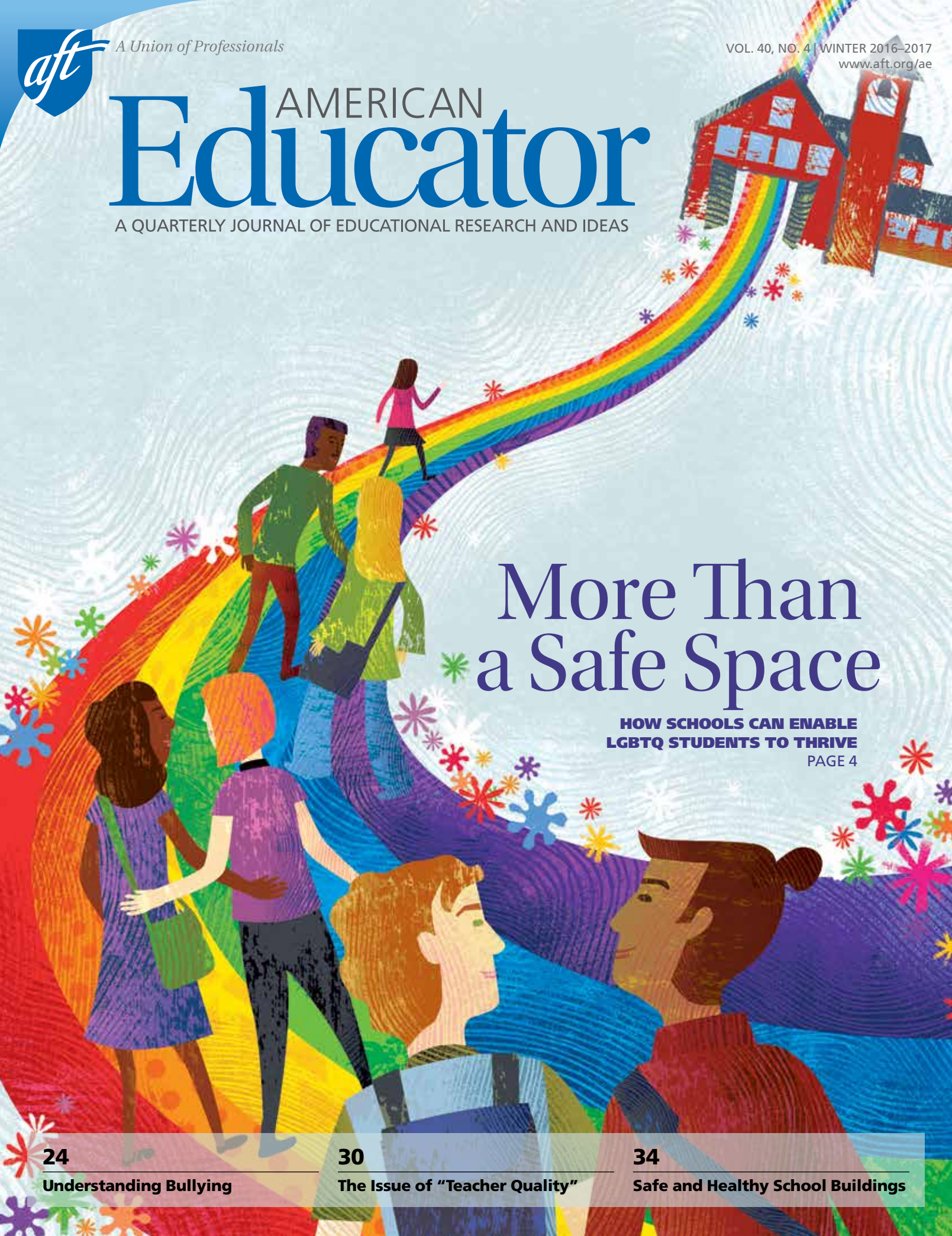
A Union of Professionals

VOL. 40, NO. 4 | WINTER 2016–2017
www.aft.org/ae

AMERICAN Educator

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND IDEAS



More Than a Safe Space

HOW SCHOOLS CAN ENABLE LGBTQ STUDENTS TO THRIVE
PAGE 4

We Must Keep Widening the Circle of Inclusion

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

Given the outcome and aftermath of the recent presidential election, you might expect that to be the focus of this column. I will address the moment we are in, but in an unconventional way, by starting with why more than half of the articles in this edition of *American Educator* concern LGBTQ issues in schools. It's not uncommon for this journal to publish multiple articles focused primarily on a single theme, but why LGBTQ issues, and why now? Because the country is at an inflection point. The last 10 years, culminating with the marriage equality decisions in the U.S. Supreme Court, have seen a tidal wave of changes in public opinion in this country, from vilifying to affirming people who are gay, straight, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning.

These victories and protections for LGBTQ people, including students, tragically but perhaps predictably have been met with a backlash, notably the rash of so-called bathroom bills restricting the rights of transgender and gender-nonconforming people. And we stand at the outset of a new presidential administration, about which many supporters of LGBTQ rights have grave concerns.

Our obligation as educators is to make schools safe and welcoming places for every member of the school community—whether for LGBTQ students and staff, immigrants and refugees, students with special needs, or any other student who for whatever reason feels vulnerable. I feel that very personally. While I am a lesbian who is openly gay and now leads a major labor union, the American Federation of Teachers (and the United Federation of Teachers before that), I was quite closeted as a child and young adult. We must build on the progress we have made toward recognizing and protecting the rights of all people, and that is even more important given the results of the presidential election.

As Michael Sadowski writes in this issue, educators and policymakers must do more than simply ensure that schools are safe for LGBTQ students and staff. The school environment should also be such that everyone feels affirmed and respected. The articles in the following pages about Gay-Straight Alliances and other forms of faculty and peer support show effective ways schools can promote the social, emotional, physical, and academic well-being of LGBTQ students. Public schools often lead the way for the broader society in modeling inclusiveness and pluralism.

Public schools often lead the way for the broader society in modeling inclusiveness and pluralism.

We cannot mandate or legislate tolerance and acceptance. But we can pass laws and policies that prohibit discrimination, and, as history has shown, attitudes will begin to shift. The Office for Civil Rights in President Obama's Education Department has urged schools to extend antibullying policies to cover LGBTQ students. The office cited Title IX, the federal law that prohibits discrimination based on gender, to protect the right of transgender students to use the bathrooms and locker rooms that correspond to the gender they identify with. The Supreme Court ruling that the Constitution guarantees a right to same-sex marriage stated that "No longer may this liberty be denied" to gays and lesbians. But they are denied other liberties, and comprehensive federal nondiscrimination protections still must be put in place.

Many people are worried that recent progress could be reversed in Donald Trump's administration. While Trump is not known for personal antipathy for gay people, others in his administration have expressed antigay views. Indiana Governor and Vice President-elect Mike Pence last year pushed through legislation that allows businesses to refuse to serve gay customers and enables corporations to deny insurance coverage to LGBTQ people. Trump's choice to head the Education Department, Betsy DeVos, and her family have given hundreds of thousands of dollars to groups that push "conversion therapy" and other antigay views. Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions, whom Trump has selected to serve as attorney general, the nation's top law enforcement official, has a record so hostile to gay rights that the Human Rights Campaign gave him a zero percent voting record. And when Trump's chief strategist, Steve Bannon, headed up *Breitbart News*, the website ran articles with headlines like "Gay Rights Have Made Us Dumber, It's Time to Get Back in the Closet."

The recent presidential election exposed troubling fault lines and unleashed alarming demonstrations of hatred and bigotry. But the story of America, at its best, is one of an ever-widening circle of inclusion, with each generation showing a greater openness to communities once excluded. Trump said he will be president for all Americans, millions of whom are LGBTQ and many millions more of whom are people who love and support them. Trump and his administration must protect the rights of all people—regardless of their race, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity—and help everyone feel safe and welcome as they go about their lives, particularly in our public schools.

AMERICAN Educator
VOL. 40, NO. 4 | WINTER 2016–2017
www.aft.org/ae

AMERICAN EDUCATOR (ISSN 0148-432X, USPS 008-462) is published quarterly by the American Federation of Teachers, 555 New Jersey Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2079. Phone: 202-879-4400. **www.aft.org**

Letters to the editor may be sent to the address above or to **ae@aft.org**.

AMERICAN EDUCATOR cannot assume responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.

Please allow a minimum of four weeks for copyright permission requests.

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the viewpoints or policies of the AFT.

AMERICAN EDUCATOR is mailed to AFT teacher members as a benefit of membership, and to faculty in colleges of education. Subscriptions represent $2.50 of annual dues. Non-AFT members may subscribe by mailing $10 per year by check or money order to the address below.

MEMBERS: To change your address or subscription, notify your local union treasurer or visit **www.aft.org/members**.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to American Educator, 555 New Jersey Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2079.

Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices.

Cover illustration:
JING JING TSONG

NAACP AND CHARTER SCHOOLS

The NAACP ratified a resolution this fall calling for a moratorium on the expansion of privately managed charter schools and an increase in charter school transparency and accountability. "We are moving forward to require that charter schools receive the same level of oversight [and] civil rights protections, and provide the same level of transparency," as traditional public schools, NAACP Chair Roslyn M. Brock said in a statement following the action. The group's position, she said, was "driven by a long-held principle and policy of the NAACP that high-quality, free public education should be afforded to all children." Learn more at **www.bit.ly/2eFY3Ee**.

TROUBLING RULES ON TEACHER PREP

"Ludicrous" is how AFT President Randi Weingarten describes the U.S. Department of Education's plan to evaluate teacher preparation programs based on the performance of the students taught by a program's graduates. The department's new regulations for teacher preparation programs, released in October, "will create enormous difficulty for teacher prep programs and place an unnecessary burden on institutions and states, which are also in the process of implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act," Weingarten warns. The final rules "will punish teacher prep programs whose graduates go on to teach in our highest-needs schools." Read more at **http://go.aft.org/AE416news1**.

"WALK-INS" A SUCCESS

Roughly 100,000 people in more than 200 cities took part in the most recent day of school walk-ins to promote educational opportunity so that every child can attend a high-quality public school or college. At most events, like the one in Illinois shown below, supporters gathered outside their schools in the morning and engaged the community in dialogue, and then, in a show of strength and common purpose, parents, students, and educators walked into the schools together. The October event was sponsored by the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, a broad coalition of more than 100 community and labor organizations that includes the AFT. Learn more at **http://go.aft.org/AE416news2**.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ALLIANCE TO RECLAIM OUR SCHOOLS

TRANSGENDER CASE

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear the case of a transgender student who identifies as a boy and wants to be allowed to use the boys' bathroom at his Virginia high school. It "instantly became the highest-profile case of the court's term so far," columnist Amy Howe observes at SCOTUSblog.com, although those looking for a landmark decision may be disappointed. The justices agreed only to weigh in on "lower-profile questions" of the case, sidestepping "the controversy over the school board's policy requiring students to use the restrooms and locker rooms that match the gender that they were assigned at birth." Read more at **www.bit.ly/2fFQGkM**.

ZUMA PRESS, INC. / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

GRADUATE WORKERS UNIONIZE

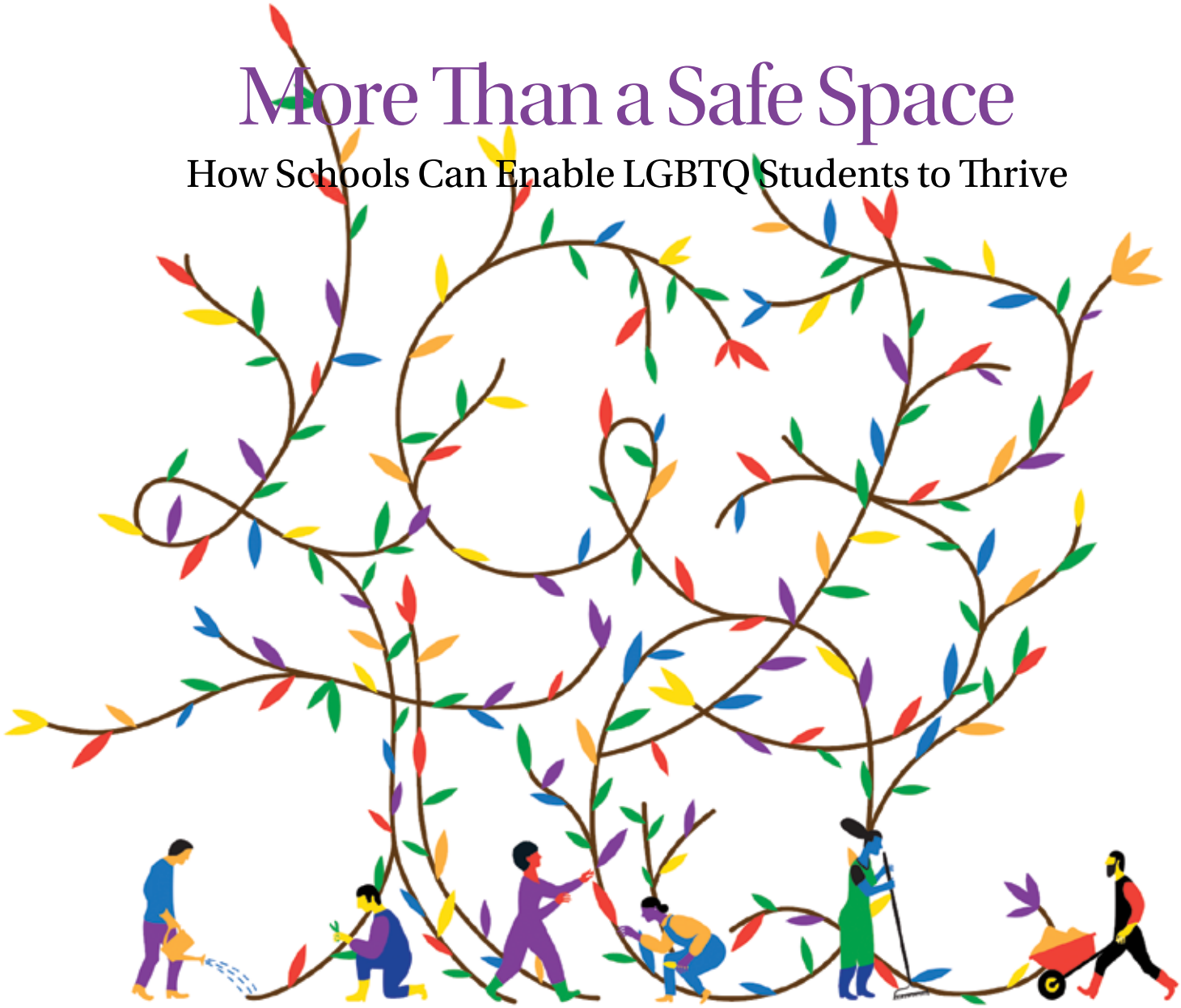
Graduate employees at Princeton University have joined their peers at the University of Chicago and Cornell University by affiliating with the AFT, as the national movement for graduate unionization gains momentum. Members of Princeton Graduate Students United voted overwhelmingly to join with the AFT and its state affiliate, AFT New Jersey, in the wake of the National Labor Relations Board's recent decision to formally classify private colleges' graduate teaching and research assistants as workers. The AFT, the largest U.S. higher education union, represents more than 25,000 graduate employees across 23 institutions and nine states. Read more about the Princeton vote at **www.bit.ly/2fVbsy1**.

"NEOVOUCHERS" IN THE STATES

A report from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP) reveals that, by allowing wealthy taxpayers to turn a profit on "charitable" contributions to private schools, 10 states are circumventing laws or public opposition to taxpayer-funded private school vouchers. "State Tax Subsidies for Private K–12 Education" examines tax policies in states that have used these neovouchers either to encourage donations to private school scholarships or to offset the cost of private school tuition. ITEP found that these states make a mockery of charitable contributions by allowing tax filers to reap more from combined state and federal credits and deductions than they give. The full report is at **www.bit.ly/2fFHElW**.

More Than a Safe Space

How Schools Can Enable LGBTQ Students to Thrive



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANDRÉ DA LOBA

By Michael Sadowski

Few educators or philosophers of education would argue that schools' sole purpose is to keep children safe. Yet a particular subset of students in the United States—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ)* students—are often served by their schools as if their mere safety were a sufficient objective in and of itself.[1] The purpose of my book *Safe Is Not Enough: Better Schools for LGBTQ Students*, from which this article is drawn, is to challenge the all-too-prevalent attitudes and practices that suggest "safe" schools are enough for LGBTQ students, and to articulate what it might look like to take public schools in the United States to the next level in their service to LGBTQ students and their treatment of LGBTQ issues.

Fortunately, this vision need not emerge out of some utopian vision of the future. Today, right now, educators working in different parts of the country and in various capacities—as teachers, administrators, librarians, and counselors—realize aspects of this vision every day with their students. Their efforts illustrate not

Michael Sadowski teaches education at Bard College, is the director of the Bard Early College-Hudson Initiative, and is the editor of the Youth Development and Education Series for Harvard Education Press. A former high school teacher and Gay-Straight Alliance advisor, he has served as vice chair of the Massachusetts Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, editor of the Harvard Education Letter, *and a teacher trainer in New York City's public schools.* *This article is adapted with permission from his book* Safe Is Not Enough: Better Schools for LGBTQ Students *(Harvard Education Press, 2016), www.hepg.org/hep-home/books/safe-is-not-enough.*

*In discussions of the issues that affect LGBTQ students, language can be problematic. Before the 1990s, most studies about LGBTQ people referred only to lesbian (L) and gay (G) individuals, but researchers have become increasingly aware that bisexual (B) people are a distinct group with specific concerns. More recent research also has recognized the special issues that affect transgender (T) individuals, who do not conform to traditional man/woman or boy/girl gender norms in a variety of ways. In addition, some individuals identify as queer (Q), a designation that implies a rejection of societal norms and/or labels associated with sexuality and gender. The *Q* in LGBTQ is also used to designate "questioning" here, referring to students who are unsure of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

only that schools *should be* more than safe for LGBTQ students but that they *already are* in many respects, in a wide range of communities and contexts around the country, and that they therefore *can be* in many others.

A History of "Safe" Schools

Safety is, of course, a basic prerequisite for schooling—children and adolescents need to feel and be safe at school in order to learn. The language of safety has therefore been central to programming in support of LGBTQ students throughout its often-contentious history over the last three decades.

The universal belief in the need for students to be safe at school was key to the arguments educators and activists made in the 1980s and early 1990s, when efforts to improve schools for LGBTQ (or, as was the focus at the time, gay and lesbian) youth were in their early stages. As these education advocates urgently and accurately pointed out, gay and lesbian students were being verbally and physically harassed on a daily basis at school, did not feel safe, and were suffering a host of academic, health, and mental health consequences because of it—conditions that persist in many school environments to this day.

