Safe Schools Equality Index

Safe Schools Equality Index Advisory Group Members

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Introducing Equality Florida's "Safe Schools Equality Index"

What?

Equality Florida is proud to introduce a "Safe School Equality Index," a contemporary, essential and comprehensive tool designed to assist Florida's Department of Education, District Superintendents , School Board Members, PTA Leaders, District staff and partnering youth centered organizations to meet the rising needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender non-binary and questioning students in our K-12 schools.

As young people come out more often, younger and with more diversity, this Index serves as a critical navigating tool to ensure students are safe, stay in school and graduate successfully.

This index serves as a critical guidepost and contains a series of twenty-four carefully selected questions pertaining to gold star LGBTQ+ school-centered best practices. This Index serves as a tool to assist districts as they systematize and operationalize policies, programs, guidelines and practices for young people who identify as LGBTQ+.

This LGBTQ Statewide Equality Index was created after launching direct, collaborative and ongoing LGBTQ+ best practices work with almost every school district in Florida. It is the first tool in our nation where districts are working side by side with each other and with Equality Florida to ensure every single student who is LGBTQ learns, thrives, matriculates and graduates successful in K-12 schools.

Why?

According to the 2017 Center for Disease Control (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 15.7% of high school students in Florida identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or are unsure of their sexual orientation, with many individual districts finding higher percentages of LGB identifying students. Moreover, close to 4% of students in Broward County identify as transgender. Across the state these students outwardly identify negative situations that speak to the anti-LGBTQ+ culture common in many schools. As a result we have seen unprecedented findings that speak to the trauma and health concerns that disproportionately affect LGBTQ+ youth.

- 27.5% of LGB students in Florida were bullied on school property compared to 12% of their heterosexual peers.
- 22.8% of LGB students in Florida have attempted suicide compared to 4.7% of their heterosexual peers.
- 57.8% of LGB students felt sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 or more weeks in a row so that they stopped doing some usual activities compared to 23.3% of their heterosexual peers.

Who?

The Safe Schools Equality Index was envisioned and designed by Equality Florida. Soon after draft form was developed in spring of 2018, twenty-seven leaders from across the sunshine state formed an Ad Hoc Advisory Group from the field of K-12 education, universities, parent teacher organization (PTA) leadership and child-centered nonprofits. These leaders met, shared feedback and collaborated in order to bring the "Safe Schools Equality Index" to you as you commence the 2018-19 school year.

How?

The Equality Florida "Safe Schools Equality Index" serves as a comprehensive guide outlining nationally recognized LGBTQ policies and best practices. It will serve as a roadmap for all of Florida's districts that are eager to improve programs, and will help to create urgency for districts that may be unaware of the needs of our LGBTQ students and the staggering at risk mental health and substance abuse challenges faced by students in our schools.

A key and hallmark goal of the Safe School Equality Index is the Index serves as an internal and collaborative district measurement tool that gives schools the ability to understand how to achieve success in targeted areas of need, both structurally and at school building levels for LGBTQ+ children.

It is with the intention that District leadership work side by side and in collaboration with culturally competent partners to ensure our LGBTQ+ youth learn, enjoy school, thrive and graduate on time and successfully.

Thank you

Together we will ensure the success and well-being of all students; thank you for your leadership and collaboration!

Safe Schools Equality Index

Anti-Bullying Policies

Has the district adopted a policy prohibiting harassment, intimidation, and bullying against students that specifically enumerates protections based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression?

☐ YES
☐ NO

Non-Discrimination Policies

Has the district adopted a policy prohibiting harassment and discrimination against *students* that specifically enumerates protections based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression?

☐ YES
☐ NO

Next Steps

☐ Amplify the importance of ensuring the confidentiality of transgender and LGBQ students as guided by the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

☐ Review all forms used in your school, including registration, attendance and class lists, to include options outside the gender binary for students and their families.

☐ Ensure students' affirmed names are used on anything that could be seen by other students or families, such as class lists, grade postings or seating charts.

☐ Implement procedures and guidelines that ensure the use of a student's affirmed name in all unofficial documents such as yearbook, printed lists, ID badges, photos, diplomas, etc. Check that individual schools follow these procedures.

☐ Verify that computer filtering systems allow staff and students to search for LGBTQ resources to augment learning and well-being.

☐ Add links to your district website's safe schools section about LGBTQ students facts, district best practices and resources.

Has the district adopted a policy prohibiting harassment and discrimination against *faculty and staff* that specifically enumerates protections based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression?

☐ YES
☐ NO

Next Steps

☐ Initiate a LGBTQ and allied faculty and staff affinity group for the purpose of ensuring district LGBTQ faculty, staff, and allies feel valued and are treated equitably.

