics right into the curriculum. Additionally, 17% of participants (2 of the 12) demonstrated frustration when inclusive curriculum was not provided.

“I can talk about in the classroom, I would like to discuss it much further particularly in readings” (Participant #12)

“Need for making classrooms more inclusive and how to do so” (Participant #11)

“...I can admit that my own classroom, while it was welcoming and comfortable and challenging, I didn't do enough to infuse history of trans and gender queer folks in into my curriculum.... And that's one of my biggest regrets.” (Participant #6)

Participants also described the need for more visibility/representation of the LGBTQ community, particularly that of transgender and gender queer individuals, within the school.
community. Fifty percent of participants (6 of the 12) highlighted the need for more visibility/representation in terms of the school making more of an open statement regarding the LGBTQ community, recognizing and exposing others to the LGBTQ community, representing the transgender community by having out staff members and through visual representation, such as signs and stickers.

“... I guess I would like to see more of a statement.” (Participant #2)

“I think it's just representation... I think... on some levels... the trans community is quite often... The last to be kind of incorporated” (Participant #5)

“There's no, there's not one person who's trans on our staff. Not one...So hiring...” (Participant #6)

Another topic participants discussed of what they would like to see more of within the school to support transgender and gender queer students is the need for more support from the leadership within the school, the administration/higher-ups. Approximately 42% of participants (5 of the 12) mentioned the need for staff to receive more support from the top-down in terms of expressing the importance and seriousness of LGBTQ issues, setting the tone for the school/district, and providing support to staff in supporting this students, especially when challenges arise.

“need leaders in the building... principals and assistant principals and whatever it might be, to really believe that this has to happen and this needs to change...” (Participant #1)

“A lot can be done from the administration. I believe that it works from the top down... I think it starts from the top down... and I think it needs to start there, because for me, superintendents set the tone for the entire district.” (Participant #4)

“... it needs to be something that is overtly stated and addressed. That it's not just like a side comment from counseling...” (Participant #11)

Participants also emphasized the need to fix the bathroom/locker room situation/policy within the school in order to support transgender and gender queer students. Approximately 33%
of participants (4 of the 12) and two of the trainers addressed the problem that gendered bathrooms/locker rooms create, the need to get rid of/fix these spaces, and the need to have labelled gender-neutral bathrooms.

“First and foremost, get rid of fucking boys’ and girls’ bathrooms” (Participant #5)

“I would like our like bathrooms to be labelled neutral or gender-neutral... when you say "gender-neutral", that's an outward statement that you're supporting this community” (Participant #2)

The tenth and final concept stressed by the participants of what can and should be done to help transgender and gender queer students feel more safe in schools is the need for the school to have a specific plan/protocol/policy in regard to their transitioning transgender and gender queer students. Approximately 58% of participants (7 of the 12) and two of the trainers described the need for a plan/protocols in order to know how the school/staff are going to support these students as well as the importance of ensuring that the staff and students are aware of the plan.

“putting the policy out there and making sure the students are aware of it” (Participant #9)

“there doesn't seem to be a policy. There's no deliberate policy being made” (Participant #11)

In regard to the third purpose of the study, what is hindering school professionals from utilizing the practices/policies that past research has shown to be effective in supporting transgender and gender queer students, participants mentioned five overarching themes. These themes are: cultural conflicts regarding the LGBTQ+ community, the negative impact/influence parents/the community have on the school’s ability to support these students, intersectionality and its associated consequences, the challenges in understanding gender fluid/gender non-binary, and the lack of leadership support leading to poor outcomes for these students. See Table 4 below for an overview of these themes and a quote that defines each theme.
Table 4

*Theme Overviews and Related Quotes Pertaining to Purpose #3 of the Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Purpose #3: What Is Hindering School Professionals from Utilizing the Practices/Policies Past Research Has Shown to be Effective in Supporting Transgender and Gender Queer Students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Conflicts Regarding the LGBTQ+ Community</td>
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<td>Negative Impact and Influence Parents/The Community Have on School’s Ability to Support These Students</td>
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<td>Intersectionality: The Importance of Discussing It and Its Associated Consequences</td>
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<td>The Challenge in Understanding Gender Fluid/Gender Non-Binary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of Leadership Support Leading to Poor Outcomes for Students/Lack of Support for Students</td>
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Theme: Cultural Conflicts Regarding the LGBTQ+ Community

The theme of cultural conflicts regarding the LGBTQ+ community depicts the idea that the acceptance/supportiveness of the LGBTQ+ community varies depending on an individuals’ membership to certain groups, such as sex, age, religious backgrounds, and ethnicity. Approximately 58% of the school professionals (7 of the 12) and approximately 33% of the trainers (1 of the 3) explained how particular demographic groups tended to be less accepting/supportive of the LGBTQ+ community. Approximately 57% of the school professionals (4 of the 7) mentioned challenges based on one’s sex and religious beliefs. Approximately 14% of the school professionals (1 of the 7) mentioned challenges based on one’s age group, and approximately 43% of the school professionals (3 of the 7) as well as approximately 33% of the trainers (1 of the 3) mentioned challenges based on ethnicity.

Participant quotes that highlight this theme include:

“I had a lot of white males who I was like... "Oh my God, why can't you get this"?" (Participant #1)

I noticed that over time.... that men teachers, in particular, withdrew... so that my … workshop … became more and more female... When you talk LGBT in a learning environment .... men express, "I don't feel comfortable," "I'd rather not," "Can I be excused because I have to do whatever," And they are let off.” (Participant #4)

“we have one girl who is Muslim, and her parents are dead-set against it” (Participant #2)

“we had a student ... an 8th grade student, and his parents are very, very, religious and you knew that this was not something that was gonna go over well with them” (Participant #7)

“so they [parents] were speaking in particular I think for the Muslim community, and feeling like this is not something that their children should be exposed to in school.... 'cause they were saying that their children ... were brought up that the LGBTQ was not an acceptable thing based on their religion.” (Participant #9)
“...for those kids that aren't comfortable being out... whether it's because of cultural issues, because we've had Muslim students, we've had Indian students come, and they're very fearful of their families finding out” (Participant #3)

“one student, who was a Caribbean, his family was from, I think, Haiti -- his parents were completely against the idea and the thought of it” (Participant #1)

[quoting a student]: “'You know... when I went to Nigeria, my uncle wanted to hold my hand and I was really uncomfortable”... so he's [a student] in Nigeria quite frequently and is growing up with that much culture in his family, and yet still in another country - our baggage that we put on him, followed him there” (Participant #8)

“I think it's maybe a little bit more challenging for some of the older generation to... to be as smooth [laughter] with it as some of those that are, um, a little younger and a little bit more progressive” (Participant #3)

Theme: The Negative Impact and Influence Parents/The Community Have on School’s Ability to Support These Students

Participants explained how negative reactions from parents/community members were connected to conflicts/challenges for the student as well as conflicts and concerns for the school’s ability to support these students. Seventy-five percent of participants (9 of 12) referenced negative experiences with parents/community members and how these experiences were related to problems for the student and challenges for the school staff in supporting these students. The impact and influence that parents have on these students, with supportive parents being helpful to these students and unsupportive parents leading to challenging situations for these students was also highlighted by one of the trainers. Some school professionals’ quotes that highlight this theme include:

Negative Experiences → Negative Outcomes

“one student... his parents were completely against the idea and the thought of it... And he was not doing well in school, and he was getting himself in trouble” (Participant #1)

“we had a student who was identifying as transgender ....the administrator said that this student could use the female bathroom and at a board meeting a couple of
community members were really up in an uproar about it, and said Absolutely not. This isn't going to happen...So the community members have been just a little bit of push back on that. " (Participant #2)