In 1989, Massachusetts was the first state to tackle the issues affecting LGBTQ youth in schools and communities by establishing what was then called the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth.[2] Although it was a tough sell in that era, even in relatively progressive Massachusetts, advocates succeeded at getting Republican Governor William Weld to issue an executive order starting the commission, primarily by highlighting the public health epidemic of gay and lesbian youth suicide. National statistics at the time showed that about a third of adolescent suicides were by gay and lesbian young people, a crisis advocates argued could be addressed through community- and school-based programs that made these environments safer for gay and lesbian students.[3]

Eventually, the commission's work led to the nation's first state-funded programs to benefit gay and lesbian youth, and policymakers made the language of safety prominent in these initial efforts. Massachusetts's school-based program, first founded in 1993, was and continues to be called the Safe Schools Program. (It began as the Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Students, and the name was changed to the Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students in recent years.)

Outside Massachusetts, other educators and activists used similar language in establishing some of the earliest programs focused on the needs of LGBTQ youth. Washington state's Safe Schools Coalition expanded from a Seattle-based group to a state-level program in 1993 to serve as a resource to educators who wanted to improve school environments for LGBTQ students. The Washington coalition also provided (and continues to make available) research reports and other publications highlighting the issues affecting LGBTQ youth, which are used by educators, researchers, and advocates around the state and elsewhere.[4]

In another example in which advocates have expressed the needs of LGBTQ students in terms of safety, in 2003 the New York City Department of Education, in cooperation with the Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI), a social service agency dedicated to the needs of LGBTQ youth, expanded HMI's Harvey Milk High School (HMHS) into the first four-year school in the United States intended exclusively to serve LGBTQ students. Advocates for the school argued it would serve as a safe haven for young people who might not be or feel safe in other city schools. Although the school has had its detractors on both ends of the political spectrum—conservatives who disagree with the notion of public money used to fund a school exclusively for LGBTQ students, and progressives who believe such a school sanctions segregation—its supporters have prevailed largely on the grounds that LGBTQ students need a "safe space" in which to learn.[5]

As a description of the school on the Hetrick-Martin website still points out, it remains a necessary remedy to a less-than-ideal situation for LGBTQ students around the city: "In an ideal world, all students who are considered at risk would be safely integrated into all NYC public schools. But in the real world, at-risk students need a place like the Harvey Milk High School. HMHS is one of the many NYC small schools that provide safety, community, and high achievement for students not able to benefit from more traditional school environments."[6]

> The "safe" paradigm has primarily centered on antibullying programs, LGBTQ "safe zones," and Gay-Straight Alliances.

What Does "Safe" Mean?

Although the efforts of educators and advocates to make schools safer for LGBTQ students have taken many forms in different kinds of communities, nationally the "safe" paradigm has primarily centered on three components: antibullying programs, LGBTQ "safe zones," and Gay-Straight Alliances. Some schools have one or two of these components in place, and many have all three. But even schools with the full triad may be operating under a tacit agreement that "safe" is an acceptable standard for meeting the

needs of their LGBTQ populations, when they can and should be doing much more.

Antibullying Programs

Largely in response to several high-profile cases of peer-to-peer harassment publicized in the national media, some of which were associated with the suicides of students who were victimized, new or expanded antibullying policies have been implemented at all levels of government in the last several years. Some of these cases have involved LGBTQ-based harassment, including that of a high school freshman from a suburb of Buffalo, New York, who according to news reports was relentlessly harassed with antigay epithets and committed suicide in September 2011. Before taking his own life, he posted on the blog website Tumblr, "I always say how bullied I am, but no one listens. What do I have to do so people will listen?"[7] (For more on bullying of LGBTQ students, see the article on page 24.)

Despite progress, unwelcoming school climates continue to take a toll on the well-being of LGBTQ students.

From 2008 to 2012, 49 of the 50 states either introduced or expanded antibullying legislation, and although most of these policies do not address the bullying of LGBTQ students specifically, they are often cited as evidence that schools and government are taking the needs of LGBTQ students seriously. Many of these bills use the language of safety in their names, such as Iowa's antibullying and antiharassment law, also known as the Iowa Safe Schools Law, which protects students from bullying and harassment based on "any of the following traits or characteristics: age, color, creed, national origin, race, religion, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical attributes, physical or mental ability or disability, ancestry, political party preference, political belief, socioeconomic status, and familial status."[8] The United States Congress is currently considering the Safe Schools Improvement Act, a piece of antibullying legislation that would include specific protections for LGBTQ students.

GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network), a national education and advocacy group that promotes improved school environments for LGBTQ students, strongly advocates such "enumeration"—the explicit listing of factors for which students might be subject to harassment or assault—for all antibullying policies. As a GLSEN policy statement explains, enumeration strengthens a school's capacity to protect not only LGBTQ students but any others who might be targeted:

> Enumeration is essential to protecting as many students as possible from bullying and harassment. The strength of an enumerated law or policy is that it underscores those students who research shows are most likely to be bullied and harassed and least likely to be protected under non-enumerated anti-bullying laws and policies. While enumerated policies specifically highlight the most vulnerable students, they do not limit the policy only to those students. All students are protected, even if they do not fall into one of the enumerated categories. Enumeration that includes sexual orientation and gender identity removes any doubt that LGBT youth are protected from bullying and harassment.[9]

With enumeration, as GLSEN suggests, there is no ambiguity about the fact that anti-LGBTQ harassment and bullying are unacceptable—regardless of any religious or political beliefs that a student, teacher, administrator, parent, or community member might hold—and that educators have a nonnegotiable responsibility to address it if it occurs. GLSEN's research has found that enumeration is associated with lower rates of victimization of LGBTQ students and a much higher incidence of teachers intervening when these students are targeted by their peers:

> Enumeration provides teachers and school personnel with the tools they need to implement anti-bullying and harassment policies, making it easier for them to prevent bullying and intervene when incidents occur. Evidence shows that educators often do not recognize anti-LGBT bullying and harassment as unacceptable behavior. Sometimes they fail to respond to the problem due to prejudice or community pressure. When they can point to enumerated language that provides clear protection for LGBT students, they feel more comfortable enforcing the policy. Students in schools with enumerated policies reported that teachers intervene more than twice as often compared to students in schools with generic anti-bullying policies, and more than three times as often compared to students in schools with no policy at all.[10]

To the extent that antibullying programs and laws protect LGBTQ and other students from being taunted by their peers in school, online, or elsewhere, they clearly have contributed to important positive change. But some experts on gender- and

sexuality-based harassment in schools have questioned whether the focus on bullying prevention has overgeneralized the various kinds of bias, discrimination, and harassment that specific subgroups of students, such as LGBTQ youth, experience. As Nan Stein, senior research scientist at the Wellesley Centers for Women, has noted, "When schools put these new anti-bullying laws and policies into practice, the policies are often overly broad and arbitrary, … [and] sometimes egregious behaviors are framed by school personnel as bullying, when in fact they may constitute illegal sexual or gender harassment or even criminal hazing or assault."[11] Moreover, antibullying policies, if they represent the only action school administrators take to support LGBTQ students, can create a false impression that the full range of these students' needs is being met.

LGBTQ "Safe Zones"

Another way in which "safe" language is central to schools' efforts to improve climates for LGBTQ students is the designation within many school buildings of "safe zones," often indicated by stickers on the classroom or office doors of individual teachers, counselors, administrators, or staff members who choose to use them. These "safe zone" or "safe space" stickers, which first started appearing in the 1990s and of which there are many versions, serve an important symbolic function in that they announce to students without the need for any discussion that these educators are, in one way or another, LGBTQ-friendly. A safe zone sticker on an educator's door can imply any number of things: that they will challenge anti-LGBTQ language and harassment when it occurs; that they are open to the discussion of LGBTQ issues in the context of classwork or just in conversation; that they might be a safe person to whom an LGBTQ student could "come out"; and, in some cases, that the educator is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning.

From 2010 to 2013, GLSEN took the idea of safe zone stickers to the next level by sending a "safe space kit" to every public middle and high school in the United States. In addition to 10 safe zone stickers, the kit included safe space posters and GLSEN's "Guide to Being an Ally to LGBT Students," which offered strategies for supporting LGBTQ students and teaching about anti-LGBTQ harassment and violence.[12]

Several research studies, including GLSEN's biennial National School Climate Survey, which draws on the responses of roughly 7,900 students nationwide, have demonstrated that the safe space campaign, like enumerated antibullying policies, makes a tremendous difference in LGBTQ students' perceptions that their schools are safe and that their teachers are adults they can trust. Unfortunately, only about one-fourth (26 percent) of the students participating in the latest GLSEN survey said they had seen any safe zone stickers in their schools, but those who had reported significantly more positive attitudes toward their teachers and other school staff than their peers who had not. Whereas about half of GLSEN's survey participants who had not seen a safe zone sticker or poster had an adult at school with whom they felt comfortable talking about LGBTQ issues, nearly three-quarters of students who had seen the stickers had such an adult in their school.

Gay-Straight Alliances

Finally, the notion of safe space has also been central to the emergence of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), extracurricular organizations in which LGBTQ young people and their allies support one another, plan educational programming for the school community about LGBTQ issues, and sometimes just "hang out" in an atmosphere where it is OK to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, or even straight. (For more on GSAs, see the article on page 10.)

Widely considered the precursor to the GSA movement in the United States, Project 10 in the Los Angeles Unified School District began in 1984 and continues today. Project 10 is a broad-based program that includes many components associated with the psychological and academic well-being of LGBTQ students, but one of its primary missions has always been to ensure "on-campus groups that are safe zones for LGBT students" in Los Angeles schools.[13]

GSAs proliferated around Massachusetts starting in the 1990s when the groundbreaking Safe Schools Program began providing seed money and educational and technical support to students and educators who wanted to start them. From the start, GSAs have been controversial in many of the communities in which they have been introduced, where conservative critics have argued that they raise issues pertaining to sexuality that are better left to families and religious communities. The teachers, administrators, and students who have started GSAs have often countered such criticism with the argument that their primary purpose is to provide much-needed "safe space" for LGBTQ students who might not otherwise feel safe in their schools.

Although far too many schools still do not have Gay-Straight Alliances, these groups have grown exponentially over the last decade. The latest National School Climate Survey, conducted by GLSEN in 2013, found that about half of students surveyed indicated there were GSAs in their schools, although another, more recent survey by GLSEN suggests a lower percentage, approximately one-third.[14] Many GSAs also register with GLSEN, and at last count the national organization had well over 4,000 such groups on its national roster. Whereas at one time GSAs were geographically concentrated in traditionally liberal bastions such as California, New York City, and the Boston area, now they can be found in schools in all 50 states. In many places, GSAs do in fact serve a crucial function as safe havens, offering to LGBTQ young people the

only place in their schools where they feel comfortable enough to talk openly and be themselves.

There is overwhelming evidence that Gay-Straight Alliances make a tremendous difference in the school lives of LGBTQ students. GLSEN's 2013 survey found that students who attend schools with GSAs are less likely to feel unsafe for reasons associated with their sexual orientation, are less likely to hear homophobic language regularly at school, report considerably higher levels of peer acceptance, and generally feel more connected to their school communities.[15] Another study associated GSAs with feelings of both personal and institutional "empowerment" for LGBTQ students—for example, feeling comfortable holding a same-sex girlfriend's or boyfriend's hand in the hallway or having the confidence to work toward change in school and government policies.[16]

It is an opportune time to create schools that affirm LGBTQ students and integrate respect for LGBTQ identities.

Like an antibullying program, however, the presence of a GSA, while essential, can also allow school officials who feel the pressures of competing priorities (such as raising test scores), or who fear controversy around LGBTQ-themed programming, to claim that the issue has been "covered" and therefore no further action is required. As long as LGBTQ students and their allies have a place to go once a week and a faculty advisor to talk to, school decision-makers may not see the need for these young people to be supported all day, every day, at school. They can fail to examine curriculum, athletics, extracurricular clubs, or other aspects of school life from which students may still feel excluded.

The Need for Safety First

Let me be very clear: "safe schools" policies and programs, enumerated antibullying initiatives, LGBTQ safe zone stickers and posters, and Gay-Straight Alliances all make a critical, lifesaving difference in the school experiences of LGBTQ students. Given LGBTQ youths' persistently disproportionate risk for harassment, feeling unsafe at school, substance abuse, and suicide, safety is a critical baseline from which all subsequent work must follow.[17] The educators and advocates who built the early successes of the LGBTQ student rights movement understood this. As a result, many schools are much, much safer places for LGBTQ students than they were 30, 20, even 10 years ago. And it has become clear to more and more people that those schools that still offer no basic protections or safe space to LGBTQ students need to change immediately.

Yet the notion of GSAs as a "safe space," or certain teachers' rooms as "safe zones," as well as the framing of initiatives to benefit LGBTQ students as "safe schools" programming, raises a number of crucial questions as educators and advocates look toward what must happen next to build on these successes. If a certain place in the school is designated as a safe space, what does that say about the rest of the building? If certain educators are seen as "safe" for students to talk to about issues that are central to their lives, what about the others? Does a school administration have a responsibility to ensure that LGBTQ students feel supported by *all* their teachers in *every* learning space in the building, not just treated with mere "tolerance" by the majority? Is safety the only thing to which LGBTQ students are entitled at school? What about the skills and knowledge they need to be effective, engaged members of their society *as LGBTQ youth*? Finally, are LGBTQ students a monolithic group with one basic common need: safety? What differences exist among various subgroups within the LGBTQ student population—boys and girls, transgender students, LGBTQ students of color—and the way they experience the school climate and programs? What would an optimal education for all these young people look like?

A Watershed Moment

While much remains to be done, our country is arguably at a watershed moment with regard to both LGBTQ rights and shifting public attitudes about LGBTQ issues. The right to marry for all couples, regardless of their sex, is now the law of the land in all 50 states. Perhaps even more significantly, the recent changes in marriage law have occurred with far less public outcry than would have been imaginable even 10 years ago. Although there are still conservative activists around the country working to overturn the Supreme Court's decision legalizing same-sex marriage and to challenge other LGBTQ rights—and these are more prevalent in some geographical areas than others—the chances that such challenges will ultimately succeed seem to be growing increasingly slim.

One of the reasons for this wave of policy change may be the dramatic shift in public attitudes about homosexuality and LGBTQ rights that has occurred in recent years. Whereas through the late 1980s only about a third of participants in Gallup's annual polls said they believed gay or lesbian relations between consenting adults

should be legal, that number rose to two-thirds by 2014. On the issue of same-sex marriage, the changes have been even more dramatic: as recently as 1996, only 27 percent of Americans said they believed marriages between same-sex couples should be recognized by law as valid, but 55 percent approved of their legal recognition by 2014 (and a 2015 CBS News poll prior to the Supreme Court's ruling found this number to be as high as 60 percent).[18]

Although popular media still depict heterosexuality and traditional expressions of gender as the norm, images of same-sex relationships and LGBTQ identities are now more common in mainstream popular culture than ever before. And while LGBTQ people of color and transgender people are still sparsely represented in the media, they are certainly more visible than they were a decade or two ago (the celebrity of openly gay black NFL player Michael Sam and the Amazon web series *Transparent* being two such examples). Moreover, the wide availability of information and resources about LGBTQ issues and identities online has contributed further to the emergence of a new age that might have seemed unimaginable even 20 years ago.

Within this larger cultural context in which attitudes about LGBTQ people and identities have shifted so favorably and so quickly, progress has also been made on the school front, but much more slowly and inconsistently. GLSEN's latest National School Climate Survey showed that significantly fewer students hear homophobic remarks "frequently" or "often" in their schools than students did at the beginning of the century, but this was still a problem for about two-thirds of the students polled. The percentage of students reporting representation of LGBTQ people and issues in their school curricula also was higher than ever in the latest survey; nevertheless, four out of five students still said there was no positive representation of LGBTQ people or issues in any of their classes, and less than half (44 percent) said they had access to LGBTQ-related information in their school library.[19]

Despite the progress that's been made, unwelcoming school climates continue to take a toll on the physical, emotional, and academic well-being of LGBTQ students. Nearly one-third of the students in the 2013 GLSEN survey said they had missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, and one in 10 missed four or more days. LGBTQ students who had experienced high levels of victimization were significantly more likely than other LGBTQ youth to miss school because of feeling unsafe, have lower grade point averages, plan not to go to college, and suffer from depression and low self-esteem.[20]

Finally, progress on LGBTQ issues seems to have come further for some students than others, depending on geography and on their specific identities under the LGBTQ umbrella. Students in the South and Midwest regions of the United States reported the highest levels of harassment, perceived lack of safety, and anti-LGBTQ language in their schools on the 2013 survey, and they were the least likely to report access to GSAs, LGBTQ-inclusive curricula, and teachers they felt they could talk to about LGBTQ issues.[21] (In 2015, 57 percent of students from the Northeast responding to a GLSEN survey said their schools had GSAs, whereas only 37 percent of students in the South said so.)[22] Moreover, transgender students in the 2013 survey reported the highest levels of harassment and the lowest levels of perceived safety among all participating students, and transgender identities tend to be the least represented in curricula, library resources, and other school materials and programs.[23]

This larger context of progress in some, but not all, aspects of society and of schooling has led me to the following conclusions: (1) Safety is an essential baseline for schools' ability to meet the needs of LGBTQ students effectively and has served as a critical foundation for efforts to introduce policies and programs at all levels of government to benefit LGBTQ students, *but it is not a sufficient goal in itself*. (2) Considerable progress has been made in recent decades on LGBTQ issues in schools, but inconsistencies with regard to geographical location, identity categories within the LGBTQ spectrum, and other factors have created *inequities that are unacceptable*. (3) Recent political progress and shifts in public attitudes about LGBTQ issues suggest it is an opportune time for educators and policymakers to move beyond "safe" and create schools that *affirm LGBTQ students and integrate respect for LGBTQ identities through multiple aspects of school life*.

Despite all the gains of the safe schools movement and the tremendous difference this work has made, about one in four LGBTQ youth still attempts suicide at some point during adolescence.[24] Only one in five has the opportunity to study LGBTQ issues at school, and more than half experience harassment based on their gender identity or sexual orientation.[25] These statistics were even worse 20 years ago, but even if conditions have improved, clearly they haven't improved enough. And, on some fronts and in some schools, they seem hardly to have improved at all.

Arguing for all students to be safe at school was the right strategy in the political climate of the late 20th century, when LGBTQ individuals—both in law and in public opinion—were viewed as less worthy of rights than their straight counterparts. Although we may still be a long way from full LGBTQ inclusion in American society, there are hopeful signs that the current generation of LGBTQ youth can grow up in a different world, where instead of being silenced they will have many opportunities to be leaders.

We can hear such a future in the words of the openly LGBTQ students at Brooklyn's Academy for Young Writers, who are inspiring younger students to join GSAs and be proud of their identities.

(Continued on page 42)

Gay-Straight Alliances

Promoting Student Resilience and Safer School Climates

ILLUSTRATIONS BY PAUL GARLAND

By V. Paul Poteat

Many students participate in a wide range of school- or community-based extracurricular programs. Although there is strong evidence such programs promote healthy development (e.g., 4-H, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Boys and Girls Club),[1] programs that specifically serve sexual and gender minority students (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer/questioning [LGBTQ] students), and that address pressing issues affecting these students, have received far less attention than other programs. Yet LGBTQ students face enduring concerns at school.[2] Because of the potential for school-based extracurricular groups to shape school climate, address inequality, and affect student performance,[3] there have been calls to identify programs and settings that may reduce discrimination against LGBTQ students, promote their well-being, and foster safe and affirming school environments.

Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) show promise for accomplishing these goals. GSAs are school-based extracurricular groups that provide a setting for LGBTQ students and their peer allies to receive support, socialize with one another, learn about LGBTQ issues, and advocate for equity and justice in schools.[4] As a result, GSAs aim not only to support their immediate members but also to improve the experiences of students within the whole school.[5]

As GSAs become increasingly present in middle and high schools across the United States,[6] it is important to understand how they can be most effective. This article begins with an overview of GSAs and how they operate. Next, it reviews findings that show GSAs are tied to positive student outcomes, highlights some of the ways GSAs promote well-being, and offers suggestions for how they can benefit youth from many different backgrounds. It

V. Paul Poteat is an associate professor in the department of counseling, developmental, and educational psychology at Boston College. He has written widely on the topics of homophobic and bias-based bullying, mental health and resilience of LGBTQ youth, peer group social networks, and homophobic attitudes and behaviors.

then describes the roles and experiences of GSA advisors, as well as how they can support GSA members. The article concludes by noting how GSAs can partner with other school-based efforts to promote the well-being of LGBTQ students and contribute to better social and academic experiences for all students.

The Purpose of GSAs

GSAs and similar predecessor groups originated as extensions of out-of-school settings for LGBTQ youth beginning in the 1990s.[7] This expansion was based on the recognition that LGBTQ students needed explicitly safe and supportive settings in their schools. Generally, they were started and led by school counselors or teachers and operated largely as groups in which LGBTQ students could receive social and emotional support.

Since that time, the aims and functions of GSAs have expanded and evolved to meet a growing range of student needs and interests. Now many of these alliances are typically youth-led, while adult advisors serve in a supportive role. Also, their efforts aim to benefit not only immediate members but also the larger school community.

Providing support for LGBTQ students continues to be one of GSAs' core functions. (To learn how a GSA supports students in one San Francisco high school, see pages 15 and 20.) This function remains crucial for several reasons: (a) much of the discrimination that LGBTQ youth experience occurs within schools,[8] (b) GSAs may be one of the few school settings that explicitly support LGBTQ students, and (c) students may have limited access to LGBTQ-affirming settings outside of school, especially in communities where such settings do not exist at all.[9]

As with many extracurricular programs, GSAs enable students to socialize and make new friends. They may also provide students with LGBTQ-specific resources, such as referring them to supportive community agencies or hosting workshops on mental health and self-care.

Many GSAs now integrate advocacy efforts into their activities as well. These efforts seek to improve both the experiences of students who are not GSA members and the climate of the whole school. For example, GSAs may plan awareness-raising campaigns to draw attention to and counteract ongoing discrimination (e.g., Day of Silence or ThinkB4YouSpeak). Or they may focus on promoting inclusive school policies (e.g., specific anti-bullying policies that protect students on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, using gender-neutral graduation gowns, or adopting LGBTQ-inclusive curricula and library materials).

Youth program models and positive youth development models inform the various aims and functions of GSAs. These models highlight several qualities that are essential for programs to be effective:

- Providing a safe and structured environment for members,
- Providing opportunities to foster peer connection among members,
- Building upon individuals' strengths to promote self-confidence,
- Empowering members by offering opportunities to take on leadership roles, and
- Providing adult support and role modeling.[10]

GSAs embody these qualities in many of their functions—for example, providing a supportive setting for members and, for those that use the student-led and advisor-supported approach, allowing students to take on more leadership roles and greater ownership of their GSA.

As part of the continuing evolution of GSAs, some have begun to rebrand themselves as Gender-Sexuality Alliances to better convey their inclusive aspiration. More broadly, in recognition of the many intersecting sociocultural identities of students (e.g., LGBTQ students of color), more GSAs have tried to recognize how forms of oppression are interconnected. In doing so, they have worked to build coalitions with other groups to address multiple systems of oppression (e.g., racial, gender, or economic inequality).[11] Overall, in the past several decades of their existence, GSAs have evolved in order to respond to changes in the broader sociopolitical climate and in school policies and student populations, and to address emerging concerns that LGBTQ students face in their schools.

GSAs are school-based groups for LGBTQ students and their peer allies to receive support and learn about LGBTQ issues.

How GSAs Support Better Student Health and Educational Experiences

Students in schools with GSAs report lower mental and physical health concerns, greater overall well-being, less drug use, less truancy, and greater perceived school safety than students in schools without GSAs.[12] These findings now have been documented across a range of studies at local and national levels. Other studies have recorded feedback from GSA members who attribute instances of personal growth and empowerment, as well as a range of other positive experiences, to their GSA involvement.[13]

Notably, some research suggests that GSAs may also benefit those students who are not members. In one study, for example, members and nonmembers in schools with GSAs reported similar feelings of safety and levels of truancy, and both fared better than students in schools without GSAs.[14] Such findings may speak to the advocacy efforts of GSAs to improve the experiences of all students in their schools. Collectively, the findings from these studies underscore the importance of GSAs in schools and show that their presence is tied to a range of factors that indicate better health and school-related experiences for all students.

What Makes GSAs Effective?

GSAs share a common mission, but they are not standardized programs. The members of each GSA largely determine its focus and how it will be run. For instance, GSAs vary in their emphasis on support and/or advocacy, the degree of structure to their meetings, and their leadership styles.[15] By examining how GSAs differ along these and other dimensions, we can identify what practices and procedures might be most effective in promoting students' well-being.

Some GSAs still face varying degrees of hostility from teachers and administrators.

Research shows that students in GSAs that offer more support and engage in more advocacy report feeling greater self-esteem, an ability to accomplish goals, and an improved sense of purpose, agency, and empowerment.[16] As such, it appears that both of these core GSA functions may be integral to how GSAs promote well-being among their members. Still, GSAs might want to consider not only the amount of support or advocacy they offer but also the sequence in which they offer them. Support and socializing opportunities may need to precede advocacy efforts, and then eventually both functions can happen simultaneously. For instance, socializing within the GSA may help build bonds among members, which ultimately will enable them to engage in larger advocacy efforts.

Open climates, in which students voice differing views respectfully and have a say in what is done in the group, have been examined extensively in the traditional classroom setting and are associated with a range of desired outcomes, such as greater civic engagement and social competence.[17] This type of climate is also important within GSAs: those with more open climates have more actively engaged members than those with less open climates.[18] It could be valuable for GSA members to discuss periodically how they perceive their group's climate and to identify ways to cultivate and maintain respectful dialogue and interaction.

In addition to the immediate GSA climate, the broader school climate may enhance or impede the GSA's ability to promote well-being among members. Although, on average, students in schools with GSAs report safer school climates than students in schools without GSAs,[19] some GSAs still face varying degrees of hostility from teachers and administrators.[20] Indeed, school systems sometimes attempt to prohibit the formation of GSAs.[21] Some politically and religiously conservative schools have tried to ban GSAs, using abstinence-only policies to justify their actions, or have required parental notification of students' membership in GSAs, largely to discourage students from joining.[22] GSA members in less supportive schools report lower levels of well-being than GSA members in more supportive schools.[23] Thus, we cannot expect GSAs to be the sole source of support or means to improve students' experiences in school. Rather, GSAs should be a part of broader efforts to ensure the visibility, protection, respect, and success of LGBTQ students.

Youth program models underscore how organizational structures are key to ensuring that GSAs are effective.[24] Of note, some students have expressed aversion to joining their school's GSA due to its perceived disorganization.[25] Research that has examined organizational structure within GSAs has found that organized GSAs (a) demonstrate agenda setting, (b) have a designated person who facilitates meetings, and (c) continually address issues by conducting check-ins at the beginning of meetings and following up on discussions from prior meetings.[26]

Findings show that more structure is associated with greater member engagement to a point, after which greater structure relates to less engagement. Because GSAs attempt to provide a range of simultaneous services to members, some degree of structure may be necessary to coordinate these services and ensure their consistency and quality. The amount of structure, however, may need to vary so that it is neither too rigid to prevent unanticipated issues from being addressed nor inadequate for a necessary level of cohesion. As a result, adult advisors and youth leaders may want to check with members about how they perceive the structure within their GSA to find the right balance.

Research finds that structure can enhance the benefits of GSAs. Specifically, the connection between receiving support and feeling a greater sense of agency is even stronger for students who are members of GSAs with adequate structure.[27] Having a sufficient amount of structure may ensure that students with pressing concerns can be heard, given sufficient time to receive support, and given greater continuity of care. This same enhancing effect has been found for advocacy: engaging in more of it has an even stronger connection to a greater sense of agency among students in GSAs with adequate structure. Advocacy efforts in GSAs often require coordination among many students and can take multiple meetings to plan. Sufficient structure may ensure the sustainability of members' efforts. It seems, then, that organizational structure might magnify the extent to which certain GSA functions (e.g., support or advocacy) promote members' well-being.

Finally, leadership roles vary across GSAs.[28] In some, several students serve as elected officers (e.g., a GSA president or treasurer); in others, leadership responsibilities are distributed across members according to specific tasks throughout the year. Also, different kinds of leadership exist within GSAs, such as organizational leadership (e.g., taking the lead on planning an event) and relational leadership (e.g., being the first to give emotional support to another member). We need to give greater attention to leadership styles in GSAs because an important part of youth programs is placing youth in leadership roles.[29]

Do GSAs Benefit Some Students More Than Others?

GSAs face a formidable challenge: how to flexibly meet a range of needs and interests of students from diverse backgrounds

to promote their well-being. Although the focus of GSAs centers on sexual orientation and gender identity, members also come with experiences shaped by their other sociocultural identities (e.g., their ethnicity, race, religion, or social class). In addition, members differ from one another in why they join and how they participate. Unfortunately, because most studies have treated GSA members as a homogenous group, limited attention has been paid to the variability of students' experiences in GSAs or to whether GSAs benefit some students more than others.

Although scholars have called for greater attention to the experiences of youth of color within youth programs,[30] there is a dearth of research to indicate whether GSAs equally benefit students of color—of any gender identity or sexual orientation—and white students. Of the research that has been conducted, one study found that students of color perceived less support from their GSA than white students.[31] GSAs must respond to the needs, strengths, and experiences of all students, including their members who are students of color. Doing so can help ensure that a GSA is inclusive, welcoming, and working toward the aspirational goal of addressing multiple systems of oppression.

While GSAs provide a range of opportunities for student members (i.e., supporting their peers, socializing with them, taking advantage of educational resources, and engaging in advocacy opportunities), members vary in their reasons for joining. Many members join to receive support (a core function of GSAs), while others join for more specific goals or out of self-interest (e.g., to place their membership on college applications). Given the many issues that GSAs seek to address within a limited amount of time—often a 30-minute to one-hour meeting per week—they may strain to adequately meet the needs of all students.

Some members may benefit more from their GSA involvement than others, depending on how well their own needs or interests align with what their GSA happens to offer. For example, students who joined because they wanted emotional support may benefit less from their involvement than members who joined for advocacy reasons, if their GSA emphasizes advocacy. This dynamic speaks to the importance of person-environment fit; a match of individual needs with environmental provisions produces better outcomes.[32] As such, GSAs should conduct periodic needs assessments among members in order to identify the range of needs or interests represented within the group, and to determine the optimal amount of time or resources to devote to meeting them.

As for the demographics of GSA members, heterosexual students are a sizable constituency within many GSAs. Indeed, the membership of heterosexual allies within GSAs is one of their unique features. Often, heterosexual students join GSAs to learn more about LGBTQ issues, advocate for human rights, socialize with peers who are already GSA members, and support LGBTQ individuals.[33]

Beyond their initial motivations for joining, several factors characterize heterosexual members who stay engaged in their GSA. For instance, heterosexual members who report having more positive feelings after attending their first several GSA meetings report greater ongoing active engagement in their GSA than others.[34] When they experience a welcoming reception during these first meetings, they may feel more invested in the group and have a greater sense of belonging. Initially feeling welcomed by the GSA may be particularly important for heterosexual students, who may be cautious in joining a club they might perceive as primarily for sexual minority students. To meet the needs and interests of heterosexual members, GSAs might consider asking for their feedback to ensure they feel included.

The Important Roles of GSA Advisors

GSA advisors play a major role in supporting students. The youth mentoring literature shows a clear connection between the presence of supportive adult role models and healthy youth development.[35] A GSA advisor may be one of just a few affirming adults in a school who is accessible to LGBTQ youth. In addition, advisors can link students to larger community networks and also advocate for these students among other educators or administrators.[36] Advisors thus have much to offer students and can have a substantial impact on students' experiences within the GSA and their overall well-being.

Many advisors have noted their desire to support LGBTQ students as a strong motivation for becoming a GSA advisor, while others have pointed to their personal connections with

GSAs should be part of broader efforts to ensure the visibility, protection, respect, and success of LGBTQ students.

LGBTQ individuals.[37] In addition to fulfilling a general advisory role during GSA meetings, advisors also support students when they experience parental rejection, relationship concerns, bullying, or mental health issues. They also provide students with referrals to other LGBTQ-affirming agencies; respond to acts of discrimination in the school; serve as a consultant to other teachers, staff, and administrators around LGBTQ issues; and plan and coordinate out-of-school events.[38]

Heterosexual students are a sizable constituency within many GSAs.

Some advisors have noted barriers to their work—for example, administrator hostility to their GSA.[39] Often, they must handle the challenges of securing adequate resources for GSA activities as well as permission and funding to attend out-of-school events (e.g., student conferences). Furthermore, many advisors are not provided with formal training for their position.[40] Given that educators serve increasingly diverse racial and ethnic populations, with a growing number of students from different backgrounds, it is crucial that GSA advisors have access to training and adequate support.[41] The convergence and concentration of diversity within GSAs requires advisors to be competent across many forms of diversity (e.g., race or ethnicity, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, or social class). Yet they may have few training opportunities to build their efficacy in providing culturally informed support for students whose identities and experiences may differ from their own.

Beyond advisors' one-on-one interactions with students, their knowledge and sense of efficacy around multiple forms of diversity could be important in their support of the GSA as a whole.[42] While the primary focus of GSAs is on sexual orientation and gender, they also aim to address other forms of oppression.[43] Advisors should be able to support and guide students with regard to such issues as racial, economic, or religious discrimination as they intersect with sexual orientation or gender.

The power-sharing dynamics between advisors and student members can vary considerably across GSAs.[44] Some GSAs reflect more of a "top-down" and hierarchical decision-making process driven largely by advisors. For instance, advisors may choose the topic or issue they will discuss at a given meeting and may play a greater role in facilitating these discussions. In contrast, other GSAs reflect a horizontal power-sharing and decision-making process with more balance between advisors and students.

We have found that students who perceive having more control in decision making within their GSA and, notably, whose GSA advisors perceive that they themselves have more control in decision making, report the highest levels of well-being.[45] Although these are conflicting perceptions of who is in control, this finding may reflect the complexity in how students and advisors negotiate their roles in making GSA-related decisions and in ensuring the success of their GSA. Because it can be difficult for advisors and students to balance power and distribute responsibilities, GSAs (like other student groups) should allot sufficient time for advisors and students to engage in these conversations so that everyone feels responsible for the success of their GSA.

Although GSAs are uniquely positioned to promote the safety, well-being, and success of students across various sexual orientation and gender identities, it would be unreasonable to expect them to be the single way to address the many ongoing concerns faced by LGBTQ students in schools. Ideally, GSAs should be supported with additional efforts linked to safer school climates and student well-being, such as adopting antibullying policies that specify protection on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, ensuring the representation of LGBTQ individuals and issues within standard course curricula,* implementing complementary schoolwide programming (e.g., social-emotional learning programs), and hosting in-service trainings for teachers and staff on LGBTQ-related issues.† Taking on this larger constellation of approaches could positively affect students and schools.[46]

(Continued on page 43)

*In July 2016, the California State Board of Education voted on a new history/social science framework that includes the study of LGBTQ Americans and their contributions to this country. The vote makes California the first state in the nation to include LGBTQ history in public schools. For more on this vote, see www.lat.ms/29AFNP4.

†At its biennial convention in July 2016, the American Federation of Teachers passed a resolution in support of LGBTQ students and staff. To read the resolution, visit http://go.aft.org/AE416link1.

Coming Out in High School

How One Gay-Straight Alliance Supports Students

By Kristina Rizga

It is a little past noon, and Mission High School's annual drag show is about to begin. The air in the school auditorium is hot, alive with loud chatter and intermittent laughter from a crowd of more than 1,000 students and adults. Scattered blue, pink, and yellow lights move across the sea of teenage faces. The stage sparkles with holiday lights and glitter. The projection screen on the stage reads: "'That's so gay' is NOT okay. Celebrate gay, hooray!" A few students sitting in the front rows are reading posters near the stage. Each displays someone's "coming out testimonial": "I am coming out as Gay, because I am fabulous." "I am coming out as a poet, because everyone should express themselves honestly and creatively!" "I am coming out as straight because I love girls!"

Pablo, a senior, is standing behind a heavy yellow velvet curtain at the back of the stage. His slender shoulders are moving up and down, as he is breathing rapidly. He can hear the voices and laughter on the other side of the curtain. The emcee on stage announces Pablo's name, and the volume of student voices in the audience goes up. His heart is racing. He wipes the sweat off his forehead with a white towel, but the drops reappear. His tongue feels swollen and dry. Pablo asks his friends for a glass of water.

This year's drag show—put on by Mission High's Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA)—has already been going better than all others Pablo has been a part of since he arrived at Mission. The drag show is a homegrown expression created by students of the school, which is located in San Francisco near the Castro district,

---

Kristina Rizga is a senior reporter at Mother Jones, *where she writes about education. This article is excerpted from* Mission High: One School, How Experts Tried to Fail It, and the Students and Teachers Who Made It Triumph *by Kristina Rizga.*

PHOTOS BY WINNI WINTERMEYER

the historic neighborhood with one of the largest gay populations in the country. The annual show features student- and teacher-choreographed dances, student and teacher "coming out" speeches, short educational videos on LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning) issues, and the popular "fashion show," in which teachers, administrators, security guards, and students appear dressed in drag.

Principal Eric Guthertz steps onto the stage in a white dress with a brown print on it, a blond wig, and red patent leather platforms to introduce the student dance Pablo has choreographed to Nicki Minaj's song "Super Bass." As Pablo and his five friends playfully twist and turn across the stage—dressed in shorts, fishnet stockings, and white tank tops—the audience cheers. Midway through the dance, during a blaring bass solo, a few students get up and dance on their chairs.

Pablo has spent more than a year thinking about the dance moves and his interpretation of the song. He has mixed in traditional dance moves from his native Guatemala: salsa, cumbia, merengue, and tango. Other ideas came from musical artists he admires, like Boy George and Lady Gaga. But the story is all his: he wants to convey the idea that dance, like life, is most meaningful when people are allowed to be whoever they want to be. For Pablo, it means breaking through the rigid confines of gender-based dance moves, allowing students to make up their own.