LGBTQ Visibility

Does the district support schools celebrating empowering holidays for LGBTQ youth? Examples include but are not limited to LGBT History Month, The National Day of Silence, National Youth HIV/AIDS Awareness Day and The Transgender Day of Remembrance.

☐ YES
☐ NO

Next Steps

☐ Celebrate LGBTQ events or holidays such as but not limited to the "Day of Silence," in April and "LGBTQ History Month" in October through school assemblies or awareness events.

☐ Host and encourage events and celebrations that are inclusive of LGBTQ youth in the district and school buildings such as November's Transgender Day of Remembrance, April's Day of Silence and June's LGBTQ Pride Month.

☐ Create a resolution through a school board champion to honor October's LGBT History Month. Include speakers and facts in a short board presentation. Other options include recognizing LGBT History Month with supplemental activities, participating as a district in a Pride parade, and recognizing further LGBTQ holidays.

Does the district monitor and categorize reported incidents of bullying and harassment that are a result of actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, while still maintaining a student's confidentiality?

☐ YES
☐ NO

Next Steps

☐ Ensure bullying complaint forms include a section on mistreatment pertaining to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression

Does the district annually collect data regarding student sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender identity (e.g. answering questions regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression?

☐ YES
☐ NO

Gay-Straight Alliances

Does the district allow students to form a gay-straight alliance ("GSA") or other similar clubs or organizations, at both the middle and high school level?

☐ YES
☐ NO

Next Steps

☐ Ensure that your middle or high school has a GSA that is supported, active, and resourced. Be sure that this GSA is allowed to have club posters and events around school, without facing unfair rules, stipulation, or harassment. The naming of the club is up to the discretion of the youth, not the sponsor or administration.

How many middle schools in your district have a GSA or other LGBTQ related club or organization?

- [ ] 0-25%
- [ ] 26-50%
- [ ] 51-75%
- [ ] 76-100%

How many high schools in your district have a GSA or other LGBTQ related club or organization?

- [ ] 0-25%
- [ ] 26-50%
- [ ] 51-75%
- [ ] 76-100%

Professional Development/District Climate

Has the district hired a LGBTQ Point Person at the district level or revised an existing position that ensures implementation of programs that promote safe, healthy, and inclusive schools for LGBTQ youth?

- [ ] YES
- [ ] NO

Next Steps

- [ ] Assign a LGBTQ Equity Liaison in your school to help educate staff and ensure updated knowledge about LGBTQ best practices. This person should receive specific training to aid them in their advocacy.

Does the district have a LGBTQ Critical Support and Procedures Guide that includes topics such as ensuring student confidentiality, how to address anti-LGBTQ language and how to create an inclusive environment, to help faculty and staff understand how to address various LGBTQ issues with consistency?

- [ ] YES
- [ ] NO

Next Steps

- [ ] Ensure school counselors, social workers, or other mental health professionals implement a support plan for transgender and gender non-binary students, including but not limited to affirming pronouns and name, substitute teacher notification, knowledge of gender affirmed unofficial documents such as student badges, etc. and equitable restroom, locker room and field trip procedures.
- [ ] Ensure educators feel supported by the administration and others in the school in their efforts to help create welcoming learning environments by addressing gender stereotyping, bias-based bullying and teaching to ensure gender literacy for all students.
- [ ] Connect with the district Homeless Liaison and Coordinator to offer cultural competency training and to ensure LGBTQ homeless youth have identity-sensitive intake procedures.
- [ ] Meet with SEL district and school building leadership to ensure best practices and trauma-informed LGBTQ care is incorporated in plans and procedures.
- [ ] Review district and school-based intake and registration forms to ensure inclusion of same sex parents.
- [ ] Verify that your district has an equitable dress code policy that is enforced fairly for all students regardless of gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, race, body size or body maturity.
- [ ] Embed LGBTQ tier one, two and three support, tools and best practices in yearly Department of Education (DOE) Mental Health Plans.
- [ ] Educate school nurses and health aides on LGBTQ sensitivity and cultural competence.

Does the district provide standalone professional development for employees focused on addressing unique needs of LGBTQ students, with the training rooted in best practices, cultural competency, intersectionality and inclusion of LGBTQ students, families, and staff?

☐ YES
☐ NO

YES	NO		YES	NO
☐	☐	**Administrators (Principals, Assistant Principals, District Staff Leadership)**		
☐	☐	**Teachers**		
☐	☐	**School Resource Officers (SROs)**		
☐	☐	**Front Office Staff**		
☐	☐	**Coaches**		
☐	☐	**Bus Drivers and Cafeteria Staff**		
☐	☐	**Counselors/Psychologists/Social Workers/Nurses**		

	YES	NO
Deans	☐	☐
Academic Coaches	☐	☐
Behavior Specialists	☐	☐
Nurses	☐	☐
Media Specialists	☐	☐
Athletic Directors	☐	☐

Next Steps

☐ Respect the confidentiality of all students, especially LGBTQ youth who may not be out at home or in the community.