“...And some parents are like, "You don't know, it's a phase. I'm not putting you on hormones, we're not stopping anything, until you know better"... And that's been a conflict." (Participant #2)

“I call the grandmother… and the grandmother's refusing to come to school to pick him up. And I said if you don’t, they're going to send him to juvenile authorities or welfare or something,... I eventually got her to come in and she just said, frankly, ... "I don't want him back in my house" (Participant #4)

“It was tough because one of our students... was totally open with transitioning but didn't feel comfortable coming to [GSA] meetings because parent wasn't necessarily as open and as accepting” (Participant #5)

“One of the things that they're [school staff] afraid of, is parent response” (Participant #10)

“There was one student, where ... one parent was on board and one wasn’t, um, And it was hard” (Participant #12)

Theme: Intersectionality: The Importance of Discussing It and Its Associated Consequences

Intersectionality refers to the understanding of how different aspects of one’s identity (i.e. race, class, gender, etc.) are interconnected and impact how that individual is treated within society. This theme of intersectionality: its influence and importance of discussing it denotes participants’ beliefs regarding the importance/influence of intersectionality as well as the importance for intersectionality of individuals to be acknowledged and discussed in school, and the need for this to occur. Approximately 58% of participants (7 of the 12) referenced this theme.

“the intersectionality of our kids is like... unbelievable... like I had to do a lot of work with my staff in understanding the children before to them,” (Participant #1)

“I thought it was so important for these girls to see her, and hear her talk about what's it like to be black and queer at [school’s town]” (Participant #2)
“I'm thinking of the intersectionality of like race and of ethnicity, and then LGBTQ and then class... I think that is where the learning needs to be done.... their [individuals in the district] level of understanding of the intersectionality and the effects of it... I don't think they're as aware as they could be” (Participant #5)

“I had uh redesigned a unit focusing on the civil rights era... to really make sure... that all of those aspects, whether it be gender, racial issues, sexuality... that they are all within civil rights ...not just one but several of them, at the same time…” (Participant #12)

“This child did not know about the black and brown stripes and why it’s important... intersectionality between the LGBTQ movement and black and brown people...” (Participant #11)

Within the theme of intersectionality, there was a subtheme of one group struggling more than others. This subtheme is in reference to the idea that certain subgroups of transgender/gender queer students struggle more than other transgender/gender queer students due to other aspects of their identity, such as age, personality, race, sex, disability, etc. Twenty-five percent of participants (3 of the 12) described how they believe it’s more challenging for transgender/gender queer students who are older rather than younger, such as in the middle school age range, thereby highlighting the intersectionality between one’s LGBTQ identity and one’s age group. One participant noted how it may be more challenging for a transgender/gender queer student who also has some type of disability, and 50% of participants (6 of the 12) addressed the intersectionality between one’s LGBTQ identity and race; how it is more challenging for student who are transgender/gender queer and students of color. Twenty-five percent of participants (3 of the 12) stated how they believe it is more challenging for transgender/gender queer students who are assigned male at birth (AMAB), thus highlighting the intersectionality between one’s LGBTQ identity and one’s sex assigned at birth. Furthermore, approximately 17% of participants (2 of the 12) emphasized the challenge for black boys who are also LGBTQ, thus highlighting the intersectionality between one’s race, sex, and LGBTQ
identity. One of the trainers also noted the intersectionality between one’s race, sex, and LGBTQ identity and how it is more challenging for individuals who are black and assigned male at birth (AMAB). Some participant quotes that highlight the subtheme that it is more challenging for certain transgender/gender queer students depending on their membership to other identity groups (age, personality type, disability, race, sex, and race/sex) are reported below:

Age:

“...I think, what I'm finding in the higher grade, there's a lot more... Like bigger the kid, bigger and more in depth the problem is” (Participant #1)

“but I think it gets a little more uncomfortable, for trans students in particular, like the middle school age…” (Participant #9)

Disability:

“But this child was also a selective mute, so she could not, really could not, tell us anything... And we kinda had to, in many ways, ask the question and get yes, and nos, and things like that. So it was really, really difficult” (Participant #1)

Race:

“I definitely feel like our black LGBT students definitely need the most support” (Participant #2)

“... it opened my eyes that transgender students and students of color are in serious danger …” (Participant #4)

“I'm thinking of one student in particular; He was a Black, gay, student... I know that the kids say things to him, I know that he struggles” (Participant #6)

Sex (Assigned male at birth – AMAB):

“I feel with girls, you can get away with the whole Tomboy thing... But... there's nothing for a boy to identify as, or give a label to.... that makes sense or ... doesn't make them actually come out as gender fluid... it's a lot easier for a girl in that sense” (Participant #1)

“and you know, “faggot” is the word... the thing you go to when you want to hurt a boy.... Um, I don't hear it as much with girls, to be honest ....” (Participant #7)
"A lot of folks who I would identify as girls or female or young women are the ones who talk about being gender creative, gender expansive. It's still not so safe for our boys..." (Participant #8)

Race and Sex:

“our black males are my, that's my number one concern. Those are the kids I worry most about as a psychologist” (Participant #2)

“You'll see girls walking down the hall holding hands, but you'll never see boys doing it. You'll definitely never see black boys doing it” (Participant #8)

Theme: The Challenge in Understanding Gender Fluid/Gender Non-Binary

The challenge in understanding gender fluid/gender non-binary represents the idea that it tends to be more difficult for individuals to understand the concepts of gender fluid/gender queer/gender expansive, etc. and those whose gender identity is not exclusively masculine or feminine and/or embraces both masculinity and femininity. Approximately 33% of school professionals (4 of the 12) and approximately 67% of the trainers (2 of the 3) discussed this concept/theme.

“But sometimes it's really hard, it's really hard for people to understand, especially gender fluid” (Participant #1)

“the thing I think some of our teachers have problems with is when a kid wants to be called.... they or them. Like when they want no like gender connection to their identity... that's something harder for I think people to wrap their brains around, because it's just very afar from what we understand identity to be” (Participant #7)

Theme: Lack of Leadership Support Leading to Poor Outcomes For Students

A significant hindrance to school professionals being able to utilize the practices and policies that past research has shown to be effective in supporting transgender and gender queer youth is a lack of support from the leaders within the school district, such as the administrators. Participants noted that when there was administration who were not as onboard with LGBTQ issues this led to a poorer school climate and staff not being as comfortable or as able to support
these students. Twenty-five percent of participants (3 of the 12) explained instances of how administrators who were not as onboard or supportive regarding LGBTQ issues created a poorer school climate and a lack of support for LGBTQ students with bullying incidents being depreciated, and school staff being less comfortable and less likely to support LGBTQ students due to the lack of leadership support.

Unsupportive administrators → Negative Outcomes (Lack of support for students)

“Some... teachers, administrators and guidance counselors felt, "This [LGBTQ work] is needful because I see it in my building, but that was always tempered by the administration is not ready...” (Participant #4)

“...my second year teaching... and administration in that building...not this district, created and caused such fear in me... that it kind of stifled a lot of that [providing inclusive content in curriculum]” (Participant #6)

“So the times when they [administration] weren't [acting supportively], they were... not taking that identity into account, and in general, maybe just not acknowledging a student's identity…” (Participant #8)

Additionally, participants highlighted the negative impacts that changing administration had on the school’s ability to support transgender and gender queer students. Twenty-five percent of participants (3 of the 12) highlighted the impacts that a change in administration had on the school being able to support transgender and gender queer students in that an administration in constant flux or when there are changes in the administration it makes it more challenging to support LGBTQ+ students.