The emcee announces Pablo's name again. The screaming crowd gets louder. Pablo is scheduled to be the third student speaker in the drag show and will share his coming out story.

"Pablo, please come out," the emcee comes behind the curtain and tells him.

"I need five more minutes," Pablo replies.

What if they throw things at me while I'm talking? Pablo is thinking to himself. He starts shaking.

One, two, three, four, five. Pablo is now counting steps in his head, looking at his black Doc Martens, as he moves toward the stage. On six, he raises his eyes toward the lights, standing in front of the podium.

"Hello, Mission High School," Pablo's soft voice interrupts the cheering, and the noise stills.

"My name is Pablo," he says in a warm, confident voice. Then he glances at his written speech on his phone one more time before he continues.

"I describe myself in a million different ways. But today, I will tell you that I am Latino and gay. Just in case you still have struggles with race, gender, and sexuality, let me tell you something. Maybe what you see, maybe the outside, it's different, but on the inside, we are all the same.

"I knew I was gay before coming out. In my sophomore year, I came out to my best friend, Claudia, in a PE class. That morning, I felt brave, I felt free, I felt honest. Sounds easy, but I used to spend a lot of time crying, hating myself, praying to God to 'change' me.

"I got rejected at home. Sometimes, it hurts. But I understand. A lot of things can't go the way you want them to, but you have to learn how to work them out.

"I want to tell you that I am a crazy dreamer, but I am not alone. From Seneca Falls, where the first well-known women's rights convention in the U.S. happened, through Selma, where Dr. King and other organizers led one of the protests for civil rights, to the Stonewall Rebellion, the birth of the LGBTQ move-

ment, and now here in our school, it's called progress, people, whether you like it or not."

Challenges at School

Even though Mission High School sponsors an annual drag show, LGBTQ students still face challenges. At Mission, no one pushed Pablo around or punched him in the stomach. But some days the verbal banter and social isolation were overwhelming. Pablo didn't care as much about the words he heard in the hallways. He tried to walk down the halls with a friend, and the many hallways and staircases made it easy enough to escape tense situations. In some classrooms, though, there was no escape.

In his freshman algebra class, Pablo's teacher asked him to sit in a group of four students. Pablo sat down next to Carlos, a recent immigrant from Honduras, who wore a San Francisco Giants hat and a small cross around his neck, over his T-shirt. Pablo liked math and was good at it. Carlos was a top student in math too, and he was extremely competitive. In the first week of class, whenever Pablo solved a problem before everyone else in the group, Carlos whispered comments in Spanish. "No, you don't know this. You are dumb, because you are gay." The teacher didn't hear the comments.

A few weeks later, when Pablo was graphing a slope on the whiteboard in front of the class, Carlos started calling him names in Spanish out loud. The math teacher heard him this time and sent Carlos to the dean's office. But when Carlos came back, he was even more emboldened and crueler than before, and the situation was no better for Pablo.

On another occasion, Pablo's math teacher was writing out numbers on the whiteboard, and each number was painted in a different color, forming a rainbow. Carlos said in Spanish that it

looked like a gay flag. Another student chimed in; she said she didn't think gay marriage was right. At the time, Pablo hadn't come out yet—even to himself. As students joined in, he said he didn't think gay marriage was right either.

"Are you serious?" Carlos turned to him. "How can you turn against your own people?"

Later that day at home, Pablo was suffocating under the unbearable weight of shame. *Why am I afraid to come out? Why am I lying?* he thought. It was during this quiet, private monologue, sitting in his room alone, that Pablo came out of the closet to himself for the first time.

During his freshman year at Mission, Pablo was in classes for English learners. His English teacher, Deborah Fedorchuk, had all of her students write in journals at the beginning of each class. She would write a topic on the whiteboard, set the clock for 10 minutes, and encourage students to write without stopping. Whatever they wanted to say was fine, she assured them.

One day, she wrote down "Women's Rights," and Pablo surprised himself; he wrote and wrote, and the words kept pouring out. At the end of the paper, he decided that he was "for women's rights" and that he was a "feminist ally." Ms. Fedorchuk loved the essay and discussed it with Pablo at lunch. She enjoyed talking to her students about their journals. Almost every day, Pablo would come to her classroom and discuss with her various political and social issues: green economies and recycling, guns and "cholos" (a Spanish term that most often describes the Latino low-rider subculture and manner of dress), stereotypes, women.

> For LGBTQ students, some days the verbal banter and social isolation were overwhelming.

"Ms. Fedorchuk was the first person at Mission who made me feel at home," Pablo recalls four years later, as a senior. "I felt mute until I met her. Her interest in my ideas made me feel alive again. I wanted to be heard so bad. I was so shy and didn't speak English. She made me talk."

Later in his freshman year, Ms. Fedorchuk told Pablo about Taica Hsu (see his article on page 20), who sponsored the school's Gay-Straight Alliance club, in which students who shared Pablo's views on women's rights debated various social and political issues. Mr. Hsu spoke fluent Spanish and taught math—Pablo's favorite subject. Even though Mr. Hsu wasn't his math teacher, Pablo felt most comfortable asking him for help with math and checking in about anything else that was going on in his life at the time. Pablo started going to the GSA's weekly meetings. He still struggled with his English and was painfully shy at first. But he liked the GSA's president, Michelle—a bold, openly bisexual young woman—who had ambitious ideas for events and campaigns. Eventually, Pablo decided to become the vice president of the GSA.

Once a week, Mr. Hsu, Michelle, and Pablo met to plan the upcoming GSA meeting. During these sessions, Mr. Hsu taught Pablo and Michelle how to write agendas, keep everyone engaged, and make people feel welcome and included during meetings. That year, they organized the first panel at which GSA students educated teachers on ways to intervene when homophobic, sexist, or racist language is used in the classrooms. The idea came about after the group realized that most bullying was happening in the classrooms, rather than in the hallways.

The GSA invited all faculty members to come to the panel, at which students shared real examples of how teachers had intervened in a way they thought was constructive. Pablo was one of the speakers on the panel, remembering how one teacher had responded to an African American student who made the comment "Don't be a fag" to his friend during her class. "Excuse me," the teacher had said, stopping the class with a visible sense of urgency and concern. "We never use that kind of language here. How would you feel if someone said, 'That's so black?'"

Pablo recalled that the student had apologized, and that kind of language didn't occur in her class again. He and other panelists advised teachers to do more of that—to relate LGBTQ bullying to other forms of abuse students at the school can identify with, such as racism or hateful language targeting undocumented immigrants. Mr. Hsu says that almost all the teachers came to the panel and later expressed their support for such discussions with students. Most teaching programs and professional development days in schools don't provide that kind of training on appropriate ways to intervene. Some teachers feel they should say something, but they don't know how to respond appropriately.

As students shared their experiences, they came to the conclusion that some teachers were better than others at stopping abusive language or establishing a classroom culture that proactively prevents bullying in the first place. They decided to share these best practices with all teachers.

The GSA panelists made many suggestions on how to address these issues, including incorporating more LGBTQ content into the curriculum. "A small group of history teachers always included studies of the LGBTQ movements in their history classes, but many don't," Pablo says. "When they do, they show how these movements helped everyone and present gay people in a positive way."

One day during his sophomore year, Pablo's friend Claudia was telling him about her crushes during their physical education class. When she was done talking, she asked, "Do you have someone you like?"

"No," Pablo said.

A week later, she asked Pablo again, while they were doing pushups.

"You know how you tell me that you need to hug a pillow after you wake up from a nightmare?" Pablo said. "Let's pretend I'm having a nightmare right now. I need you to be there for me. There is someone I feel attracted to, and his name is Stephen."

Claudia stopped doing pushups.

"Yes, I'm gay," Pablo said, continuing to do pushups.

"Oh my God!" Claudia said with a smile. "I knew it."

Someone overheard them talking, and the news spread quickly throughout the school.

"It didn't matter anymore," Pablo recalls. "After I came out, I felt like I had space in the school. I felt bigger. I felt like, 'yes, I'm going to cope. I'm going to have good grades.'"

When Pablo came out to Claudia and joined the GSA, he felt physically and emotionally stronger and more confident in his abilities to cope with his new place in the world. At school, Pablo felt that people noticed him more. His grades improved, eventually landing him on the honor roll.

But at the end of his sophomore year, when school was out for the summer, life at home felt more stifling than usual. Pablo was spending more time at his house, where he lived with his mother and two uncles. His inability to be truthful with his mom weighed more heavily on his mind with each passing day.

After living at home grew unbearable, Pablo eventually moved into a friend's house. At school, Mr. Hsu checked on Pablo every day. His attendance and grades plummeted, and Mr. Hsu was worried. He talked to Pablo's teachers and sent out an e-mail asking them to be more lenient with Pablo's deadlines that month. In addition, Mr. Hsu introduced Pablo to his friend Erik Martinez, who was a case manager at a local LGBTQ youth community center and educational organization called LYRIC. Pablo started going to LYRIC every two weeks. He enjoyed talking to Martinez. Pablo didn't want to sit in a small room talking to a therapist about all of the things that were horrible in his life. He wanted to be in a group of like-minded people who were dealing with similar issues. LYRIC provided that community and felt like home. Pablo's relationship with his family remained strained, but he started feeling stronger about his ability to cope with it.

"The [drag show] dance, my expression, the LYRIC family, [that] was my therapy back then," Pablo reflects now. "What I really needed was resilience and building my confidence and skills to speak out."

A Supportive Gay-Straight Alliance

In schools all over the United States, teens who identify as LGBTQ are bullied far more than others.[1] A 2013 national survey conducted by GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network) found that homophobic (and sexist) remarks are more common today than racist comments. In addition, 85 percent of kids who identified as LGBTQ said they had been verbally harassed at school, 39 percent said they had been physically harassed, and 19 percent said they had been physically assaulted. These youths are more likely to skip school and have lower grades.[2]

Studies show that a GSA is one of the strongest buffers a school can build to reduce the bullying of gay teens. In schools with GSAs—according to journalist Emily Bazelon, author of *Sticks and Stones*—kids experience less abuse, have higher grades, and feel a greater sense of belonging.[3] There are about 3,500 GSAs in the United States, mostly in high schools but some in middle schools, according to the national Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network (GSA Network, formerly called the Gay-Straight Alliance Network). Founded in 1998, the GSA Network supports GSAs, and helps students establish them, in schools across the country.

The GSA Network, which unites statewide GSA organizations and promotes the GSA movement nationally, considers Mission one of its strongest and most effective local chapters in the country. Mission students, teachers, and administrators say that their GSA draws most of its strength from an authentic student ownership model. The work of its leadership is then reinforced by a larger, school-based approach designed to reduce stereotypes and biases, including sexism, racism, and the bullying of students with disabilities.

Most local GSAs look for guidance from the GSA Network, which coordinates large events for local chapters to participate in, such as National Coming Out Day. This national campaign raises awareness of the LGBTQ community, highlights commonalities among gay students and others who live with complex or multiple gender identities or who struggle with exclusion, and gives LGBTQ students in each school the ability to express themselves publicly.

Distributing forms for National Coming Out Day was one of the first campaigns Pablo ran when he joined the GSA, encouraging students to reveal hidden or lesser-known sides of their identities. As forms dotted the walls of Mission, some students came out as queer, others as allies of LGBTQ friends and family, and others as poets, punk rockers, dancers, food lovers, and secret admirers. Pablo says that in his freshman year, about 20 students filled out the forms. By his senior year, more than 300 did.

> The success of any antibullying initiative depends on the degree of student ownership.

During his sophomore year, Pablo danced in his first drag show. It was the first time Mission opened up the event to the entire school, after four years of gradual buildup. As he danced, the vast majority of students clapped and cheered. A few yelled out crude jokes, and teachers had to walk several students out. When one student was reading her "coming out" testimonial, someone threw a piece of crumpled paper at her. The ball didn't make it to the podium and landed in the front rows.

Even though the reception of the first public show was not as welcoming and widespread as the one at which Pablo read his testimonial two years later, he felt a tangible change at school the next day. As he walked down the hallways, countless students approached him to express support. He also noticed that students who didn't fit in—socially isolated and bullied kids who were not LGBTQ—wanted to talk to him. Some said they wanted to dance in next year's drag show. Others wanted to share their own stories of social exclusion, racism, or bullying.

"Before the drag show, I was a freak and it was a bad thing," Pablo recalls. "Now, it became a good thing. Many students still

looked at us as weird, but now we were also cool. We know how to dance, how to put on the most popular party at school, and we are good at listening to different people."

When Pablo became the vice president of Mission's GSA in his sophomore year, he proposed that the GSA put even more energy into homegrown activities designed by students. He also wanted to put on more events that celebrated queer culture; he felt that too many events focused on the ways in which LGBTQ teens were being repressed. "I didn't want Mission High to see gay students only as victims or negative statistics," he says. "I wanted everyone to see us as the most active and positive people at the school." If the GSA could put on the most popular parties at the school, Pablo reasoned, the club would attract many more allies, who would then become powerful ambassadors and disseminators of a culture of respect among students who would not otherwise connect to the GSA on their own. These student allies would also be taught to intervene and stop the spread of homophobic language.

Kim, a straight member of the GSA, is a perfect example of how Pablo's strategy worked. "I loved the dances, and that's why I joined, and so many others do too," she explains. "What appealed to me is that the drag show was the only place at the school where the dances were modern, not traditional. I love Lady Gaga, and I wanted to dance to pop music. As we were practicing for the drag show, I learned about the meaning behind these dances and the drag. But we also just hung out a lot and talked about life, and I learned about how hard it was for LGBTQ students to be out. I learned about the high number of suicides among gay teenagers.

"The drag show was the most powerful recruitment tool. My friends saw me dance and wanted to join, and I'd say, 'Oh, I'm going to a GSA meeting today,' and they'd just come and hang out. At any time, half of the kids were just hanging out there, eating pizza and seeing straight people they know support LGBTQ people."

Pablo's third and final drag show was the most popular event at Mission among students that year, and because it was open to the entire school, it was probably the only event of its kind anywhere in the country. When Pablo read his testimonial to the audience, the auditorium—filled with more than 900 teenagers from dozens of cultural and religious backgrounds—was so quiet and respectful that Pablo's breathing could be heard in the microphone. Some of the loudest cheers of support came from Carlos, Pablo's biggest tormentor four years earlier. A month after the drag show, Pablo helped Carlos find his first job out of high school.

While the situation for LGBTQ youth remains dire in too many schools across the country, the school climate for all students at Mission visibly improved from 2010 to 2014, according to students. In a districtwide 2013 student survey, 51 percent of Mission 11th-graders reported that other students "never" or "rarely" made harassing statements based on sexual orientation, compared with 28 percent from the same grade in other schools. Significantly higher percentages of Mission 11th-graders also reported that "this school encourages students to understand how others think and feel" and that "students here try to stop bullying when they see it happen."[4]

Educators at Mission agree that the success of any antibullying initiative depends on the degree of student ownership of the strategies for solutions. A GSA club, a drag show, or any other antibullying strategy that is superimposed by adults without genuine leadership and engagement by the students will not work. Another thing that wouldn't work, Pablo adds, is expecting that one club, like a GSA, can by itself change the entire school culture.

Mission supports dozens of clubs that celebrate diversity, individual difference, and inclusive leadership. But most of the important work happens in the classroom, Pablo says. Teachers who are in charge of their classrooms know how to set up classrooms that encourage positive social norms and effective group work and collaboration among students. They model behavior. They show students how to stand up for others and stop abuse effectively. And most important for Pablo, great teachers find relevant, intellectually challenging content that not only teaches history, fiction, grammatical conventions, and vocabulary, but also pushes students to explore the meaning of courage, empathy, honesty, forgiveness, and taking responsibility for one's own actions. ☐

Endnotes

1. Diane Felmlee and Robert Faris, "Toxic Ties: Networks of Friendship, Dating, and Cyber Victimization," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 79 (2016): 243–262.

2. Joseph G. Kosciw, Emily A. Greytak, Neal A. Palmer, and Madelyn J. Boesen, *The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools* (New York: GLSEN, 2014).

3. Emily Bazelon, *Sticks and Stones: Defeating the Culture of Bullying and Rediscovering the Power of Character and Empathy* (New York: Random House, 2013), 77.

4. California Department of Education, *California Healthy Kids Survey: San Francisco Unified Secondary 2013–2014 Main Report* (San Francisco: WestEd, 2014); and California Department of Education, *California Healthy Kids Survey: Mission High Secondary 2013–2014 Main Report* (San Francisco: WestEd, 2014).

How I Support LGBTQ+ Students at My School

Professional educators—in the classroom, library, counseling center, or anywhere in between—share one overarching goal: ensuring all students receive the rich, well-rounded education they need to be productive, engaged citizens. In this regular feature, we explore the work of professional educators—their accomplishments and their challenges—so that the lessons they have learned can benefit students across the country. After all, listening to the professionals who do this work every day is a blueprint for success.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY VIKTOR KOEN

By Taica Hsu

Growing up, I always wanted to become a teacher. As a precocious 8-year-old, I remember tutoring my friends in math. I loved helping them learn. In high school, I even started a tutoring program, and I participated in my school's peer counseling program.

While I dreamed of being an educator, I had no idea that one day I'd serve as an advisor to the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) where I taught. In high school, I knew I was gay, but I did not feel supported enough to come out to my friends and family. It wasn't until college that I felt comfortable telling others about my sexuality.

I came out during my first year at Dartmouth College. I also decided to put aside my dreams of teaching. I thought I wanted to be a doctor. I think I felt pressure to pursue a career like medicine, business, or law because society respects those professions more than teaching.

But by my sophomore year, I started taking education classes and changed my major to education. After I graduated from

Taica Hsu teaches mathematics and serves as the faculty advisor for the Queer Straight Alliance at Mission High School in the San Francisco Unified School District.

Dartmouth in 2006, I attended the Stanford Teacher Education Program, where I earned my license to teach mathematics in California. In 2007, I did my student teaching at Mission High School, a very racially and ethnically diverse school in San Francisco, and I've been a math teacher there ever since. (For more on Mission, see page 15.)

Connecting with the GSA

For nearly 10 years, I have been the school's GSA advisor, which has been incredibly rewarding. I first became interested in helping the group when I was a student teacher. I would attend meetings throughout the year, and I got to know the students and the teacher then advising them. That teacher left when I became a new teacher at Mission. Colleagues told me not to take on too many things my first year, but the GSA was really important to me, and I decided to become the advisor.

A Gay-Straight Alliance empowers students to stand up for who they are.