Inclusive Curriculum/Materials

Has the district introduced an inclusive curriculum or literature that fairly represents diverse groups of individuals and families, including LGBTQ characters, authors, history, and/or stories?

☐ YES
☐ NO

Next Steps

☐ Integrate inclusive curriculum and literature in varied subject areas and, if a student identifies as transgender implement developmentally appropriate literature and conversations to ensure all students understand the importance of inclusiveness.

☐ Have your media specialist offer resources that include LGBTQ characters and literature that reflects the full student population, including LGBTQ students and families at elementary, middle and high school level.

☐ Provide role models. Show a wide range of achievements and emotions for all people that move beyond gender-role stereotypes. Read diverse biographies.

Does the health curriculum include discussions of LGBTQ relationships, identities, and families?

☐ YES
☐ NO

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Do all schools have access to "safe space" stickers and/or posters, for faculty members to place in their rooms or throughout the school?

☐ YES
☐ NO

Next Steps

☐ Staff may wear adornments that signify they are an ally, such as rainbow lanyards, pins, bracelets or necklaces, as well as a warm smile.

Have faculty members who post "safe space" stickers received training pertaining to inclusive classrooms for LGBTQ students?

☐ YES
☐ NO

Next Steps

☐ Ensure that LGBTQ students are included in protections from exclusion, mistreatment or bullying when presenting "class guidelines" at the year's beginning as well as periodically throughout the year.

☐ Make yourself a visible ally by displaying supportive materials such as safe space stickers, posters and LGBTQ related books/literature.

☐ Respond to Anti-LGBTQ behavior and language swiftly and peacefully.

☐ Group students in ways that do not rely on gender, such as table groups, letters in their names or colors of their clothes. Avoid situations that force children to make gendered choices, such as "boys line up here," and "girls line up there."

Do appropriate district personnel within the district connect LGBTQ youth to local and LGBTQ culturally competent mental health services, counseling, and support resources?

☐ YES
☐ NO

Next Steps

☐ Pair with LGBTQ youth advocacy organizations to offer transgender and LGBTQ cultural competency training to outside mental health providers who serve school district students.

☐ Ensure that organizations linked to district support and leadership are LGBTQ cultural competent and have received professional development training such as but not limited to PTAs, youth-focused community nonprofits and SEDNET providers.

Transgender Students

Has the district created a process for changing a transgender student's name and gender pronoun for purposes of "unofficial" school records (e.g., posted attendance sheets, student IDs, PA announcements, graduation announcements, yearbook photos, diplomas)?

☐ YES
☐ NO

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Does the district having a "Transgender Support and Procedures Guide" that would include topics such as restroom access, pronoun usage, knowledge of official and unofficial documents and examining other gender-based rules and activities, to help faculty and staff understand how to address various transgender issues with consistency? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Next Steps

☐ Model verbal safety cues such as courteously asking pronouns and acknowledging that your classroom/office is a safe space for all.

Does the district require faculty and staff to refer to transgender students according to the students' affirmed names and pronouns? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Next Steps

☐ Use students' correct pronouns and affirmed name when verbally and on written unofficial forms.

☐ Ensure that students' correct pronouns and affirmed name are readily available to substitute teachers, either by using the affirmed name on the roster or by placing a note on the roster.

☐ Ensure district-wide student Information system has a drop down menu for trans students that include affirmed name. Be sure to ask the student if the student is out at home prior to including affirmed name.

Does the district have a dress code/appearance policy that is gender neutral, therefore allowing students to wear attire that corresponds with the students' gender identity or gender expression? Does this apply to events like school dances, graduation attire, school photos and other school events? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Does every school in the district allow transgender students to use the restrooms requested by the student and that corresponds to their gender identity. Accommodations are often created on a case-by-case basis. ☐ YES ☐ NO

Does every school in the district allow transgender students to use the locker room requested by the student and that corresponds to their gender identity. Accommodations are often created on a case-by-case basis. ☐ YES ☐ NO

Does every school in your district have at least one bathroom designated as gender-neutral that is located in an easily-accessible area (e.g. not located in the nurse's office or teacher's lounge)? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Non-Binary Students

Has the district created a process for working with meeting the needs of non-binary students in each of the categories above? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Next Steps

☐ Encourage students to connect with other students based on interests and activities that they enjoy rather than connecting with other students solely based on gendered activities.