“And so... years ago there was a lot of tense moments... that sort of loosened up a little, and then it kinda went back to it a little... when we had some transitioning of administration” (Participant #11)

“Our administration is in constant flux... this is my 26th year, and I've had over 15 different principals... the administration ... it's just constantly changing, and they never seem to just get a grip [with supporting the students, such as through inclusive curriculum]... it's just so crazy there all the time” (Participant #8)
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The overall goal of this study was to provide a qualitative analysis of participants’ (school professionals and LGBTQ+ training professionals) experiences in working with transgender/gender queer students as to discover what effective practices/policies schools are implementing to support and meet the needs of these students, what issues arise with these practices/policies, and what is hindering school professionals from utilizing the other practices/policies that past research has shown to be effective in supporting transgender and gender queer students. In accordance with the qualitative approach known as Grounded Theory, the primary researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with various school professionals and trainers of organizations which provide training to others regarding the LGBTQIA+ community.

The interview results revealed several ways in which schools and its staff members are currently supporting transgender and gender queer students. These effective methods of support include:

- Having the LGBTQ+ community visible/represented in the school building
- Valuing and celebrating diversity
- Creating a climate/culture that is accepting of the LGBTQ+ community as well as noticed improvements with climate/culture
- Stressing the importance of knowledge and understanding of the LGBTQ+ community
- Having professional development trainings and bringing in speakers from LGBTQ+ organizations
- Having parental support/receiving positive reactions from parents
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- Utilizing an inclusive curriculum
- Having a Gender Sexualities Alliance (GSA) club
- Providing counseling and referring these students to outside providers
- School staff using their own power and privilege to advocate for and support these students
- Allowing students to use gender neutral restrooms or the restroom associated with their gender identity
- Allowing students to have their chosen name in the electronic student database system
- Having support from the school leaders
- Having/implementing specific transition plans for these students

Although the participants discussed many ways in which schools are currently supporting transgender and gender queer students, they also highlighted several issues with some of the current practices/policies used to support these students. These issues include: the lack of and need for more knowledge/understanding/learning opportunities for staff, students, and parents regarding LGBTQ+ topics, challenges with implementing inclusive curriculum, not addressing LGBTQ+ topics in the younger grades, a lack of support for GSA clubs as well as a need for more acceptance regarding the LGBTQ+ community, complications and need to improve the bathroom/locker room layout and the handling of student information in the electronic database system, and the need for specific policies/plans for students transitioning in school.

Correspondingly, participants identified five factors, overarching themes, that are hindering school professionals from properly supporting these students and using the practices/policies past research has shown to be effective. These five factors include:
cultural conflicts, negative reactions from parents regarding LGBTQ+ issues, the intersectionality of students, the challenge understanding gender fluid/gender non-binary, and the lack of leadership support. Given that participants acknowledged six overarching issues with the current practices/policies to support transgender and gender queer students and five hindrances in providing support for these student, important takeaways for school professionals based on this study’s findings as well as recommendations for schools are reported below.

**Interpretation of Findings:**

**Takeaways for Schools – What They Need to Know and Ways They Can Improve the School Environment For Transgender and Gender Queer Students**

Both past research and this study’s participants highlighted the importance and benefit of having diversity and acceptance of the LGBTQIA community within the school environment. Participants emphasized how having diversity within the school was good, and how an increase in diversity was related to the school community being more accepting and supportive of people who look or behavior differently, such as transgender and gender queer students, and those students feeling more comfortable within the school environment. Therefore, school districts should attempt to increase the diversity among their staff population, if possible. If the school’s staff and student populations are not very diverse, schools should still make an effort to celebrate diversity, through the recognition and celebration of different groups of people, based on culture, religion, race, ethnicity, sexuality/gender expression, etc. By acknowledging diversity, staff and students receive the message that diversity should be accepted and encouraged, and that we should not judge others based on factors such as race, class, sexuality, gender, family structure, etc. (Orr, et al., 2015).
The importance of diversity was also emphasized by participants’ comments regarding the need for more cultural competency, the need for more acceptance regarding the LGBTQIA population, particularly that of transgender and gender queer students, and the need for more visibility/representation regarding the LGBTQIA community with the school environment. Schools can improve/continue to improve the acceptance of their transgender and gender queer students by: recognizing the LGBTQIA population within the school community and exposing others to the LGBTQIA community, representing the transgender community by having out staff members and through visual representation, such as signs and stickers, making more of an open statement regarding the acceptance/support of the LGBTQIA community, and having/normalizing conversations regarding LGBTQIA issues at the school and community level.

Another important topic to discuss is the notion that there are certain groups of people or cultures that tend to be less accepting and supportive of the LGBTQIA community. This notion was mentioned by the study’s participants and has been noted by past research. Over 50% of participants described incidents of individuals who are older, identify as male, Muslim, and/or religiously conservative being less accepting and supportive of the LGBTQIA community and the school’s attempts to support these students. Similarly, past research has described how people who are older, male, adhere to Islam or conservative Christian religions, and/or identify with certain racial/ethnic groups, specifically African American or Latinx, tend to have more unaccepting/disapproving views of the LGBTQ+ community (Adamczyk, 2019; Higa, et al., 2014). Therefore, it is important for schools to keep these various identity groups in mind and recognize that individuals from any one of these identity groups, whether they are staff members or parents, may need more support or guidance from the school and education regarding the
LGBTQIA community especially in terms of why transgender and gender queer students, in particular, need to be accepted and supported within the school environment.

It is also important for schools to consider the impact and influence parents/families have on transgender and gender queer students. Participants highlighted how when parents were on board, this parental support aided in the ways the school could support the student and the student being happier and successful in school, whereas when parents were not on board the student struggled. The difference within the students, depending on the level of parental support, is nicely summarized by this participant:

“we had one boy... mom was on board... he [the student] wanted to wear leggings and long t-shirts, and she allowed him ... But when he ... stayed with dad, he wasn't allowed to at all. And... you could see the change in him, when he could wear what he wanted to wear, he had the best days, and then when he was at his dad's... how awful he felt. Um, he struggled for as long as I knew him” (Participant #1)

This noticed difference within students is supported by past research which states that support from one’s family, especially in relation to social transitioning, is associated with improved mental health outcomes for transgender or gender queer individuals (Eisenberg, et al., 2017). Therefore, it is critical that school staff are aware of the impact that parental support, or lack thereof, has on these students and determine the level of parental support each of these students have so they can provide the needed support to these students, especially those who lack support from home.

Both this study’s participants and past research discussed the helpfulness of using one’s privilege/power in order to help those with less privilege/power, such as the LGBTQIA community. School staff members who identify within certain groups which are non-
minority/dominant groups within society, such as white, heterosexual, and cisgender, can use their status within those groups to help those that have been oppressed within society, like transgender and gender queer students, and to interrupt and disrupt the experiences of discrimination that these individuals face. The actions of people with privilege helping those with less privilege and disrupting the oppressive systems within society is what Wernick et al. (2013) refer to as the primary principle of allyhood. Therefore, school professionals with power/privilege in the school environment should try to become aware of this power/privilege and attempt to use it in order to better support their transgender and gender queer students.