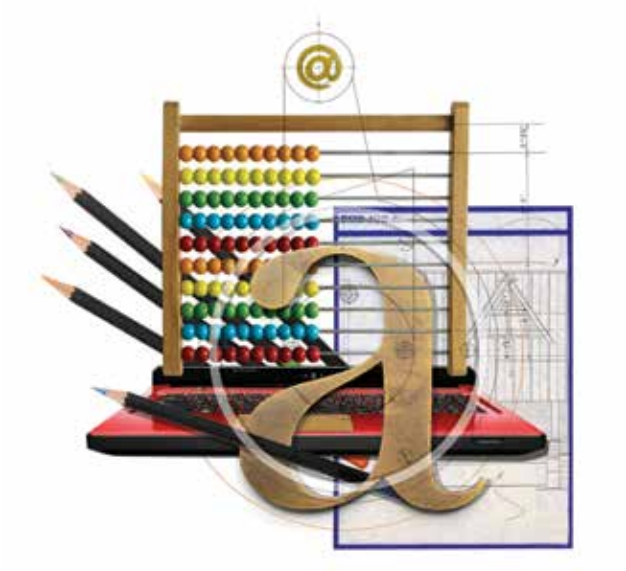
Students really make the group their own. They take on leadership positions and take ownership of the club, and it has become a very supportive space for a lot of students. During my first couple of years, teachers would refer students to the GSA when they would say homophobic things or do things that were insensitive toward the LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, plus) community. (I always include "+" because I think this movement should be as inclusive as possible.) And so, the GSA also became a place where students could learn from what we were doing.

I remember one student in particular who was referred by a teacher to the GSA for calling another student gay. Instead of calling his parents, the teacher told him to attend a GSA meeting to learn why such speech is not OK. Although he was required to attend only once, he was really drawn into the group and kept coming all year. The members of the GSA were kind and welcoming, and they educated him about LGBTQ+ issues. He became a strong ally for our community the rest of his time at Mission.

Having a group where students feel supported and free to discuss identity in a way they might not be able to in other spaces in school is really powerful. Ultimately, a GSA empowers students to stand up for who they are and enables allies to stand up for their LGBTQ+ peers.

The students who belong to the GSA at Mission make sure the group is visible on campus. The club has sponsored a marriage booth where students of any sexual identity can pretend to get married. We hold events on the Day of Silence, and we put on a drag show for LGBT Pride Month in our school district. For National Coming Out Day, we encourage students and staff to come out and identify as something different (not exclusively related to gender or sexual orientation), and we post these testimonies around the school. It's important that we are viewed as part of the school community, have a voice, and are respected.

Our membership ebbs and flows. Some students are especially committed to the work of transforming the school, while others join just to hang out with their friends, which is fine because they're still learning about LGBTQ+ issues and can be allies. This year, we have a core group of 10 students, half of whom were part of the club last year. I actually prefer a small group because students can get more done when we meet in our 40-minute lunch period. The club really is student-led. As an advisor, I mainly give them feedback and help with logistical issues, such as planning schoolwide events.



A Celebration of Drag

Among the most popular events the GSA plans are drag shows. The first one was very small, and we invited about half the school. GSA members only put the word out to teachers they felt comfortable with, ones who supported LGBTQ+ students and addressed homophobic and transphobic remarks in the classroom. They were invited because students felt these teachers would create a safe environment and would hold their students accountable for being respectful while watching the show. That spring, we held two 40-minute shows, in which students and teachers (including me!) performed.

As part of the show, students gave "coming out" speeches, or their friends or teachers read their speeches for them if they were too nervous to do so themselves. Parents and community members came too, and we got great feedback. Because it was such a big hit, we've been doing it ever since. It's even become a schoolwide assembly, so all students are now invited and attend, and a large number of students and faculty members, including the principal, participate in drag.

The GSA hosts the drag show because drag helps students understand the difference between gender (a social construct)

and sexual orientation. In watching and participating in drag, students see that gender is not dictated by the clothes you wear or by the activities you like. Gender is an identity that is fluid and can be expressed in many different ways. Gender expression—i.e., the ways someone manifests femininity or masculinity—may or may not conform to social constructs. While it can often be an extension of a person's gender identity, it does not define it. Drag breaks down the idea of gender norms and gender barriers, which makes it very powerful.

I still keep in touch with former students like Pablo, whom I see a few times a year. Pablo currently works and takes college classes. A year after he graduated in 2013, Pablo came back to Mission to help choreograph the drag show. Other GSA alumni also tend to keep in touch. Rexy, our most recent former president, helped choreograph last year's show and even participated in it. It's important for students to see that the alumni connection to the GSA remains strong.

It's a connection I regret not having in my own high school. I graduated in 2002 from a school in Corona, California, which is part of Riverside County. My high school felt oppressive, and it was not a good place to be LGBTQ+. When I first got involved with the GSA at Mission, I really wanted to cultivate a space where students could feel comfortable being who they are.

To ensure that all students feel supported in our club, last year students changed the name from GSA to QSA, for Queer Straight Alliance. They felt like that was more inclusive of all identities and that compared with "gay," the word "queer" represents a broader identity. Our students noticed a lot of their peers were identifying as "gender queer" or just "queer" in general and didn't want to label themselves as "gay" or "lesbian" or "transgender."

Educating Other Teachers

Every few years, our club holds a training for the school's staff. We help give teachers tools to intervene when a student says something homophobic in class. For years, teachers were just coming to me privately and saying, "I have a student who said something. Can you talk to them?"

Because of these trainings, and because LGBTQ+ students have been so articulate about the fact that teachers should intervene when homophobic remarks are made, more teachers are using what gets said in class as teachable moments. For instance, I think it's really important to ask a student what he or she means by a homophobic remark and then to explain the oppressive history of that language.

Sometimes when students say something derogatory, they don't even understand its connotation. A teacher can respond with a question like, "What do you actually mean by 'That's so gay'?" Often, students will say, "Oh, I don't mean it like that." That's when a teacher can say, "All right. Well, what else could you say to communicate your feelings without targeting or being negative toward an entire community?" This moment then becomes educational because the teacher can talk about the history of the derogatory use of the word the student has used. The teacher can help students understand how using the word that way offends people whose identity is being associated with a negative connotation.

We help give teachers tools to intervene when a student says something homophobic in class.

At Mission, teachers have adopted this approach not only for LGBTQ+ slurs but for racist and sexist remarks, so they can help students really reflect on their language and be more aware of others' feelings. Such reflections often occur in our school's ethnic studies classes and during QSA meetings, both of which help students understand that discriminatory language is part of a system of oppression, in which we sometimes unintentionally participate but from which we can break free.

I do think my colleagues have gotten better at handling these situations instead of just coming to me. I've actually had teachers come to me and say, "Hey, I did this in class, and it really worked." That feedback is empowering, and it shows that these trainings and discussions have pushed teachers forward to deal with discriminatory remarks and not just ignore them or pretend not to hear them. They are actually engaging with students around their language so that all students feel safe.

As a sign of its strong support for LGBTQ+ students and in an effort to make Mission more inclusive, our school just opened its first gender-neutral bathroom. We're trying to ensure that students know about it and feel safe using it—and that adults know how to convey the purpose of a bathroom with no gender restrictions. Although the QSA has helped make Mission a more welcoming place for all students, we still have work to do. ☐

How Educators Address Bias in School

BY GLSEN

Teachers play a critical role in ensuring that students learn in the safest and most affirming environment possible. Findings from our 2015 national survey of secondary teachers and students,* a follow-up to a survey we conducted 10 years ago, provide valuable information about how educators are addressing bias in their schools. To that end, the findings highlighted below focus on teachers' survey responses and offer insights into what challenges remain.

- Approximately half of the teachers believed that bullying, name-calling, or harassment was a serious problem at their schools.
- Overall, teachers reported that students felt safer in their schools, and also reported lower incidences of biased remarks, than teachers surveyed in 2005. Yet these more positive perceptions did not hold true for safety and bias related to race/ethnicity and religion.
- Most teachers surveyed reported intervening at least sometimes when hearing biased remarks; they did so most often with sexist remarks and least often with negative remarks about transgender people.
- While at least half of teachers reported being very comfortable intervening in all types of biased remarks, they were most comfortable intervening in negative remarks about ability, and least comfortable intervening in negative remarks related to gender expression and transgender people.
- Most teachers also reported feeling comfortable addressing bullying behaviors, but they were most comfortable addressing bullying based on race or religion, and least comfortable addressing bullying based on a student's actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.
- Teachers surveyed in 2015 reported intervening in biased remarks less often than did teachers surveyed in 2005. This change may be a result of the change in their comfort levels in intervention.

Teachers in 2015 may be less prepared for handling these behaviors among their students, which could indicate a continuing, and perhaps greater, need for professional development.

Supportive LGBTQ Practices. The overwhelming majority of teachers surveyed felt that teachers and other educators had an obligation to ensure safe and supportive learning environments for LGBTQ students. However, this sense of obligation did not always translate into action, with only about half of teachers reporting having engaged in any LGBTQ-supportive practices.

Most commonly, teachers indicated that they had worked directly with students by providing one-on-one LGBTQ student support and discussing LGBTQ issues with students, and were less likely to report engaging in activities that may have a broader impact on school climate, such as including LGBTQ people or topics in their curriculum, educating other school staff, advocating for inclusive policies, or advising a Gay-Straight Alliance or similar student group.

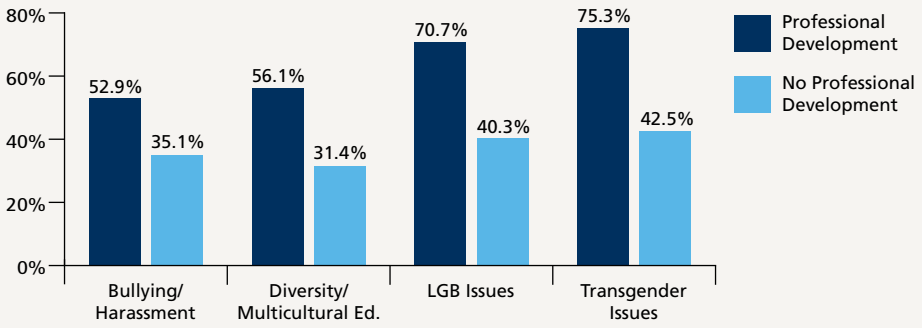
Professional Development. Our findings highlight the importance of professional development in helping teachers become more aware of the bias students face in schools and better equipped to respond. As shown below, teachers who had received professional development on diversity/multicultural education or on LGBTQ student issues reported intervening in biased remarks more often and were more likely to engage in LGBTQ-supportive practices. The effect of LGBTQ-related professional development on LGBTQ-supportive practices was particularly striking.

However, teachers were unlikely to receive this type of professional development in their pre-service training or when working in schools. Although over three-fourths of teachers said they had some type of professional development on diversity/multicultural education, less than a third said they had received any training on LGBTQ student issues. Teachers in schools with enumerated LGBTQ policies were more likely to have received professional development on issues related to LGBTQ students and on diversity/multicultural education. However, further analysis demonstrated that professional development on bullying that does not include content on diversity or LGBTQ student issues does not necessarily lead to an increase in LGBTQ-supportive efforts.

Teacher Characteristics. Although few teachers reported incorporating LGBTQ people and topics into their teaching, those teaching English or history/social studies were more likely to do so than those who teach in other subject areas. This pattern held true for most LGBTQ-supportive practices as well, suggesting that more attention should be given to helping teachers of all disciplines address anti-LGBTQ bias and support LGBTQ students.

Engagement in LGBTQ-Supportive Practices by Professional Development

For each type of professional development, teachers who had received it were more likely to engage in practices supportive of LGBTQ students than those who had not. As shown below, more than 70 percent of teachers who had received professional development in LGBTQ student issues had engaged in LGBTQ-supportive practices, compared with just over 40 percent of teachers who had not.



Percentage of teachers who engaged in LGBTQ-supportive practices

SOURCE: GLSEN, *FROM TEASING TO TORMENT*, PAGE 74.

*On behalf of GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network), Harris Poll administered an online survey to 1,367 U.S. students ages 13–18, and to 1,015 U.S. middle and high school teachers. The survey results were released in a September 2016 report, *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate Revisited*, as a follow-up to a similar GLSEN report 10 years ago. The 2016 report is available at www.bit.ly/2e97QUE.

Understanding Bullying Behavior

What Educators Should Know and Can Do

By Elizabeth Kandel Englander

This may not be the first time you've read about bullying, but like many educators, perhaps you still feel frustrated with a problem that seems to defy a tsunami of opinions, discussions, stories, and proposed solutions. Anyone working in schools knows very well how serious bullying can be; on the other hand, it's not uncommon to hear even mild slights characterized as bullying. We want to help children who are being targeted, but we also know there's no way to *require* children to like each other. We know that children can be cruel online, but realistically, how can educators address problems that are happening off campus and in cyberspace?

My purpose in this article is to help educators sort through some thorny issues that complicate our efforts to understand bullying and cyberbullying, and to suggest practical and realistic ways to address these behaviors effectively.

Let's start with a few key points that are often not well understood but can really help clarify everything that follows.

First, the chronic overuse of the term *bullying* produces a set of problems that actually impedes our prevention efforts. By permitting children to blithely frame many interpersonal difficulties as bullying, we're allowing (perhaps even encouraging) them to abandon consideration of personal responsibility in situations where they may bear some. Likewise, by calling everything bullying, we greatly water down the very real distress that targets of bullying experience, and this can result in children themselves taking bullying much less seriously.

Elizabeth Kandel Englander is a professor of psychology at Bridgewater State University and the founder and director of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center, which delivers free antiviolence and anti-bullying resources to K–12 educators. The author of numerous articles and books, she chairs the Cyberbullying Workgroup at the Institute of Digital Media and Child Development, which is supported by the National Academy of Sciences. This article is excerpted with permission from her book Bullying and Cyberbullying: What Every Educator Needs to Know *(Harvard Education Press, 2013), www.hepg.org/hep-home/books/bullying-and-cyberbullying.*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JAMES YANG

Probably the single most common confusion I see in the field is the mix-up between bullying and fighting. Fighting is an equal-power conflict. Bullying, on the other hand, occurs between a powerful aggressor and a target who lacks the power to fight back.[1]

This leads us directly to the second point, namely that bullying is an abusive behavior and needs to be understood as such.

Third, contemporary bullying is not always easy to recognize. Teachers and administrators today sometimes miss or misinterpret incidents because they lack information about what to look for.

Fourth, bullying in school is not always separate from what happens on the Internet. We may tend to think of bullying and cyberbullying as distinct and unrelated events, but in actuality, they're often neither.

Finally, bullying is not a problem adults alone could or should fix; children *do* need to learn how to cope with meanness, whether it's milder incidents that adults help coach them through or more serious situations that require direct adult intervention.

What Is Bullying?

Precisely defined, bullying is calculated, ongoing abuse that is aimed at a less powerful target.[2] Bullying is intentional and repetitive social cruelty; the targets cannot defend themselves.

Using this definition, between a quarter and a third of children report being targeted by bullies in a given year.[3] Notably lacking are statistics on bullying at very young ages. In my own research based on survey data from parents of younger students, 6 percent of kindergarten parents, 7 percent of first-grade parents, and 19 percent of second-grade parents reported that they were aware their child was being, or had been, bullied at school or online (and cyberbullying can indeed start this early).[4]

It's harder to know how common cyberbullying is. Higher rates of cyberbullying are reported in studies that ask about a wider variety of digital behaviors or about problems that may have happened during longer periods of time. It does appear clear, though, that as children grow, digital bullying occupies an increasingly larger proportion of all bullying incidents. In my own 2015 research, 31 percent of elementary school bullying was reported to have occurred electronically, but almost all (97 percent) of high school bullying involved electronics.

Digital communication changes how we communicate and thus, in turn, changes the social interactions that ensue both online and offline. Children don't see the school hallways and cyberspace as separate. For them, text messaging is just another way of talking, and the Internet is just another place where they see their friends.

But digital technology isn't the only factor that has changed the nature of bullying. Many of us saw or experienced bullying as children, and it's natural that as adults we should be on the lookout for the kind of overt, often physical bullying behaviors we saw when young. But research shows that most bullying today does not involve any physical contact.[5] A mistaken focus on physical bullying sometimes causes us to miss the forest for the trees. We need to know much more accurately what to look for and what to respond to.

Most bullying today is centered around the use of psychological methods, including those I call *gateway behaviors*—socially inappropriate behaviors used to convey contempt and dominance, such as whispering about people in front of them, laughing at others openly, eye rolling, ignoring, name calling, encouraging peers to drop friends, posting embarrassing photos online, and so on. Gateway behaviors in and of themselves don't necessarily indicate bullying. Students may use gateway behaviors when they're in a quarrel or simply annoyed with a peer.

Regardless, these "beginning" or low-risk ways of asserting power or expressing contempt, left unchecked, can normalize disrespect and thus escalate into conflict and bullying.[6] It's the *continually repeated* and *targeted* use of gateway behaviors by powerful peers, with the intent to demean and harass, that becomes true bullying.

How Do I Tell If It's Bullying?

Actually, you may not always be able to tell. While the kids involved have the entire story, the adults may only see the immediate gateway behaviors, with no real information about whether the underlying problem is bullying, fighting, or some other issue. Not being able to tell if a problem is bullying doesn't mean you cannot respond effectively, however. But for the moment, let's explore how to assess an incident to determine if a situation is bullying.

> Bullying is calculated, ongoing abuse that is aimed at less powerful targets who cannot defend themselves.

Assessing intentional cruelty. Sometimes this is obvious, but often it's not. It can be difficult to judge an internal process like intention. However, there are clues that can help detect indications of bullying, such as power imbalance and repetition.

Assessing power imbalance. In my research, subjects who reported that they were able to exploit bullying successfully for their own social gain rated themselves as significantly more popular than other children.[7] Because most children's power today is derived from high social status (rather than from physical size), consider any known differences in social power (popularity and social status) between the children involved.[8] Perhaps the alleged aggressor is much more popular than the target. Or, the alleged target may belong to a socially vulnerable group. Popular kids and groups vary from school to school, but students often targeted for bullying are those with special needs and those who identify (or who are identified, accurately or not) as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer/questioning (LGBTQ).

Very recent research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has in fact confirmed what many educators have observed anecdotally: namely, that lesbian and gay students

report being bullied (and violently attacked, including sexually attacked) at very high rates. The 2015 report of the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, which analyzed the results of its Youth Risk Behavior Survey of representative samples of U.S. high school students, found that 34 percent of these vulnerable students reported being the targets of bullies on school property, 23 percent experienced sexual dating violence, and 42.8 percent had contemplated suicide.[9] A study published in the journal of the American Sociological Association found that LGBTQ students are four times more likely to be targets of cyberbullying.[10] This situation could be termed a crisis, and one in which the imbalance of power is playing a pivotal role.

Assessing repetition. It's important to distinguish, when possible, between problems that are ongoing but have been detected only for the first time, and problems that are genuinely one-time incidents. Just because a child *reports* a bullying incident for the first time doesn't mean it's the first time it has happened. The bottom line is, the child may know things he or she hasn't disclosed to you and may be the only source likely or able to divulge that information. The only way to tap that vein is to develop enough of a connection with the student that he or she is likely to tell you the entire history.*

If you suspect that a child may be experiencing repeated episodes of cruelty, but you're not sure whether he or she would divulge such information to you personally, the most responsible course of action is probably locating an adult in whom the child can comfortably confide. That person may or may not be you. Don't misinterpret this as a criticism. The chemistry that unfolds between you and the children you teach is not entirely in your control.

Dealing with Gateway Behaviors

As I pointed out above, you may not be able to definitively label a situation as bullying, but the good news is that even without that information, you can still respond effectively. The solution is to focus on the behaviors you can see instead of the internal motives and feelings you can't see.