Intersectionality refers to the understanding of how different aspects of one’s identity (i.e. race, class, gender, etc.) are interconnected and impact how that individual is treated within society. Past research and the participants from this study highlighted the concept if intersectionality, particularly in regard to transgender and gender queer students who are also male and students of color. Research has indicated how transgender individuals of color whose sex assigned at birth is male have more challenging experiences and are often the targets of victimization and violence among the transgender population within the United States (Higa, et al., 2014; Wernick, et al., 2014). Similarly, this study’s participants also highlighted how it appears to be more challenging for transgender and gender queer students of color who are also assigned male at birth (AMAB), as they described that this subgroup of transgender and gender queer students struggle more in school compared to other intersectionality subgroups. Given this information, it is important for schools to be aware of the impacts that intersectionality has on students, to educate others regarding intersectionality, and to pay careful attention to transgender and gender queer students of color who are also AMAB, as this subpopulation may need more support.
Another important topic to discuss is the importance and need for knowledge/understanding/normalization of the LGBTQIA community and related issues. All of the participants emphasized that there needs to be more learning opportunities within the school regarding LGBTQIA-related topics. This demand for more learning opportunities pertains to the need for more training/education/knowledge-gathering opportunities for staff members, more education for the students, and education/learning opportunities for parents. This need for more learning opportunities is demonstrated by Participant #2 stating, “... you have to educate. Yeah. You have to educate. That's the only way to get around this” and “...if we really wanna create that safe environment, we have to start normalizing everything and anything LGBTQ straight from the beginning” and by the fact that 92% of participants discussed the need for school to have more knowledge-gathering opportunities specifically for staff.

One way schools can provide more learning opportunities for their staff is through trainings or professional development workshops, which were mentioned by participants and supported by past research. Participants stressed the need for schools to have more professional development workshops for the entire staff as they are not happening enough, if at all. They also highlighted the need for more refresher workshops for the staff as ongoing training for the staff to stay up-to-date regarding LGBTQIA issues and for new, incoming, staff members to receive LGBTQIA-related training. Relatedly, past research highlights the importance and benefit of professional development training; these LGBTQIA trainings/workshops raises staff members’ awareness and knowledge regarding gender variance and also increases the number of school professionals available to support LGBTQIA students (Klotz, 2015; Slesaransky-Poe, et al., 2013). This is particularly important as it has been shown that it is often more difficult for others to understand the concept of gender fluid/gender queer compared to transgender and since the
presence of supportive school professionals positively affects the school environment and students’ well-being and mental health (Eisenberg, et al., 2017; Singh & Kosciw, 2017). Additionally, past research and participants emphasized how one of the most influential components of professional development, and one of the best ways to truly understand the experiences of transgender and gender queer students and improve one’s strategies for working with them is to utilize experiential learning (Slesaransky-Poe, et al., 2013) and directly hear about their experiences, what some referred to as the “human factor”. This concept is demonstrated by this participant:

“Unless you go through it, unless you have... relationships with people, right? You're not gonna know. You can only know so much... Those only so much you can know from a book or what not” (Participant #5)

Therefore, when planning staff professional development trainings, schools should ensure that these trainings are offered at least once a year for the entire school staff, specifically cover topics pertaining to transgender and gender fluid/gender non-binary students, and incorporate personal stories/experiences of transgender and gender queer students, such as through something they’ve written or through the use of videos.

In regard to the need for more learning opportunities for students, schools can provide students with more education regarding LGBTQIA-related topics through the implementation of an inclusive curriculum and by ensuring that this LGBTQIA-inclusive curriculum/language is addressed at the elementary school level rather than waiting until the middle or high school level. Past research and this study’s participants discussed the need and benefit that inclusive curriculum and beginning LGBTQIA conversations at the elementary level have and can have on supporting transgender and gender queer students (Sadowski, 2016; Slesaransky-Poe, et al.,
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2013). However, it is important for schools to keep in mind the several challenges participants described with regard to implementing an inclusive curriculum. These challenges included: teachers being unsure about exactly how to go about implementing an inclusive curriculum or using inclusive language within the classroom, staff feeling like it is easier to implement an inclusive curriculum in some subjects (English and History) compared to others (Math and Science), and in turn only some teachers incorporating LGBTQIA-related topics in the classroom while others are not.

In terms of the challenges with implementing an inclusive curriculum and the need for schools to begin conversations regarding the LGBTQIA community at the elementary level, school should consider a few suggestions. Schools can provide more direct guidance on how staff can incorporate LGBTQIA-related issues into the curriculum through professional development trainings that specifically discuss ways of providing an inclusive curriculum especially for each subject. Schools can also provide all staff members with quick fact sheets or “crib notes” detailing ways of responding to students/frequently asked questions (Luecke, 2011) so that staff feel more comfortable supporting transgender and gender queer students and are better equipped to do so. Furthermore, schools can offer professional development workshops that discuss how to relay LGBTQIA topics at the elementary level and how to phrase LGBTQIA-inclusive language at this level in an age-appropriate manner. Schools can receive this information and more direct guidance for their staff by connecting with various LGBTQIA support organizations, such as GLSEN, PFLAG, and the Trevor Project to receive various resources and/or having these organizations conduct professional development workshops for the school staff.
Both this study’s participants and past research discussed the helpfulness of providing transgender and gender queer students with counseling services. Research mentions how school professionals can support these students by offering counseling services, either in individual or group format (Sadowski, 2016) and half of the participants noted how these students were supported by receiving counseling services with some school mental health professional and by being referred to LGBTQ-based organizations or to an outside therapeutic provider. Thus, it would be beneficial for schools to offer, and continue to offer, counseling services/referral recommendations to transgender and gender queer students. However, it is critical that school professionals do not “out” these students in the process of offering these counseling services and ensure that these services occur confidentially as even a single instance of “outing” can create danger and exclusion for that student (P. Connelly, personal communication, March 10, 2020).

In regard to ways in which schools can help transgender and gender queer students feel more safe in schools, it is important to highlight three specific methods discussed by the participants as problems and/or complications with each of these three methods were noted. These three methods are the presence of a GSA or similar type of group, gender neutral bathrooms, and the school’s electronic student database system. School professionals, particularly school administrators, need to be aware of the issues/complications mentioned by the participants as they contain implications for schools, and thus should be addressed/corrected, as applicable.

Two participants discussed incidents where they experienced a lack of support and/or pushback from school officials regarding the GSA, which is problematic since GSAs have been shown to improve the school safety and climate for LGBTQIA students (Klotz, 2014; Porta, Singer, et al., 2017). Therefore, school professionals, particularly those in administrative
positions, should consider the impact their opinions/behaviors have on GSAs as well as the students in this group and should try to be fully supportive of GSAs/similar types of groups.

In terms of gender neutral bathrooms, participants addressed the problem that gendered bathrooms/locker rooms create, the current need for schools to get rid of/fix these spaces, and the current need to have labelled gender-neutral bathrooms. This is critical for schools to consider given the fact that gender neutral bathrooms improve the safety and acceptance of the LGBTQIA community within the school environment (Porta, Gower, et al., 2017) and since many schools still utilize gendered, boys and girls, bathrooms/locker rooms, utilize the nurse’s office as the gender neutral bathroom/locker room, and/or have not labelled bathrooms as gender neutral or gender inclusive.

In terms of the school’s electronic student database system, it is important to touch on a few complications that participants noted. Although some participants did state that students are able to have their chosen name and preferred pronouns listed in the electronic student database system that the school uses, such as Genesis and PowerSchool, a few participants were unsure of how a student’s name is handled in the school’s electronic system and/or whether parental permission for a name change is needed. This poses a serious concern; all staff members should be aware of how the electronic system works and if a student’s name in the electronic system can be their chosen name as well as if parental permission is needed. School administrators should ensure that this is made known to their entire staff as well as to the students’ families, so that everyone is on the same page with what can be done. Another point of concern was that some participants stated that the electronic system reflects a student’s legal name and thus students are not able to have their chosen name in the school’s electronic system. This is concerning given that, in New Jersey, you do not need the student’s birth certificate or other documentation to
TRANSGENDER AND GENDER QUEER YOUTH IN SCHOOLS

match the name and pronouns entered into the school’s electronic system and you do not need parental permission. In other words, if the student would like, the chosen name and preferred pronouns can and should be entered into the school’s electronic database. In order to go about doing so, schools can maintain a copy of the student’s birth certificate and other identification documents reflecting the student’s birth name and sex under lock and key, while the student’s chosen name and gender/preferred pronoun(s) are entered into the electronic student information system (Orr, et al., 2015 & Trainer #3). School officials can connect with the electronic student database provider at the district level to allow the school to create attendance sheets, report cards, and other school-related documents using the student’s chosen/preferred name while the district still has access to the student’s legal (birth) name and gender. When it comes time to submit student information to the Department of Education’s database and in the event of state testing, school officials can simply switch the student’s chosen name/gender to the student’s legal name/gender just before submitting the student’s information, and they can pull the student’s test booklet prior to testing in order to correct it with the student’s chosen name and gender, respectively.

Another important topic to discuss in regard to this study’s results and the implications it poses for schools is the theme of top down support or support from school administration. Participants highlighted the importance of and need for having support from the administration in promoting LGBTQIA issues and creating an atmosphere within the school that is respectful and inclusive of the LGBTQIA community. The importance of having the support of school leaders, such as principals, the benefits of receiving this support, and school staff’s desire/need for this support has also been stressed by research (Abreu, et al., 2020; Mangin, 2020). This study’s participants clearly exemplified how the presence of administrators who were not
onboard with or supportive of LGBTQIA issues created a poorer school climate and a lack of support for LGBTQIA students within the school as indicated by bullying incidents being depreciated, and school staff being less comfortable and in turn less likely to support LGBTQIA students due to the lack of leadership support. Conversely, participants clearly illustrated how the presence of LGBTQIA-supportive administrators who stressed the importance of LGBTQIA issues and educating the school community regarding LGBTQIA topics, and who supported staff in supporting these students established an LGBTQIA-supportive tone within the school.

Furthermore, participants emphasized the need for more support from the leaders and administrators within the school district, such as superintendents and principals; participants expressed that there needs to be more support from the top down in terms of expressing the importance and seriousness of LGBTQ issues and in providing support to staff in supporting these students, especially when challenges arise. This need for more top down support is highlighted by this participants comment,

“*I think you need leaders in the building... principals and assistant principals and whatever it might be, to really believe that this has to happen and this needs to change... because in all honesty... nothing's gonna change unless.... you make these things real...*” (Participant #1)

It is also important for schools to have an individualized gender transition plan for their transgender and gender queer students. Participants emphasized the need for schools to have a plan/protocol for their transitioning transgender and gender queer students. They expressed the importance in having these plans and making sure that school staff and students are aware of these plans. The importance of specific plans/policies, such as individualized gender transition plans, has also been described by past research. Orr and colleagues (2015) as well as Kosciw & Diaz (2006) explain how developing and implementing comprehensive and well-defined transition policies, such as an individualized gender transition plan, for transgender students is
the most effective and influential way to protect the rights and safety of these students, and to ensure that the entering or re-entering process for these students is carefully constructed. Therefore, school professionals, specifically school leaders, should verify that they have a comprehensive plan in place for their transgender and gender queer students and confirm that the school staff and student body are aware of this plan.

It is noteworthy to mention the uniqueness of this study in that it interviewed various school professionals, such as school psychologists, counselors, and teachers, regarding their perspectives on working with transgender and gender queer youth. Most of past research on how to support these students consists of case studies and/or is from the perspective of parents or researchers but does not take into account school professionals’ perspectives. This study’s results revealed the unique experiences of school professionals in working with and supporting transgender and gender queer youth; interview responses noted the interesting challenge of school professionals in dealing with the differing impacts of working with supportive versus unsupportive administrators and/or parents.

Limitations of the Study

Recruitment Method and Participant Characteristics

The participants for this study included twelve school professionals and three trainers. The primary researcher distributed recruitment information for the study utilizing the assistance of an expert within the LGBTQIA community through his connections with school professionals. Beyond this direct referral process and use of a convenience sampling method, the primary researcher utilized snowball sampling, as needed, to obtain the desired sample size. Additionally, the group of participants interviewed for this study was fairly homogenous regarding gender and
race, consisting of mostly female-identified and White individuals. Therefore, in future research it would be beneficial to sample a more diverse group of individuals.

Method of Analysis

The primary researcher utilized a mono-method approach in gathering the study’s data, with the use of one interview with each participant, rather than utilizing a multi-method approach, and thus this may pose a possibility of bias regarding the results. In some cases, the primary researcher conducted interviews with participants, both school professionals and trainers, who she already knew/had previously met. Although none of the participants, school professionals or trainers, objected to this and all voluntarily agreed to take part in this study, it is possible that these previous relationships/dynamics may have introduced a level of response bias. Additionally, given the primary researcher’s own beliefs as to how transgender and gender queer students should be supported in school and the fact that the primary researcher conducted all the interviews herself, her personal beliefs may have inadvertently introduced a level of response bias for the participants.

Given the limitations described above, it is advised that readers interpret the study’s findings with a certain level of caution. Despite the limitations present within this study’s design and the suggestion for additional research within this area, this dissertation study is believed to provide noteworthy findings and recommendations for school districts/school professionals to consider.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to provide a qualitative analysis of school professionals' experiences in working with transgender/gender queer students as to discover what effective practices/policies schools are implementing to support and meet the needs of these students, what issues arise with these practices/policies, and what is hindering school professionals from utilizing the other practices/policies that past research has shown to be effective in supporting transgender and gender queer students. The participants involved in this study were 12 school professionals and three trainers of the LGBTQ+ community; the 12 school professionals were the main participants for the study whereas the trainers were interviewed for exploratory purposes of the study. Findings revealed important ways in which schools are currently supporting their transgender and gender queer students, what effective practices/policies they are utilizing to support these students, what issues or challenges arise with these practices/policies, and what factors are hindering school professionals from using effective practices/policies and from appropriately supporting these students. Some recommendations include the following: increase and/or celebrate diversity within the school community, have the LGBTQ+ community visible/represented, be aware of cultural conflicts that may conflict with the LGBTQ+ community and the impact that parental support, or lack thereof, has on these students, school professionals should be aware of their own power/privilege and the impacts of intersectionality, offer staff-wide, LGBTQ-related, professional development trainings at least once a year, implement inclusive curriculum and provide more guidance on how staff can incorporate LGBTQIA-related issues in the curriculum, remove gendered bathrooms/label bathrooms as gender neutral, allow students to have their chosen name and preferred pronouns in the electronic
database system, have more support from leadership in promoting the LGBTQ+
community/issues, and develop/implement individualized gender transition plans. Furthermore,
this study adds to past research as it highlights the unique experiences of school professionals
and the challenges they face in dealing with the differing impacts of working with supportive
versus unsupportive administrators and/or parents.

Despite the limitations of this study and a need for further research, the dissertation is
thought to provide meaningful results and recommendations for schools in order to make the
school environment a safer place for transgender and gender queer students.
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doi:10.4135/9781452230153


TRANSGENDER AND GENDER QUEER YOUTH IN SCHOOLS


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TRANSGENDER AND GENDER QUEER YOUTH IN SCHOOLS


TRANSGENDER AND GENDER QUEER YOUTH IN SCHOOLS


APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The School Professionals Perspectives’ on Working with Transgender and Gender Queer Youth Study

Study Purpose
This study explores school professionals’ perspectives on working with transgender and gender queer youth within the school environment using grounded theory. Before taking part in this study, please read the informed consent form below. Please check and initial “I Agree” and provide your signature and date at the bottom of the document if you understand the statements and freely consent to participate in an audio-recorded interview.

Study Method
This study utilizes interview-based research to explore school professionals’ perspectives on working with transgender and gender queer youth in order to determine: what effective practices/policies schools are implementing to support these students, what issues arise with these practices/policies, and what is hindering school professionals from utilizing the other practices/policies that past research has shown to be effective in supporting these students. The study is being conducted by school psychology doctoral student Courtney Cross of Rutgers University, and it has been approved by the Rutgers University Institutional Review Board. No deception is involved, and the study involves no more than minimal risk to participants (i.e., the level of risk encountered in daily life). Participation in the study will involve one one-hour interview, either in person or in a video-based call, conducted with the primary researcher, Courtney Cross.