When a child behaves in a way that breaks a school rule, you know what to do: follow the school's protocols. But gateway behaviors are trickier precisely because they usually *don't* break school rules. (How could a school have a rule against laughing?) In those cases, the student is obeying the letter of the law but is still behaving in a socially inappropriate way. Since these socially inappropriate behaviors, by themselves, are only small transgressions and may be viewed as minor misbehaviors, they can be used right in front of adults.

As I stated above, adults may have trouble deciding whether a child's gateway behaviors rise to the level of bullying because they also can be used to tease or to be mean just once. Even if you become an expert at recognizing these behaviors, you won't always know *why* they're being used. Two boys laughing pointedly at a third might be doing it for the first time or the hundredth time. There's usually no obvious way to know which it is. So what should the response be, if you're not sure which you're seeing?

Many adults I train remark that they may pause and attempt to do an on-the-spot motive analysis: "Maybe the child only meant it as a joke, or it could very well be just a passing minor bit of nastiness." If what they see is really egregious—an overt threat, for example—then they know what to do. But if they only see an inappropriate behavior and don't know if it's being used to bully, they may decide it could be counterproductive to stir the waters. Unfortunately, an accumulation of these inappropriate yet minor social misbehaviors can poison the social climate in a school. That's why gateway behaviors absolutely require a response, *regardless* of why they're being used.

Formal discipline is an option but one you can't, or won't, often use for gateway behaviors, since its application is obviously limited for behaviors that don't break any rules and that may or may not be being used for bullying.[11] Furthermore, using formal discipline for teasing or every random mean comment is not only overkill but probably impossible. Instead, what you need is a response that can be used *before* behaviors rise to a level that requires formal discipline. It has to be one that is also appropriate in the event the child has merely gone too far with a tease or has, in a rare spiteful mood, thrown out a single mean comment or gesture.

Your goal in responding to gateway behaviors is simple: you want the children in your school to understand that you expect them to behave in a reasonably civilized and considerate manner at all times. It's not necessary to establish the motive of the offending student(s) (e.g., teasing versus bullying). All you need to ascertain is the presence of an inappropriate social behavior.

The Nine-Second Response

I've developed a response set for gateway behaviors that has several advantages. It's quick, easy to do, makes sense to everyone, takes the onus off the target and puts it on the entire community, and can't be debated or argued with. It avoids the entire can-you-prove-I-did-this conundrum, and it addresses bullying behaviors while not branding the casual users with a scarlet "B" that will follow them for life. Most importantly, this response will clearly convey to all the students who see it what your expectations are for their social behaviors.

*For more on the importance of connecting with students, see "It's About Relationships" in the Winter 2015–2016 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/winter2015-2016/ashley.

Step one: Consistently notice gateway behaviors. This is the difficult part of the response, because the idea of having to respond to every snicker and rolled eye may indeed be seen as, at best, overwhelming, and at worst, simply impossible. But remember that the goal of setting expectations is not to find yourself obliged to constantly point out violations but rather to change the students' behavior so that those violations no longer occur. Once children understand a clearly stated expectation for their behavior, most will comply with it (the exception being those who have too many other challenges). In other words, notice and respond consistently, and you won't have to do it for long.

Step two: Own the impact. Once you notice a gateway behavior, responding is simple and quick. When you see a child who behaves contemptuously or rudely toward another child, simply tell the offending child that *you*—*not* the target—are offended and bothered by the behavior and that they must stop.

That's it. Clocked, this takes about five seconds, although I call it the *nine-second response* because it takes another four seconds to pull your mind together when you're not accustomed to responding. Teachers who are used to doing it tell me they can respond very rapidly.

The critical element here is to *not* emphasize the damage being done to the target ("How do you think that made Kristin feel?"). Instead, emphasize the damage to yourself and to the entire school community. No question or attention should be drawn to the target—implying to any watchers that the target is really not the problem. If needed, you can always talk with that child later, but for now, you're driving home the message that the use of socially cruel behaviors affects you and the entire school by poisoning the school climate. By not addressing the target, you're emphasizing that it is not the target's job to bear the responsibility for that damage.

While some teachers ask me if it's OK to say that a gateway behavior affects everyone, or that it's something "we" (the school community) don't do, it is most effective to tell a child that *you*, personally, are being harmed by his or her behavior. The fact that you are directly affected (offended, bothered) emphasizes the message that gateway behaviors don't simply harm people in the abstract. People who use them are being truly hurtful to the school community, and there are very good reasons for the social rules that forbid such behaviors. Most children who engage in these behaviors are focused only on wounding the target and haven't particularly considered that they could be having a much broader negative impact.

There is still a role for formal discipline. If you repeatedly see a child doing something mean, particularly to the same target, you should of course continue to respond, but you should also go up to the next level. Two problems need to be addressed: (a) you suspect that bullying is going on—this is no longer a one-time event, and (b) you are asking this student to stop being offensive, and he or she is ignoring you and persisting. Both counts should be subject to formal discipline.

As for a more positive and preventive way to address these behaviors, having a class discussion is a great way to examine gateway behaviors and their consequences. Begin by asking your students to identify behaviors they consider rude or inconsiderate. Make a list on the board. If the students don't think of common gateway behaviors, like name calling or eye rolling, you can include them on the list. Once you have a reasonable catalog, ask your students, "Why do we have rules about these behaviors? What's the purpose?" Encourage a discussion about how manners aren't just meaningless, arbitrary rules—they are guidelines based on consideration for the feelings of others, and by keeping everyone feeling OK, manners allow people to function at their highest level.

The point of this class discussion is to remind children that social rules aren't pointless or even only about kindness. Social rules keep people's feelings from being hurt and help students focus on academics. Finally, you can encourage a discussion about why and how these rules are sometimes broken by accident (such as with teasing that goes too far), versus on purpose. The Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center offers free, age-appropriate curricula for kindergarten through grade 12 that can help you shape those discussions (see www.marccenter.org).

Most bullying today is centered around the use of psychological methods.

Regarding cyberbullying, children can easily make any adult feel less than capable about technology. However, while children may easily learn which buttons to push on a gadget, they often fail to understand the *impact* of electronic communications and how tone and meaning can get lost. What children need is help in understanding how to send and interpret accurate communications. (See "Identifying and Responding to Cyberbullying" on page 28 for more about cyberbullying and how educators can respond.)

Keep the Focus on the Child's Behavior

Although I always encourage a focus on the behavior itself rather than on the label, educators in many states are obliged to make an official determination about whether a child's behavior constitutes "bullying." I truly believe that there's no way to always get this issue exactly right. Still, here are some general suggestions that may help:

Evaluate the balance of power. Ask yourself if one of the children has much less power than or is afraid of the other. If the answer is yes, then taking a closer look is a better approach than dismissing the incident.

Weigh the content of the dispute. Ask yourself if the dispute appears to be relatively inconsequential. A quarrel over whether

someone's mother is an alcoholic is not inconsequential, but an argument over who gets to go first on the slide can be. Is the content of the quarrel something that can be really hurtful? Is it important? If the answer is no, then encouraging the children to work it out for themselves is probably merited. (The exception to this is when the dispute is repeated, in which case the content becomes largely irrelevant.)

Consider whether the dispute is a repeat occurrence. Regardless of content, is this situation or problem appearing repeatedly? Even if the content seems very trivial, students who are engaging in problem behaviors together over and over again are essentially struggling with a larger issue. That's a signal that a talk is merited.

Look for an obvious ulterior motive. An obvious ulterior motive is always a signal to take a situation more (not less) seriously, although the situation may be different from the one being reported. For example, a young child persistently telling you that so-and-so is cutting in line and should be punished is a signal for a talk with the "telling" child. You may ultimately decide that so-and-so is indeed guilty, or you may find yourself uncovering something entirely different.

Determine whether the situation has escalated. Adults should devote attention and care to any situation between children that appears to be escalating. Children often don't understand how their behaviors can contribute to an escalation, including their digital behaviors. Some education is often in order.

Always respond to fear. If a child is afraid, that situation always merits your close attention. Always provide a fearful child with support and a safety network, including a "safe adult" whom he can visit whenever needed. Check in with him regularly and often.

Having a class discussion is a great way to examine gateway behaviors and their consequences.

Always offer a safety hatch. Even if you tell kids to work something out for themselves, or tell them not to "tattle" (an approach I strongly recommend against—see important research by the Youth Voice Project[12]), finish your comment by letting the children involved know that you will listen later if this is important (even though you may not be able to listen right now).

Identifying and Responding to Cyberbullying

It may be difficult to ascertain if the harassment that occurs online meets the traditional three criteria for bullying (intent, power imbalance, and repetition).[1] It's not only that power imbalances can shift unpredictably online; the difficulty is also that while a target may legitimately *experience* online behavior as bullying, an alleged cyberbully may never have *intended* that outcome.

At times, this issue may be irrelevant, particularly when digital behaviors closely resemble in-school bullying. For example, the aggressor and target may largely agree on intention and outcomes when a student sets up a web page committed to "The Group Who Hates Sally Smith." That aggressor clearly intends to be hurtful; the web page is updated regularly with new content, so she intends the hurt to be repetitive, and because she invites others to become "members" of the group or web page, she's clearly looking for the audience to admire her power.

But many other times, the alleged cyberbully's actual intention is much less clear, and the target may experience the online behavior in a way that's completely different from how it was meant. Suppose a student sends a funny, embarrassing image of another student to two of his buddies on Instagram, who then forward it to dozens of other students. You could argue that the meme's creator, who was trying to be funny, *should* have realized that his snarky picture could get sent to many others, but this action still probably wouldn't meet the criteria for bullying. The creator's intention wasn't to demonstrate his power or dominance, and although the picture was forwarded many times, he personally sent it out only once, to two people. He may not have intended for it to hurt the target and may have assumed that the target would never know.

Nevertheless, the subject of that image might indeed experience what happened as bullying—the humiliating picture was sent and seen repeatedly and was certainly sent on purpose. The object of the "joke" is likely to feel markedly powerless as well, since once out on the Internet, that image is essentially uncontrollable.

The point here is that when we talk about assessing intent, power, and repetition in a digital environment, there are two perspectives—the alleged bully's and the target's—and they may be very different. Which counts more: the intention of the bully, or the subjective experience of the target? As I've noted, sometimes this is hard to figure out even in face-to-face incidents, and the difference between these two perspectives can be magnified when the interactions are digital.*

Because the intent to hurt or bully can be absent or not apparent in a digital environment, it's critically important for children to understand the dynamics of online communication—and how easily casual digital actions can escalate out of their control.

*For more on bullying and cyberbullying prevention, the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center offers free research-based curricula, online needs-assessment and surveying services, downloadable games, information for parents, and training materials for faculty and administrators.

Even if you ask them to work it out, help them with the process. Rather than just saying, "You two work this out," prompt the children by asking them, "How could you two work this out for yourselves, without having to ask for help from a grownup? Can one of you propose a solution?" If the students respond with a reason why they came to you (e.g., "But he never does what he says he'll do"), then help them negotiate a compromise, but also stay put, to help enforce the results. Hopefully, the extra minutes you spend there will mean that in the future, these children will be able to work out small problems for themselves.

Finally, when discussing a student's hurtful behavior with parents, students, or others, a few cautionary points are in order:

1. Never use the word *bullying* unless you must. It's emotionally loaded and likely to generate an emotional response. Refer to a child as a bully only when you are absolutely required to.
2. If you must label a situation as bullying, make clear the criteria used for that label and how you see the case fitting these criteria.
3. The parents of the bully will often disagree with your assertion, and it's a good idea to let them save some face. Sometimes it's helpful for parents to know that many children may "try out" bullying. That may permit them to focus on their child's behavior without being distracted by a debate about the word *bullying*. Keep in mind, though, that they may need to hear a recommendation that their child discuss the incident with their pediatrician or family doctor.
4. On the other side, the parents of the target may disagree if you *don't* think the situation is bullying, in which case it's often a good idea to reemphasize the indisputably objectionable nature of the behavior in question and refocus on concrete actions that can increase the child's sense of safety (such as providing the child with a "safe adult" whom she can visit any time she feels the need, or providing daily or weekly check-ins with the students and their parents during the resolution of the incident).
5. Never cite confidentiality without explaining it—this point cannot be overemphasized. Many parents don't understand that federal law (and possibly state law, depending on the state) forbids administrators from discussing another parent's child in any way. To an upset parent, you may appear to be stonewalling or even protecting the other student. It's critical to point out that you absolutely don't have a choice—you understand how they feel, but you must obey the law.

(Continued on page 44)

While cyberbullying and bullying may affect the target similarly, the cyberbully and the bully may be two very different animals. Assessing for cyberbullying, therefore, relies heavily on the subjective experience of the target—and we need to keep in mind that the existence of a cyberbullying target won't always imply the coexistence of an intentional cyberbully.

Unlike traditional bullying, much cyberbullying takes place off campus, most typically on a mobile device or in the child's home. This means that the behavior falls into a different legal category. While behavior that takes place at school is clearly under the jurisdiction of educators, behavior at home is usually viewed as being under the jurisdiction of parents.[2] Still, this doesn't permit schools to wash their hands of it. If the behavior in question involves criminal activity, threats, significant violence, or electronic or physical stalking, I believe (as a nonlawyer) the police should be consulted.

It's often worthwhile to have an educational discussion with the cyberbully and cyberbystanders. This discussion is *not* discipline; it is educational, about the dangers of cyberbullying and the fact that everyone is now aware of the situation. If relevant, discuss future legal problems the child may face if these behaviors continue. You can involve a school resource officer or police officer in the discussion, and the child's parents.

If you find out about an online situation, be sure to inform potential cyberbullies and cyberbystanders about the consequences for bullying or cyberbullying while in school. If the cyberbully or cyberbystanders engage in any bullying or cyberbullying in school, follow through on consequences immediately. Inform all relevant adults (teachers, coaches, counselors, and bus drivers) about the situation between the children. Make sure they are aware of the potential for bullying and urge them to keep a very sharp eye on these children. If it were me, I would document everyone I had informed of the situation.

Follow up with parents, especially the parents of targets. Do not wait for them to call you; let them know that the above actions are being taken. Many parents want to know what disciplinary actions are being taken against a cyberbully, and you will need to educate them about confidentiality laws. Be sure they know you are not merely refusing to furnish information because you personally wish to protect a bully.

–E.K.E.

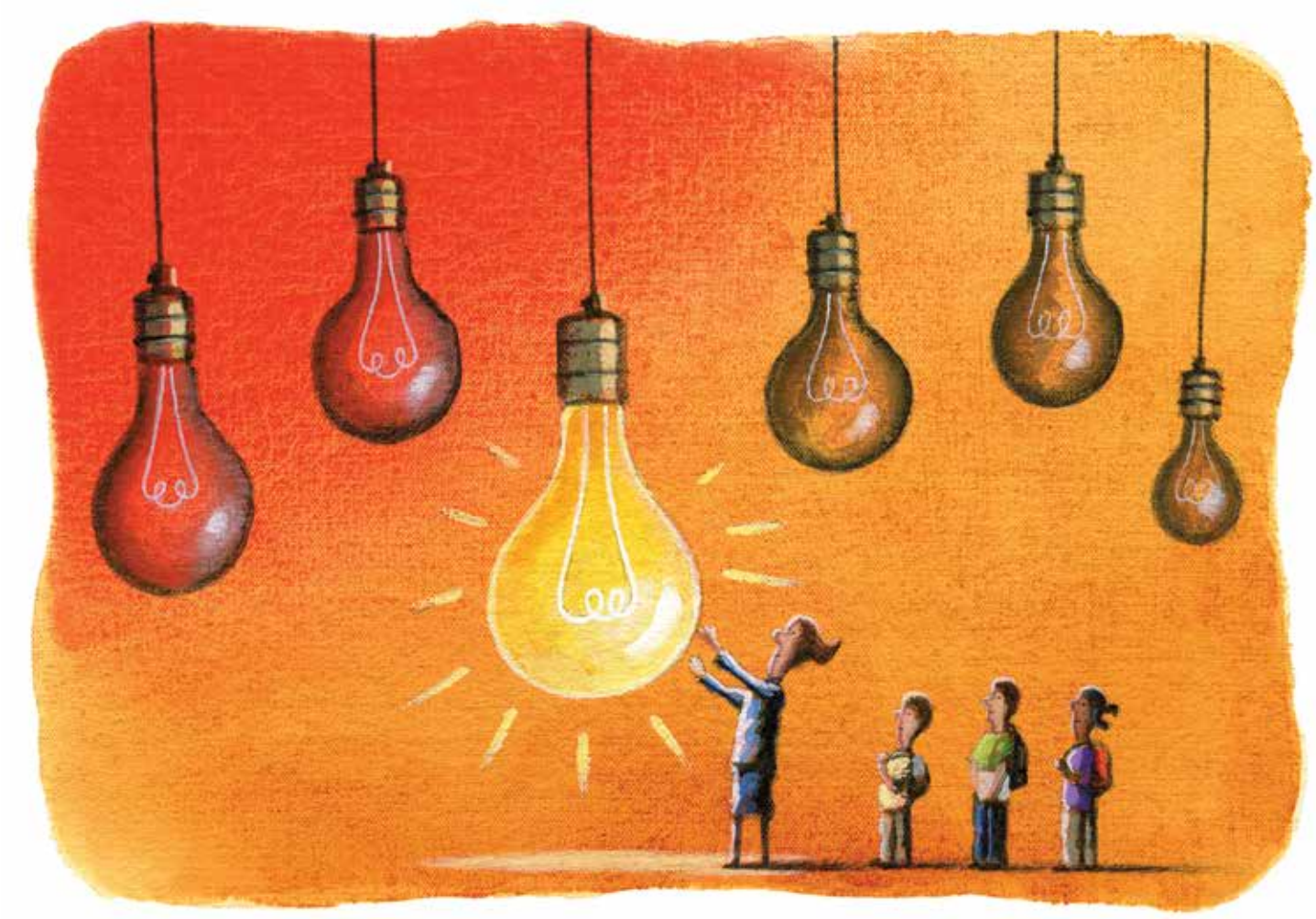
Endnotes

1. Dan Olweus, "Bullying at School: Long-Term Outcomes for the Victims and an Effective School-Based Intervention Program," in *Aggressive Behavior: Current Perspectives*, ed. L. Rowell Huesmann (New York: Plenum Press, 1994), 97–130.

2. Todd D. Erb, "A Case for Strengthening School District Jurisdiction to Punish Off-Campus Incidents of Cyberbullying," *Arizona State Law Journal* 40 (2008): 257–287.

In Defense of Educators

The Problem of Idea Quality, Not "Teacher Quality"



ILLUSTRATIONS BY PAUL ZWOLAK

By E. D. Hirsch, Jr.

People who emphasize teaching quality and the central importance of teachers are right to do so. Where some go wrong is in thinking that teacher quality is an innate characteristic. The effectiveness of a teacher is not some inherent competence, as the phrase *teacher quality* suggests. Teacher effectiveness is contextual. I have witnessed over and over that in a coherent school most teachers can become highly effective.*

Why has the topic of teacher quality suddenly reached such a crescendo? Education reform has been on the national agenda since 1983, the year of *A Nation at Risk*. Only in the last few years has the teacher quality issue risen to the top. I think it may be reform fatigue, possibly desperation. We are blaming teachers because of our disappointments with the results of our reforms.