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed upon participant consent. The goals of the interviews are to better understand what effective practices/policies schools are implementing to support and meet the needs of transgender and gender queer students, what issues arise with these practices/policies, and what is hindering school professionals from utilizing other practices/policies that past research has shown to be effective in supporting transgender and gender queer students. The recordings will be used so that the primary researcher may examine participants perspectives’ on working with transgender and gender queer students, and how the school, its’ policies, and/or other school professionals impacted one’s work with these students. Participation is strictly confidential. Participants will answer a series of questions, in an in-person or phone interview format. Some items may require an interviewer prompt for verbal elaboration of specific responses. Other items require the interviewee to provide a written, numerical, response or a “Yes”/“No” response. Individual responses will not be presented and/or linked to participants. The recordings will not include participant names or other identifiers to link participants to audio recordings.

Study Benefits
Participant time and consideration in responses are greatly appreciated and will contribute to the broad understanding of the care and emotional as well as physical safety of transgender and gender queer youth in the school environment, as well as what policies/strategies are in place to
improve the safety of these students. Please keep in mind when responding to questions, only consider your experiences in working with transgender and gender queer youth.

Participation is voluntary; refusal to take part in the study involves no penalty or loss of benefits to which participants are otherwise entitled, and participants may withdraw from the study at any time. Participants will not receive credit or monetary compensation. No risks have been identified with study participation. Study results will be provided to participants upon request.

Confidentiality
Interviews will be audio recorded upon consent of the participant. The recording(s) will be stored as audio files, will be transcribed, and then saved in password-protected electronic documents. All research data, including written notes/responses, audio files, and electronic data files, will be retained for three years following the end of the data analysis. At that time, data transcription files, audio files, and written notes will be destroyed; paperwork will be shredded, audio files will be destroyed, and electronic files permanently deleted. During the time prior to three years after study completion, all hard copy data files will be stored in a locked box securely located within the primary researcher’s residence and all electronic data files will be stored in a password-protected file on the primary researcher’s computer. At no time will individual study data be available for public review. Subjects may withdrawal from the study at any time and may request that interview data is not used in the study.

Contact Information
If participants have further questions about this study or their rights, or if they wish to file a complaint or concern, they may contact:

Primary Researcher:
Ms. Courtney Cross, Rutgers University
School Psychology Doctoral Student
crc198@gsapp.rutgers.edu

Dissertation Chair Person:
Dr. Shalonda Kelly, Rutgers University
Graduate School of Applied & Professional Psychology
152 Frelinghuysen Road
Piscataway, NJ 08854-8020
skelly@gsapp.rutgers.edu

Institutional Review Board
Rutgers University, The State University of New Jersey
Liberty Plaza / Suite 3200
335 George Street, 3rd Floor
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu
Your signature on this form grants the researcher named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The researcher will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

_____ I read the above information and provide my consent to participate in the School Professionals Perspectives’ on Working with Transgender and Gender Queer Youth Study by way of an audio recorded interview, and agree to have the audio recording transcribed.

__________ (Initial)

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<tr>
<th>Printed Name of Participant</th>
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APPENDIX B: SCHOOL PROFESSIONAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Demographics

1. Age: __________

2. Gender: Male Female Other: ______________

3. Preferred Pronouns: Him/His She/Her(s) They/Them/Their Other: __________

4. Ethnicity: White African Amer. Hispanic Asian Native Amer. Other: Specify________

(circle all that apply)

5. Location of Employment: School Setting Private Practice


7. When did you first become aware of the transgender/gender queer population?

____________

(Transgender referring to an individual whose gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth and Gender Queer referring to an individual who displays a gender identity and/or gender expression that is not considered typical for their sex assigned at birth)

8. Amount of training in working with LGBTQ community (i.e. regarding transgender / gender queer individuals)

   No Training Minimal Training Some Training Lots of Training

   Number of courses taken: ____________

   Number of conferences/workshops attended: ____________

   Number of (professional development) training sessions attended: ____________

   Number of years of on-the-job training: ____________

9. Have you attended professional development training/workshop in regard to working with this population?

   Yes No

   a. If yes, was the training provided by the school district you worked (or currently work) for?

      Yes No
b. Did your past (or present) school district recommend this training to you/other staff members?  
   Yes  No

10. How would you perceive your knowledge of transgender/gender queer individuals?

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Number of transgender/gender queer individuals known: ________________

Nature of the relationship(s) (i.e. student, acquaintance, colleague, friend, family, partner, self):

______________________________________________________________  (specify all that apply)

Researched the topic (i.e. googled definitions, read article(s), heard on the news, discussed with colleagues, conducted one’s own research, such as case study, thesis, dissertation, etc.):

______________________________________________________________  (specify all that apply)

Number of years of on-the-job training: ________________

Number of conferences/workshops/professional development sessions attended: ________________
Interview Protocol – School Psychologists

1. **Tell me about the climate / culture of your school?**
   a. Have you witnessed or heard of LGBTQ-related bullying / harassment incidents (verbal – neg comments etc. or physical)?

2. **Tell me about your experience working with transgender and gender queer students?**
   a. Main issues that came up? / how you handled it?
   b. Any unforeseen challenges?
   c. Suicidality – have you experienced this with these students?
   d. Any conflicts with administration / other school professionals?

3. **How did you support these students?**
   a. What therapeutic supports would you / did you offer these students?
      i. Advocating for the student
      ii. Counseling (individual and/or group)
      iii. Connect them with supportive staff in the building?
      iv. Connect them with school’s GSA
      v. Sought professional development
   b. Intervening in bullying incident(s)?

4. **Is your school doing anything to make the environment feel more safe for transgender / gender queer youth?**
   a. If “Yes”, Tell me more
   b. Are there school policies in place to protect and support transgender and gender queer students?
      i. What policies are in place in the school to protect transgender and gender queer students?
         1. Anti-bullying/harassment policies
         2. Structural factors (i.e. structural barriers to these students, such as bathrooms/locker rooms; GSAs present, etc.)
         3. Inclusive curriculum/policies?
            a. Coordinated School Health Programs
            b. Class/library resources?
         4. Handling of student identification documents
c. Involvement of Medical Professionals (pediatricians)

d. Supportive Staff
   i. Advocating for these students
   ii. Offering counseling/referring out
   iii. Educating others
   iv. SEL
   v. GSAs

e. Professional Development opportunities

f. Transitioning procedures – gender transition plan

5. Tell me about your thoughts on what things can be done to help TG / GQ students feel more safe in school?

6. Tell me about your experience working with other school professionals (e.g. administration / teachers) in trying to support these students?
   a. Are they unsupportive? / Are they supportive?
   b. Do they know of any of the policies in place to support these students?
   c. Do they follow any of the policies in place to support these students?

7. Have your views regarding transgender and gender queer students changed since you entered the school environment?
   a. If “Yes”, Tell me more

8. Have the school’s views regarding transgender and gender queer students changed since you entered the school environment?
   a. If “Yes”, Tell me more

9. What are some ways these student demonstrate strengths?
   a. Skills?
   b. Resilience?
   c. Supports present?
   d. Personality trait(s) that help?