A History of Misguided Reforms

The "back-to-basics" and "whole-school reform" strategies disappointed. The state standards movement and the No Child Left Behind law have left high school students just about as far behind as they were before the law was instituted. Charter schools, despite their laudable triumphs, are highly uneven in quality.[1] Their overall results are not much better than those of regular schools.[2] When favored educational ideas do not pan out

E. D. Hirsch, Jr., is a professor emeritus at the University of Virginia and the author of many articles and books, including the bestsellers Cultural Literacy *and* The Schools We Need. *He is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the founder of the Core Knowledge Foundation. Excerpted with permission from E. D. Hirsch, Jr.,* Why Knowledge Matters: Rescuing Our Children from Failed Educational Theories *(Harvard Education Press, 2016), www.hepg.org/hep-home/books/why-knowledge-matters.*

*My defense of teachers does not extend to nonperforming ones. Children and the community come first. Most teachers agree. As American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten has said: "If someone can't teach after being prepared and supported, he or she shouldn't be in our profession."

as hoped, reformers understandably think: "The flaw is not in my theory; it must lie in poor implementation (i.e., it must be the fault of the teachers)."

But the most likely cause of disappointing results from the various reforms is that they have been primarily structural in character. They have not systematically grappled with the grade-by-grade specifics and coherence of the elementary school curriculum. Educational success is defined by what students learn—the received curriculum. Not to focus on the particulars of the very thing itself has been an evasion that is not of the teachers' doing. The underlying theory of the reforms (reflected in state reading standards) has been that schools are teaching skills that can be developed by any suitable content. That mistaken theory has allowed the problem of grade-by-grade content to be evaded. It was that fundamental mistake about skills that has allowed teachers to be blamed for fundamental failures—the failures of guiding ideas, not of teachers.

Elementary school teachers are people who for the most part love children, who want to devote their lives to children's education, but many find themselves stymied and frustrated in the classroom. They apply the notions received in their training, and do what they are told to do by their administrators, under the ever-present threat of reading tests that do not actually test the content that is being taught. Under these extremely unfavorable conditions of work, it's no wonder that teacher unions have pushed back. When the classroom, which should be a daily reward, becomes a purgatory, one turns to contract stipulations.

It's true that in the United States, there has been a deep problem with teacher preparation for more than half a century. We have a system that, according to teachers themselves, does not prepare them adequately for classroom management or the substance of what they must teach.[3] Therefore, my counterthesis to the blame-the-teachers theme is blame the ideas—and improve them.

The "quality" of a teacher is not a permanent given. Within the American primary school, where curriculum is neither coherent nor cumulative, it is impossible for a superb teacher to be as effective as a merely average teacher is in Japan, where the elementary school content is coherent and cumulative. For one thing, the American teacher has to deal with big discrepancies in student academic preparation, while the Japanese teacher does not. In a system with a specific and coherent curriculum, the work of each teacher builds on the work of teachers who came before. The three Cs—cooperation, coherence, and cumulativeness—yield a bigger boost than the most brilliant efforts of teachers working individually against the odds within a topic-incoherent system. A more coherent system makes teachers better individually and hugely better collectively.

American teachers (along with their students) are, in short, the tragic victims of inadequate theories. They are being blamed for intellectual failings that permeate the system within which they must work. The real problem is idea quality, not teacher quality. The difficulty lies not with the inherent abilities of teachers but with the theories that have watered down their training and created an intellectually chaotic school environment based on developmentalism, individualism, and the skills delusion. The complaint that teachers do not know their subject matter would change almost overnight with a more specific curriculum and with less evasion about what the subject matter of the curriculum ought to be. Then teachers could prepare themselves more effectively, and teacher training could ensure that teacher candidates have mastered the content they will be responsible for teaching.

A focus on technological solutions alone is also inadequate. Those who hope to find amelioration of the "teacher quality problem" through the use of computers and "blended learning" may be fostering yet another skills delusion. Such fixes haven't worked in the past. Computers seem to work best in helping older students learn specific routines. No doubt, well-thought-out computer programs can help teachers do their work, especially for teachers in their first years. But there are *inherent* limitations. For example, after decades of work and billions spent, computers cannot accurately translate from one language to another. Probably they can't even in theory.[4]

American teachers are being blamed for intellectual failings that permeate the system within which they must work.

Such current limitations do not lend confidence that they can transform primary education. Young students rely on an empathetic personal connection that not even our most advanced computer-adaptive programs can deliver. This is not to say that computers have no important place; it is to say that their place is supplemental, not transformative. They need to be used in support of teachers under a coherent cumulative curriculum. Computers cannot magically replace the hard thinking and political courage needed to create one.

The Problem with Value-Added Teacher Evaluation

In the face of unfair scapegoating, teachers have understandably become demoralized by being constantly blamed for failures not their own. Here is the new conventional wisdom about teachers taken from the nonpartisan policy magazine *Governing* of June 13, 2013:

> The research is clear: Teacher quality affects student learning more than any other school-based variable (issues such as income and parental education levels are external). And the impact of student achievement on economic competitiveness is equally clear. That's why it's so disturbing that in 2010, the SAT scores of students intending to pursue undergraduate education degrees ranked 25th out of 29 majors generally associated with four-year degree programs. The test scores of students seeking to enter graduate education programs are similarly low and, on average, undergraduate education majors score even lower than the graduate education applicant pool as a whole. Education schools long have accepted under-qualified students, then offered them programs heavy on pedagogy and child development and light on subject-matter content.

This scientific-sounding comment is incorrect from the start. The assertion that "Teacher quality affects student learning more than any other school-based variable" is not footnoted. According to two summaries of research by Russ Whitehurst, a better curriculum can range from being slightly to dramatically more effective than a better teacher.[5] That's not surprising when you consider that the curriculum is what teachers teach and what students are supposed to learn. Teachers are not to blame for ideas and curricula that are inherently inadequate.

Some policymakers have recently decided that the way to improve teacher effectiveness is to institute value-added teacher evaluations as part of a system of incentives, rewards, and sanctions, potentially including dismissal. The theory is that such a system will energize teachers, boost their performance, and bring highly qualified people into the profession. Some jurisdictions, including Chicago, Washington, D.C., and New York City, have instituted value-added measures (VAMs) of teacher effectiveness, based on formulas like:

$$Ag = \theta\, Ag{-}1 + \tau j + S\varphi + X\gamma + \varepsilon$$

where Ag is the achievement of student i in grade g (the subscript i is suppressed throughout); $Ag{-}1$ is the prior year student achievement in grade $g{-}1$; S is a vector of school and peer factors; X is a vector of family and neighborhood inputs; θ, φ, and γ are unknown parameters; ε is a stochastic term representing unmeasured influences; and τj is a teacher fixed effect that provides a measure of teacher value added for teacher j.[6]

Statistical analysis is indispensable but can be very misleading unless supported by a valid theory of the underlying causes of the results. But, in fact, the results themselves cry out that something is amiss, since the value-added principle has exhibited far more uncertainty and variability for language arts than for math. That's not surprising. In math, there is a high correlation between what is supposed to be taught and what is actually tested, whereas that's not true for the language arts curriculum and current reading tests.

Not being curriculum based, reading tests cannot be accurate measures of school-driven gains in a given year.

Two false assumptions underlie applying VAMs to reading tests. The first mistake is the assumption that reading comprehension is a general skill. The second is the assumption that existing reading tests can accurately gauge the value that has been added by the teacher to reading comprehension from one year to the next. Our current reading tests cannot in fact reliably and validly gauge the value the teacher has added.

Here's why. Scores on reading tests reflect knowledge and vocabulary gained from all sources. Advantaged students are constantly building up academic knowledge from both inside and outside the school. Disadvantaged students gain their academic knowledge mainly inside school, so they are gaining less academic knowledge overall during the year, even when the teacher is conveying the curriculum effectively. This lack of gain outside the school reduces the chance of low-socioeconomic-status (SES) students showing a match between the knowledge they gained in school during the year and the knowledge required to understand the individual test passages.[7] The tests are fairly accurate means of gauging a student's general knowledge, but they have no way of indicating the sources of students' general knowledge. Not being curriculum based, they cannot be an accurate means of testing how well the particular knowledge

in the school curriculum has been imparted. The implicit assumption that "general reading skill" is itself the content of the curriculum is a technical mistake and an incorrect assumption. Once that mistake has been exposed, the validity of the VAM projects in language arts collapses. Any judge in a lawsuit, properly alerted to the falsity of their assumptions, should rule against the fairness of value-added measures for rating language arts teachers. These reading tests may be roughly accurate measures of a student's average reading abilities, but, not being curriculum based, they *cannot* be accurate measures of school-driven gains in a given year.

In short, there's no valid or reliable way of determining what test-relevant verbal knowledge is school based and what is not. How could it be determined? *Tests that are curriculum-blind cannot gauge how well a curriculum has been imparted.* VAMs in reading are thus inherently unfair both to low-SES students and to their teachers. Reading tests at best are 70 percent accurate at the individual level.[8] The inherent uncertainty of the school-based contribution to a student's reading scores between one year and another must reduce the validity of test inferences even more. Statistical manipulations cannot make a test reveal what it cannot reveal in principle. The whole VAM effort in reading will need to meet this objection head-on in order to establish the effort's validity. It's hard to see how it could do so. It has not done so thus far.

If I were a principal in a primary school, I'd spend my money on teachers, on their ongoing development, and on creating conditions in which the work of teachers in one grade supports the work of teachers in the next, and in which teachers would have time to consult and collaboratively plan. One especially vivid story about collaboration in Japanese elementary schools* was told to me directly by the late professor Harold Stevenson, who studied Asian schools. He had observed the event in a fourth-grade math class. A student was having grave difficulty with a math problem and its concepts. After allowing the student to work on it for a short time, the teacher quietly made a surprising analogy with the student's daily experience as a way of dealing with the problem. The student's face brightened, and he instantly began to solve the problem.

After the class, Stevenson went to the teacher to congratulate her (in perfect Japanese) on the most remarkable bit of teaching he'd ever witnessed. The teacher shook her head: no, it wasn't her brilliance that produced the result, and from her desk drawer she took out a handbook that teachers had cooperatively compiled. "Here it is," she said. "It's suggested as a good tack to try when you run into that situation."

The incident illustrated how good teaching can often depend more reliably on the coherence of the wider system, and the cooperation it brings, than on virtuoso performances. Schooling takes 12 years. Its success depends on slow but sure progress, not bursts of brilliance—welcome as those are when talented teachers inspire a whole class. ☐

Good teaching can often depend more reliably on the coherence of the wider system, and the cooperation it brings, than on virtuoso performances.

*For more about lesson study, see "Growing Together," in the Fall 2009 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/fall2009/dubin.

Endnotes

1. But there have been laudable triumphs in regular schools too. See E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Why Knowledge Matters: Rescuing Our Children from Failed Educational Theories* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2016), 159–184.

2. Philip Gleason, Melissa Clark, Christina Clark Tuttle, Emily Dwoyer, and Marsha Silverberg, *The Evaluation of Charter School Impacts: Final Report* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

3. See, for example, Kate Walsh, Deborah Glaser, and Danielle Dunne Wilcox, *What Education Schools Aren't Teaching about Reading and What Elementary Teachers Aren't Learning* (Washington, DC: National Council on Teacher Quality, 2006).

4. A large part of human language interpretation is disambiguation, the process of choosing appropriate word and clause meanings, and rejecting others. Despite decades of work and billions spent, this problem of machine translation has not been solved. Yehoshua Bar-Hillel famously argued it could not be solved, in his piece "The Present Status of Automatic Translation of Languages," *Advances in Computers* 1 (1960): 91–163. I have not seen a credible refutation of his argument, which is based on the insight that an unstated context is required for disambiguation. So far, no way has been devised even in principle to enable a machine reliably to identify which unstated context is the right one. Computers need explicitness; they seem to be very literal minded. So far, they are less expert than people in gauging the unsaid that is necessary to grasp the said. Moreover, they cannot come up with new meanings for old words—which humans do all the time. Landauer's "Latent Semantic Analysis" makes a stab at analyzing what other words are and are not present, as does Google Translate (a good stab—but unreliable). See Thomas K. Landauer and Susan T. Dumais, "A Solution to Plato's Problem: The Latent Semantic Analysis Theory of Acquisition, Induction, and Representation of Knowledge," *Psychological Review* 104 (1997): 211–240.

5. Matthew M. Chingos and Grover J. "Russ" Whitehurst, *Choosing Blindly: Instructional Materials, Teacher Effectiveness, and the Common Core* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2012); and Grover J. "Russ" Whitehurst, "Don't Forget Curriculum," *Brown Center Letters on Education*, October 2009.

6. Eric A. Hanushek and Steven G. Rivkin, "Generalizations about Using Value-Added Measures of Teacher Quality," *American Economic Review* 100 (2010): 267–271.

7. The claim by test makers that their questions are self-contained or made fair by glosses is convenient but erroneous and naive. No text—glossed or not—is self-contained.

8. That is the average intercorrelation between the most reliable tests. Leila Morsy, Michael Kieffer, and Catherine Snow, *Measure for Measure: A Critical Consumers' Guide to Reading Comprehension Assessments for Adolescents* (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2010).

A Matter of Health and Safety

Improving Teaching and Learning Conditions in Schools

The photos above and on the following pages reveal deficient and hazardous school building conditions in cities across the country. They were taken by students from Critical Exposure, an organization founded in 2004 that teaches students how to advocate for changes in their schools and communities through documentary photography. For more, go to **www.criticalexposure.org**.

By Jerry Roseman

School facilities matter. Building conditions may not always be seen as the most important of the myriad issues facing public education, but they are a fundamental concern and must be addressed. We have for too long ignored the many negative effects that deficient building conditions have on educational quality. Until we ensure all students have access to school buildings that are healthy, safe, comfortable, and dry, we can't hope to adequately protect the well-being of our students and staff, recruit and retain teachers, or provide high-quality education to all.

In recent years, the Detroit Federation of Teachers has protested not only a chronic lack of resources in Detroit's public schools but also the decrepit state of the district's school buildings.[1] Educational staff and others have cited black mold, rodent and insect infestation, asbestos contamination, water damage, disintegrating walls, and lead paint, among other issues, as threats to the safety, achievement, and morale of their children and the larger school community.

While varying in scope and degree, the condition of Detroit's public schools sadly mirrors the physical deterioration of public schools nationwide. But children of color and those from high-poverty communities are most affected. From the crumbling and overcrowded school buildings of Newark, New Jersey's East Ward,[2] to Philadelphia, which boasts some of the oldest school buildings in the country,[3] America's postindustrial cities have garnered international attention for the accelerated decline and neglect of their educational infrastructure.

Since 1985, I have served as the director of environmental science and occupational safety and health for the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) Health & Welfare Fund. The Health & Welfare Fund is a freestanding PFT-affiliated organization that was established in 1974 through the union's collective bargaining

Jerry Roseman is the director of environmental science and occupational safety and health for the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers Health & Welfare Fund. He has worked as a public health and environmental science professional for more than 30 years.

agreement to provide supplementary benefits and related support to promote the health, safety, and well-being of all PFT-represented employees in the School District of Philadelphia.

In my role with the Health & Welfare Fund, I review information and data, as provided by the district, about environmental exposures and related building conditions; conduct school-site visits and evaluations to assess mold, asbestos, lead, and a range of other environmental hazards;* and work with school district officials and educational staff to find practical solutions to ensure safe building conditions.

While I could provide a laundry list of the environmental facility deficiencies I've seen throughout my career, this article primarily focuses on what we have found are the best and most effective ways to improve conditions in our schools.

The Need for Better Facilities

Before I discuss the approaches to ensuring safe building conditions that the PFT and the school district have attempted to work on together, it would be helpful to provide some background on the state of our country's school buildings.

A 1995 report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office found poor public school conditions across the country and estimated that the nation's schools required $112 billion to complete all the repairs, renovations, and modernizations necessary to restore facilities to good overall condition. This report also concluded that 28 million students attended schools nationwide that needed one or more building features extensively repaired, overhauled, or replaced, or that contained an environmentally unsatisfactory condition, such as poor ventilation. One of the most telling conclusions was that 15,000 schools were found to have air unfit to breathe.

According to the American Society of Civil Engineers' "2013 Report Card for America's Infrastructure," the nation's school facility grade has improved only slightly in recent years, from a D-minus in 2001 to a D in 2013. The society reports that while the condition of school facilities continues to deteriorate, spending on school construction nationwide has decreased to approximately $10 billion, about half the level spent prior to the recession in 2008, while the investment needed to modernize and maintain our nation's school facilities is at least $270 billion. Even more troubling, the report concludes that "due to the absence of national data on school facilities for more than a decade, a complete picture of the condition of our nation's schools remains mostly unknown."[4]

The Center for Green Schools at the U.S. Green Building Council has also highlighted the critical need to address deficient school facilities. In its 2013 "State of Our Schools" report, the council warns that "every day we let pass without addressing inefficient energy practices, poor indoor air quality, and other problems associated with unhealthy learning environments, we are passing up tremendous opportunities." The 2016 *State of Our Schools* report by the 21st Century School Fund, U.S. Green Building Council, and National Council on School Facilities rightly calls for using the following four strategies to improve our public school buildings: (1) ensure the public and policymakers understand local facility conditions, and provide access to up-to-date, accurate data; (2) engage communities in all phases of school facilities planning; (3) find and pilot new innovative funding sources; and (4) leverage public and private resources in new ways.[5]

Children and school staff spend a significant portion of their day in schools. Research suggests that each year, the average child spends about 90 percent of his or her time indoors, approximately 1,300 hours of which is spent in a school building.[6]

Studies have concluded that low-income and minority children are more likely to attend schools that are in poor physical condition.[7] The 21st Century School Fund reported that from 1995 to 2004, the country's most disadvantaged students received about half the funding for their school buildings ($4,800 per student) as their more-affluent peers ($9,361 per student).

Without coalitions, the challenges to ensuring safe school buildings are even greater.

In addition, districts with predominantly white students spent significantly more on their school facilities than districts with predominantly minority students. Spending on school construction from 1995 to 2004 ranged from an average of $5,172 per student, in districts with the highest concentrations of minority students, to $7,102 per student, in districts with the highest concentrations of white students.[8]

Numerous studies have concluded that students in substandard school buildings perform at lower levels than students in newer, functional buildings. Researchers have found that students in deteriorating school buildings score 5 to 11 percentile points lower on standardized achievement tests than students in modern buildings, after controlling for income level. In addition, some experts believe that the negative impact of substandard school buildings may be cumulative and continue to increase the longer the student attends an older, deteriorating school.[9]

A Look at Philadelphia

Since 2010, I've conducted more than 500 site evaluations of unsafe school building conditions in Philadelphia. I've documented more than 5,000 individual deficiencies in more than 140 separate buildings. I've seen classroom desks, chairs, floors, and books covered with lead-containing paint chips and dust. I've seen damaged asbestos insulation material in educational spaces, and extensive, visible mold growth covering ceilings, walls, and

*For more on toxins found in the school environment, see "First, Do No Harm," in the Winter 2011–2012 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/winter2011-2012/landrigan.

floors in classrooms, bathrooms, libraries, and cafeterias. A number of schools have unguarded radiators and uninsulated steam pipes accessible to children, which present a burn hazard. I've also documented extensive asthma triggers, including rodent and insect infestations, droppings and nesting materials, elevated moisture and humidity, and dust from damaged plaster and sheetrock walls and ceilings.