***Sub-points under the bold questions are possible prompts for the primary researcher to ask if the interviewee cannot think of a response and/or for the primary researcher to use as follow-up questions to help the interviewee elaborate on responses ***
APPENDIX C: TRAINER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Demographics

1. Age: __________________

2. Gender: Male    Female    Other: __________________

3. Preferred Pronouns: Him/His    She/Her(s)    They/Them/Their    Other: ______

4. Ethnicity: White   African Amer.   Hispanic   Asian   Native Amer.   Other: Specify: ______
   (circle all that apply)

5. Location of Employment: School Setting    Private Practice


7. When did you first become aware of the transgender/gender queer population?
   ____________
   (Transgender referring to an individual whose gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth and Gender Queer referring to an individual who displays a gender identity and/or gender expression that is not considered typical for their sex assigned at birth)

8. Amount of training in working with LGBTQ community (i.e. regarding transgender / gender queer individuals)
   
   No Training    Minimal Training    Some Training    Lots of Training

   Number of courses taken: ____________

   Number of conferences/workshops attended: ____________

   Number of (professional development) training sessions attended: ____________

   Number of years of on-the-job training: ____________

9. Have you attended professional development training/workshop in regard to working with this population?    Yes    No
10. How would you perceive your knowledge of transgender/gender queer individuals?

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Number of transgender/gender queer individuals known: ______________

Nature of the relationship(s) (i.e. student, acquaintance, colleague, friend, family, partner, self):

__________________________________________________ (specify all that apply)

Researched the topic (i.e. googled definitions, read article(s), heard on the news, discussed with colleagues, conducted one’s own research, such as case study, thesis, dissertation, etc.):

____________________________________________________________ (specify all that apply)

Number of years of on-the-job training: ______________

Number of conferences/workshops/professional development sessions attended: __________

11. Rate your level of confidence in providing others with training regarding transgender/gender queer individuals?

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<tr>
<th>No Confidence</th>
<th>Low Confidence</th>
<th>Moderate Confidence</th>
<th>High Confidence</th>
<th>Very High Confidence</th>
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Interview Protocol – Trainers

1. **Tell me about your experience working with transgender and gender queer students?**
   a. Main issues that came up? / how you handled it?
   b. Any unforeseen challenges?
   c. Suicidality - have you experienced this with these students?
   d. Any conflicts with school staff (i.e. administration / other school professionals) or parents?

2. **Tell me about a typical training session**
   a. Format of the session (discussion; lecture based, a mixture)
   b. What topics are covered?
      i. Do the topics covered differ depending on the audience?
   c. How do audience members respond to the information covered?
      i. Do some individuals respond differently than others?

3. **Do schools typically approach your program or do you reach out to schools?**
   a. What schools have reached out to you / have you trained?

4. **What professionals from the school typically attend the training sessions?**

5. **Tell me about your thoughts on what things can be done to help TG/GQ students feel more safe in schools?**
   a. School policies to protect and support transgender and gender queer students?
      i. Anti-bullying/harassment policies
      ii. Structural factors (i.e. structural barriers to these students, such as bathrooms/locker rooms; GSAs present, etc.)
   b. Inclusive curriculum/policies?
      i. Coordinated School Health Programs
      ii. Class/library resources?
   c. Handling of student identification documents
   d. Involvement of Medical Professionals (pediatricians)
   e. Supportive Staff
      i. Advocating for these students
ii. Offering counseling/referring out
iii. Educating others
iv. SEL
v. GSAs
f. Professional Development opportunities
g. Transitioning procedures? Gender transition plan

6. Have your views regarding transgender and gender queer students changed since you entered the field?
   a. If “Yes”, tell me more

7. Have the school’s views regarding transgender and gender queer students changed since you entered the field?
   a. If “Yes”, Tell me more

8. What are some ways these student demonstrate strengths?
   a. Skills?
   b. Resilience?
   c. Supports present?
   d. Personality trait(s) that help?

***Sub-points under the bold questions are possible prompts for the primary researcher to ask if the interviewee cannot think of a response and/or for the primary researcher to use as follow-up questions to help the interviewee elaborate on responses ***
APPENDIX D: RESULTS CODEBOOK

1. **Importance of Diversity and/or discussing diversity in the school setting**
   Represented by:
   a) The school / school staff liking the diversity within the school
   b) Comments about diversity being discussed within the school setting
   c) Comments indicating positive associations (lack of judgments) with high levels of diversity and more negative associations (i.e. dislike) with lower levels of diversity

2. **Importance of the acceptance of others**
   Represented by:
   a) Demonstrating the school community’s acceptance of the LGBTQ community (as represented by mentioning acceptance, recognition, supportiveness, openness)
   b) Positive comments regarding acceptance (liking acceptance, being pleased with the level of acceptance / improvement in the level of acceptance using terminology like “great” – the level of acceptance and conversations about acceptance are great, “the best thing was the acceptance / being accepted”, etc.)
   c) Need for (more) acceptance (i.e. being tolerant isn’t enough)
   d) Change in level of acceptance (improvement)

3. **Certain Cultural Challenges / Issues regarding the LGBTQ community**
   As demonstrated by the acceptance/supportiveness of the LGBTQ varying based on an individuals’ membership to certain groups (cultural background, ethnicity, race, religion, biological sex, age group)

4. **Participants’ Responses to the Climate and Culture of their School, in relation to the LGBTQ community**
   a) Change over time

5. **Impact / Influence parents’ / community’s reactions of the LGBTQ community had on the student / the schools’ ability to support the student**
   a) *Positive reactions leading to positive outcomes* (for the student and/or school was better able to support the student, helped get things done, etc.)

   b) *Negative reactions leading to conflict / challenges / problems* (for the student, and/or within the school. Such as: expressed resistance, or that the student’s situation and/or schools’ ability to support the student were hard/tough due to the opinion of the parents/community, school having to address/respond to parental/community disapproval/unsupportiveness, and/or being careful/wary of this)
6. **Utilizing one’s privilege / power to improve the situation for others** *(could be an individual’s privilege / power or the privilege / power of a group (such as the school as a whole, a subpopulation within the school or a subpopulation within the community))*
   - Mentions terminology like “privilege” and/or “power” directly
   - Explains how their dominant/ non-minority status in a certain group (i.e. race, gender, age, etc.) – helped them accomplish something and/or improve situation for those with less privilege / power

7. **Importance of discussing with others intersectionality (the interconnection of various types of identities, i.e. race, class, gender); ALSO its importance / influence on how transgender / gender non-conforming students are treated in schools**
   a) One subgroup of transgender / gender non-conforming students struggling more in school / being less supported in school based on another type of (minority) identity
   b) All transgender / gender non-conforming students struggling equally, regardless of having other minority identities

8. **More of a challenge for people to understand those who identify as gender fluid or gender non-binary (statements that imply it is more challenging / harder to understand, need more practice with it etc.)**

9. **Importance of Knowledge / Understanding / Normalization / Learning / Education**
   - (1) Stating the importance of knowledge/ understanding / normalization / learning / education
   - (2) Describing, in a positive frame of reference, how one enhanced / improved their or others’ awareness / understanding / knowledge (learning) regarding these students
     Possible ways this awareness/understanding /knowledge /learning was attained:
     o Learning from others (colleagues, students, a training/workshop)
     o Getting the language to use / knowing the language to use / changing one’s language
   - (3) Expressing a need or desire to build one’s or other’s awareness / understanding / knowledge / learning of transgender / gender non-conforming students (and how this will be helpful for these students)
     Possible ways this awareness/understanding /knowledge /learning can be attained:
     o Learning from others (colleagues, students, a training/workshop)
     o Getting the language to use / knowing the language to use / changing one’s language
     o Going through the experience with a TG/GNC student (witnessing it/seeing it)
   - (4) Individual not understanding or lacking knowledge (being ignorant) regarding the LGBTQ community (such transgender and gender non-conforming students) and/or how to support these students and how this poses problems or challenges
10. How the school / school staff has or is currently providing social-emotional support for their transgender and gender non-conforming students and describing the importance of these things
   a) Visibility / Representation
      i. Signage / posters / flags / stickers posted
      ii. Advertising / holding events about the LGBTQ community
      iii. Out-school staff members / employees
   b) Inclusive Curriculum / Resources and/or using inclusive language
      i. Implementing an inclusive curriculum (talking about it in class)
      ii. Providing resources for the students
      iii. Utilizing inclusive language in school/classrooms
      iv. Positively describing the above and / or expressing a desire or need to provide inclusive curriculum and upset when it wasn’t provided
      v. Challenges with providing an inclusive curriculum / using inclusive language (i.e. unclear on how to go about this, easier to do in some classes compared to others, being done in some classes but not others, etc.)
   c) Creating a Safe Space of Support for students
      Making a safe space for the students and the importance of having this (safe) space
      i. Creating a support system / Having a “go-to person” or support system
      ii. Making an effort to get to know / understand these students
         1. Mentioning getting to know / understanding the students
         2. Having (1 on 1) conversations with these students
      iii. Honoring the student’s identity (preferred name/pronouns, their gender expression)
      iv. Creating an environment of respect/trust/safety
         1. Gender Neutral Bathrooms / Locker rooms
            a. Having gender neutral bathrooms / unisex bathroom or stall
            b. Using the nurses’ office as the gender neutral bathroom
            c. Can use the bathroom associated with their gender identity
            d. Having gender neutral locker rooms / working towards getting one
            e. Able to use the locker room of their gender identity
            f. ** Doing whichever of the above the student is most comfortable with
         2. Handling of electronic database / student records
            a. Able to give use student’s chosen name in information system
            b. Want / desire for this to be more visible / advertised to student / families (i.e. currently isn’t really being done)
            c. Unsure of how the name is handled in the records
            d. Working to get / having chosen name on Zoom
      v. Taking students’ confidentiality seriously
vi. Empowering these students / Giving these students a voice / Listening to their voice

d) Presence of GSAs / SAGA type group / Support groups
   i. Having GSA / SAGA type group present in the building
   ii. Explaining the supportiveness / influence / benefits of these groups and/or any positive comment regarding these groups
   iii. Describing the lack of support from the school for these groups as negative experiences

e) Involving the community (the town/district/) and its members
   i. Getting / keeping the community involved and aware of LGBTQ issues
   ii. Importance of having / building a community
   iii. Spreading the message of the importance of community and LGBTQ issues (to community members, including but not limited to parents)
   iv. Communicating with parents / Providing parents with support
      1. Supporting the student by supporting parents / dealing with parents according to students’ wishes/needs

f) Providing counseling services to transgender / gender non-conforming students (individual and/or group format; Counseling (aka talking with the student) done by a mental health professional in the school, a trusted adult within the school, or program within the school)

g) Referring the students to outside therapist/organization for additional support

h) Bringing in Speakers (Pairing up with LGBTQ support organizations AND individuals in, or familiar with, the LGBTQ community)
   i. These organizations having a space in the school
   ii. These organizations coming into the school to speak to staff/students/hold trainings
   iii. Individual speakers coming in to conduct trainings / speak to the staff/students

i) WORKSHOPS / (PD) trainings
   i. The participant attending trainings/workshops themselves
   ii. The participant running trainings/workshops for school staff members
   iii. School staff attending trainings/workshops; the school having training for staff

j) School staff members educating each other; Getting/Giving advice from/to each other
   i. Asking questions on how to handle certain situations
   ii. Giving staff members examples of things they could say / how they could respond to a student
iii. Collaborating with each other regarding the student(s) ; coming together to support the student
iv. Knowing what staff member(s) are knowledgeable of the LGBTQ population / knowing who to go to with their questions or concerns
k) Having a (specific) plan / policies
   i. Developing / creating / implementing these policies / plans
   ii. Mentioning these policies / plans and their helpfulness / why they’re helpful
   iii. Staff knowing about these policies / plans – doing refreshers for the staff on them
   iv. Discussing the need for having a plan / procedures
l) Dealing with Bullying incidents
   i. The challenges the school has with bullying incidents
      1. Changes over time
      2. Age group differences

11. The Need / Importance of starting LGBTQ topics in the younger grades (elementary)
LGBTQ topics include: using/ giving them the language, discussing LGBTQ issues in school/class, enhancing understanding of LGBTQ concerns, like identity, etc.
   a) Having these conversations at the younger (elementary level)
      i. It currently not happening (enough / at all)
      ii. Thinking kids are too young
   b) Importance / need for more training at this level
   c) Lack of LGBTQ connections / awareness / less visibility at the younger levels

12. IMPORTANCE OF LGBTQ ISSUES coming from the TOP-DOWN
   a) Administrators being helpful and supportive in working with these students \(\rightarrow\) positive outcomes
   b) The influence / impact they have in creating a safe space for these students and on the work their staff do
      i. The importance for staff in receiving support from the top-down
      ii. Administration setting the tone for the school / district (administrators that are supportive \(\rightarrow\) positive outcomes, whereas administration that is not as supportive or onboard with LGBTQ issues \(\rightarrow\) negative outcomes (poor school climate / culture; staff not able or as comfortable in supporting these students)
   iii. Impact changing of administration has on the school

13. What participants want to see more of: What things can be done to help TG / GNC students feel more safe in school
   a) More cultural competency
      i. Directly mentioning “cultural competency”
      ii. Celebrating various cultural groups – such as through the celebrations of holidays or notable days for various cultural / identity groups
   b) Building community / Involving the community
i. Using direct terminology like “build a community”; wanting the community to be more involved/wanting the community to get on board with LGBTQ issues – getting their “buy-in” / interest

c) Creating / having a safe space for students
   i. Feeling support; having support from others (i.e. through GSAs or relationships with someone in school)

d) Giving the students a voice (i.e. giving them control/ putting them in charge – in leadership-like role, and/or listening to them)

e) Learning Opportunities
   i. Education / Understanding / Knowledge Gathering / Training for Staff
   ii. More education to the students
   iii. More education / learning for parents
   iv. Having more open, safe, conversations for staff / community

f) Inclusive curriculum

g) Having Visibility / Representation of LGBTQ community in the school

h) Needing support from leadership – administration (top-down support)
   i. Expressing the seriousness/importance of the situation / LGBTQ issues

i) Provide counseling support / recommendations / Get outside counseling support

j) Gender neutral bathrooms
   i. Having them
   ii. Getting rid of gendered bathrooms / locker rooms

k) Need for a plan / protocol / policy

14. Participant’s views regarding transgender / gender non-conforming population
   a) Have grown / (learning) learned more / become more knowledgeable / increase in understanding / awareness
      i. Grown
      ii. Learned more / became more knowledgeable
      iii. Increase in understanding of these students / their experience
      iv. Increased awareness
   b) Continuing to learn

15. School’s views regarding transgender / gender non-conforming population
   a) Have changed – Yes!
      i. Due to demands from others
         1. State mandates / guidelines
         2. Community
      ii. Improved learning / understanding / awareness/ knowledge
         1. More Visibility
         2. More Conversations
   b) Progress / improvement

16. These students demonstrating strengths
   Specific ways they have demonstrated strengths:
      a) Patience / understanding
      b) Vulnerability / openness
c) Showing up for school / keep on coming back / staying focused on school  
d) Coming out / transitioning in general  
e) Insisting on who they are (asserting themselves) in an environment that isn’t or 
   may not be so open to LGBTQ  
f) Discussing / sharing with others what they are going through / what they need  
g) Having resilience (bravery / strength)  
h) Having / being around the right people (having / finding support)  
i) Learning and Being who they truly are (changing their lives)  
j) Having their own unique talent / strength / skill