As you can imagine, such deficiencies have been responsible for numerous student and staff illnesses across the district, leading to increased absenteeism and lost instructional time. These unhealthy conditions also have led to the loss of much-needed instructional space and educational materials, including books, computers, and musical instruments. Additional financial consequences ensue when repairs are delayed for months or even years and small fixes become bigger and far more expensive to perform.

The School District of Philadelphia is the eighth-largest school district in the nation, with about 220 schools, 140,000 students, and 20,000 staff. The average age of the district's school buildings is more than 65 years old, exceeding the national average by about 20 years. According to data from the school district, about 51 percent of Philadelphia K–12 students are African American, 19 percent are Hispanic/Latino, and 7 percent are multiracial. With respect to socioeconomic status, Philadelphia is considered a "low-wealth" district, in which as many as 87 percent of its students are "economically disadvantaged."[10]

One of the things that makes Philadelphia unique is that the teachers union and its Health & Welfare Fund have developed, and devoted significant resources to, an independent, professional Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ) program. Since the 1980s, the PFT Health & Welfare Fund has acted as a "watchdog," overseeing and verifying district activities with respect to school building health and safety.

The PFT Health & Welfare Fund has also engaged federal agencies (such as the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health [NIOSH]), local governmental agencies (including the Philadelphia Office of the Controller), public advocacy groups, parent organizations, and others in efforts to improve school conditions. Without these coalitions, and absent district buy-in, the challenges to ensuring safe school buildings are even greater.

In 2010, after the union recognized the lack of comprehensive and systematically collected data regarding facility conditions and related IEQ impacts, union and management health and safety representatives began working together on a comprehensive IEQ-facility condition, evaluation, and documentation system. It involved union and district representatives agreeing to notify each other about all health and safety activities conducted in schools, including environmental inspections and evaluations.

To the extent possible, we perform inspections and evaluations together. We document our observations and share quantitative data. We also typically interview the school principal, building engineering staff, and the PFT building representative, in addition to as many building staff members as possible.

Information collected should be shared in a jointly developed report created for each school. These school-level reports include detailed room-level observations, findings, and, most importantly, recommendations. The idea is to avoid previous situations where separate evaluations resulted in arguments about the state of building conditions, impacts, and the status of repairs. Hopefully, data and lessons learned from on-the-ground evaluations can then be used to inform districtwide improvements.

The report is typically in the form of a school-specific spreadsheet, referred to as an "IEQ Dashboard," with attached photos and detailed remediation directions, as necessary. These are used to summarize problems and guide remediation activities by the district's facilities and operations department and its capital programs department. (For an example of an IEQ Dashboard, see page 37.)

These reports represent the district's first labor-management attempts to conduct systematic joint assessments. The involvement of the union in the inspection process enables broader and more open communication and participation by building staff, facilitates documentation, and ensures issues are addressed in a comprehensive manner.

The reports' careful detailing of problems at the room level and designation of time frames for needed work, which are included in the spreadsheets, are especially valuable. They also note whether problems are ongoing or repetitive.

A new computerized maintenance management system is currently being rolled out to handle work orders in the school district. This system has great potential not just for tracking work but for capital planning, priority setting, and improving communication with school staff. One welcome feature is that each complaint generated will be followed up with an e-mail on its status to the person (e.g., the teacher) who registered it.

In addition to school-specific dashboards, reports are created in which the school-specific information is aggregated into an IEQ Master Dashboard that is updated on a weekly basis. These reports serve as a comprehensive record, at the district level, of documented school building condition deficiencies, proposed recommendations, and remediation time frames. This process is just one element of an effective, working partnership.

A School-Specific "IEQ Dashboard"

Over the last five years, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and the School District of Philadelphia have worked together to inspect and evaluate school building conditions. After each inspection, the joint labor-management team creates a school-specific spreadsheet, known as an IEQ (Indoor Environmental Quality) Dashboard, like the one shown here, to share its observations and recommendations and to guide remediation efforts. In addition to the columns below, we note if the problem is recurring and include date-specific information, such as when a complaint was filed and when remediation work is expected to be completed. –J.R.

Category of Problem	Location within School	Recommended Corrective Action	Trade or Department Responsible for Repairs	Additional Trades or Departments	Additional Notes	Is Room/ Location in Use?	Status of Repairs
Mold/ moisture	Bathroom plumbing stack and faculty room adjacent to classroom X	Evaluate the bathroom plumbing stack and associated pipe chases for source of moisture. Remove loose paint and plaster from the ceiling and debris from the top of the vending machine and lockers. Work orders should be issued as needed for the repair.	Operations/ Building engineer	Maintenance/ Plumber	The source of moisture impacting the closet in the adjacent classroom and the adjacent bathrooms on the first and second floors appeared to be from an active plumbing leak. Since the plaster ceilings were damaged in the first- and second-floor bathrooms, the leak may be occurring in the third-floor bathroom pipe chase/wall cavity.	No	Fixed
Mold/ moisture	Basement storage areas and hallway (outside boiler)	Implement the requirements of the Mold Design Data Collection package, and evaluate and repair the steam leak.	Maintenance/ Environmental		Mold growth was distributed along the lower sections of the wooden partition walls. The steam leak was observed above the main steam line located above the drinking fountains.	Yes	Fixed
Mold/ moisture	Auditorium	Evaluate the building's HVAC equipment and computer control interface, and make repairs or program adjustments as needed.	Maintenance/ HVAC		The building engineer reported control issues with the air conditioning system that may have resulted in condensation and mold growth, and the computer control interface is not programmed properly.	Yes	Fixed
Integrated pest management	Gym office	Remove the mouse droppings and clean the area with a detergent solution. Work orders should be issued as needed for integrated pest management.	Operations/ Building engineer		Mouse droppings were observed on the desk and floor in the gym office.	Yes	Not Fixed
Mold/ moisture	Buildingwide	Remove the impacted classroom sink cabinets. The floor and wall under the cabinets will require repair and painting. A Mold Design Data Collection package was issued.	Maintenance/ Plumber	Maintenance/ Environmental and Maintenance/ Painter	Several classroom sink cabinets were impacted by mold growth and/or significant water staining and deterioration in the specified rooms.	Yes	Fixed
Paint/ plaster damage	Second-floor women's restroom and girls' restroom; classrooms A, B, C, D, and E	Remove the flaking paint from the impacted area. Painted surfaces are assumed to contain lead-based paint, and work should be conducted in compliance with lead remediation rules and regulations.	Operations/ Building engineer		Flaking paint was observed on the bathroom walls, ceilings, and air shaft; moisture-damaged plaster was observed on some ceilings, where specified; and plaster debris was noted in places.	Classrooms A and B yes, others no	Not Fixed
Mold/ moisture	Buildingwide	Evaluate the building's steam traps and replace as needed.	Operations/ Building engineer		Steam was being released from the fan room located on the basement's lower level.	Yes	Fixed
Asbestos	Classroom Z	Remove the damaged asbestos pipe insulation from three 12-foot pipe risers along the window wall, following the directive in the Asbestos Design Data Collection.	Maintenance/ Environmental	Office of Environmental Management & Services	Contact with pipe insulation had damaged the material at several points, resulting in an asbestos exposure hazard.	No	Fixed
Thermal control	Buildingwide	Evaluate the thermal control systems and ensure all components are working as required in order to provide proper temperature control during occupancy.	Maintenance/ Ventilation mechanic		Problems with thermostats, dampers, and sensors.	Yes	Not Fixed
Mold/ moisture	Art room	Evaluate the source of moisture impacting the ceiling tiles and issue work orders for repairs. The ceiling tiles should be replaced as needed until the source of moisture is eliminated.	Operations/ Building engineer		Water-stained ceiling tiles were observed.	Yes	Not Fixed

In 2011, PFT health and safety representatives attended the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools National Symposium with several school district managers from facilities and operations and environmental management services. We jointly presented our challenges and described our collaborative efforts, including the IEQ Dashboard. We also discussed what could and should be done moving forward.

Representatives from NIOSH also attended this symposium, recruiting school districts, unions, and school staff to participate in research efforts aimed at assessing and evaluating mold, moisture, and dampness issues in schools. PFT and Philadelphia school district officials agreed to participate.

This work resulted in major NIOSH studies in the Philadelphia schools beginning in 2011, including a soon-to-be-released dampness, moisture, and mold study of 50 elementary schools. This study involved identifying physical damage to walls, ceilings, floors, and other classroom components from water, moisture, and mold in 8,000 rooms. Also, health survey questionnaires were distributed to more than 4,000 staff members, dust samples were collected for bacteria and mold, and air quality measurements were taken in 500 individual classrooms. As the largest study of its kind in the United States, it can yield important information about all school building conditions, not just those in Philadelphia.

Environmental Action Teams

In a few elementary schools where building conditions were considered to be interrelated and widespread, we developed school-based teams, called Environmental Action Teams (EATs), in an attempt to systematically resolve issues and facilitate improved communication and collaboration. EATs are initiated at schools with multiple and complex building problems that have been verified through joint labor-management inspection and that often require capital improvement and environmental remediation work. These school-site teams have been highly effective at identifying and resolving problems collaboratively and efficiently.

EATs generally consist of eight to 10 members, including the principal, educators, maintenance and custodial staff, district managers who oversee school maintenance (including representatives from capital programs and environmental management services), and PFT environmental science representatives. EATs develop comprehensive inventories and "punch lists" of environmental and building condition deficiencies and concerns in their schools. This process is collaborative, coordinated, and ongoing, with a goal of documenting deficiencies and setting priorities, time frames, and responsibility for action.

For instance, one elementary school built in the 1930s had major steam leaks in multiple areas of the building. The temperature was impossible to control: some areas were excessively hot, while other rooms were freezing, prompting staff and students to wear coats and hats indoors. The steam leaks had resulted in significant damage to asbestos insulation materials and to lead-painted walls and ceilings. Such leaks had also caused mold growth, requiring costly environmental remediation, and major damage to wood flooring, furnishings, and educational materials. In addition, unrelated construction work was taking place at the school and causing dust and disruptive noise inside the building. Teachers brought their concerns to the building representative, who contacted me.

I first called the school district's environmental department. Soon after, an official from that department met me at the school for a joint inspection. We then met with the principal, the building engineer, and the PFT building representative to draw up a comprehensive punch list of issues and concerns.

We decided to establish an EAT at this school because the problems were so extensive and interrelated. The team meets once or twice a month. We immediately began the process of addressing asbestos and mold damage, as required by law and/or agreements between the union and the district. Areas where asbestos or mold damage was documented were kept off-limits until that remediation occurred.

Then we fixed the active steam leaks, starting on a Friday and continuing throughout the weekend, when the school was closed. That way, when students and staff returned to the school on Monday, there were no more active steam leaks or visible contamination from mold or asbestos.

Buckled flooring was addressed next. That's typically a several-day process that requires a team approach. Damaged flooring was identified in the principal's office, multiple classrooms, and other areas throughout the school. Before bringing in the carpenters, we identified which rooms had to be unoccupied to repair their floors and figured out with school staff where to move students, how to phase in that work, and where to create "swing space." Thanks to EATs, school staff have much more control over construction activity, and we all work together to minimize any disruptions to teaching and learning.

Often, without an EAT, such problems can remain unresolved for extended periods of time. And when one problem is addressed, the process of fixing it can cause or worsen others. For instance, in the elementary school discussed above, past repair work on the floors had created extreme noise and dust hazards in the building. An EAT helps ensure that such repairs are made safely, and just as important, it coordinates those repairs and communicates their progress to the principal and teachers.

Too often, school staff are not consulted about construction. For example, we've had situations where the maintenance staff has not coordinated the location and schedule of work with other school staff or even the principal. So a teacher might show up to her classroom one morning and find the door closed and carpenters working inside. That leaves administrators and teachers scrambling to relocate students and staff. When it comes to construction and repairs in schools, this lack of coordination is common throughout the country—but it doesn't have to be.

A Way Forward

To provide all children with equal opportunities to learn, ensuring the safety of school buildings is paramount. In the work we've done in Philadelphia, our greatest successes in making real and sustained improvements in school conditions have come from implementing the following four elements:

1. *Data transparency:* Collected data regarding school buildings must be open, shared, accessible, and fully transparent so that actions can be based on real evidence.
2. *Citizen science and crowdsourcing in the form of surveys (like the one shown below):* School staff must play a central role in the collection, documentation, and reporting of building condition deficiencies and related IEQ impacts, issues, and concerns on a real-time or near-real-time basis and at a sufficiently granular level—the school and classroom levels. Surveys can be an easy and useful way to identify problems experienced by school staff.
3. *Community and union participation:* Those who have primary responsibility for the education, support, nurturing, and protection of our students—i.e., the adults most directly affected by the conditions in our schools—must be involved in all aspects of monitoring facility conditions and have a voice in implementing solutions.
4. *Postremediation assessment and verification:* School staff, community members, union representatives, and district officials must play an integral role in verifying that remedial actions have been taken to make school buildings safe for students and staff.

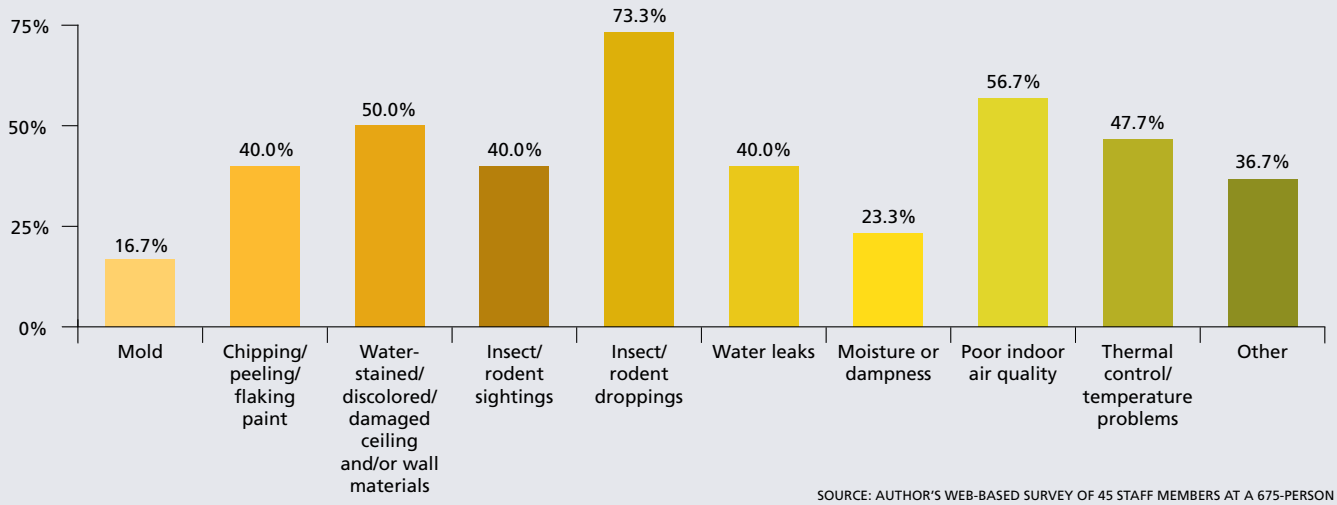
In any school district, stakeholders such as educators and parents can make a tremendous difference. For example, they can write to school board members, city council representatives, and school district leaders to insist that all current information about school facility and indoor environmental conditions is publicly available and accessible to all. Participating in and testifying at school board meetings, city council hearings, and other public forums is also important.

> If building conditions are unsafe, teachers can't teach and students can't learn.

While policymakers have fixated on devising ways to hold educators and schools accountable based on students' test

(Continued on page 44)

What problems are you seeing in your room/area?



SOURCE: AUTHOR'S WEB-BASED SURVEY OF 45 STAFF MEMBERS AT A 675-PERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, CONDUCTED IN DECEMBER 2015, ASKING RESPONDENTS TO IDENTIFY PROBLEMS IN NORMALLY OCCUPIED SPACES THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL.

sharemylesson
POWERED BY AFT

Bullying and LGBTQ Youth

RESEARCH SHOWS that students who identify as LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning) face bullying at significantly higher rates than their peers, and the consequences, such as increased rates of suicide, can be heartbreaking. Dedicated educators have an extraordinary opportunity each day to create a safe and welcoming environment for the children who come through their doors.

The AFT's own Share My Lesson offers a bullying prevention collection of resources to help teachers educate all students about LGBTQ issues and build inclusive school communities. The free antibullying materials, which teachers, parents, and LGBTQ advocacy organizations from across the country have contributed to, are designed to support all students. This year, a special effort has been made to highlight the crisis faced by LGBTQ youth. The following are suggestions from Share My Lesson on ways teachers can help these students.

Recognize Biased Language

Students and educators hear language that is hurtful to LGBTQ students on a regular basis—most frequently, the expression "That's so gay." Teachers can deter the use of such phrases by monitoring language in school and intervening on behalf of students. The Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching Tolerance website offers resources on helping all students understand why language matters.

Develop LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum

One way to send a positive message to students is to recognize and include achievements of LGBTQ individuals in lesson plans and class discussions. When done authentically, such information shows students that every person has worth and can make valuable contributions to our society. GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network) offers suggestions on highlighting LGBTQ individuals and issues in your classroom.

Learn More about LGBTQ Experiences

If you don't have friends or family from the LGBTQ community, you might be unsure how best to advocate for students who identify as LGBTQ. Educating yourself and your students about LGBTQ issues can help build empathy. The award-winning short film *A Place in the Middle* chronicles the life of an 11-year-old transgender Hawaiian girl who dreams of leading the hula troupe at her Honolulu school. The film's accompanying classroom discussion guide and online resources provide an opportunity for students to reflect on the importance of diversity and inclusion.

Recognize that LGBTQ Students of Color Face Unique Challenges

Be aware of and sensitive to the fact that the experiences of LGBTQ students of color may differ from those of their nonminority peers. Also, keep in mind that an additional stigma comes from being labeled a "double minority." GLSEN offers resources for supporting LGBTQ students of color.

Become a Schoolwide Advocate for LGBTQ Students and Allies

Teachers and other school staff can advocate for LGBTQ students by simply paying attention to language used in classrooms and hallways and intervening in ways that make LGBTQ students feel not only safe but also part of the school community.

Organizing schoolwide character education programs can also set the tone for positive behavior. Teaching Tolerance's multimedia kit "Bullied: A Student, a School and a Case That Made History," and Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights' "Speak Truth to Power" curriculum, feature the story of Jamie Nabozny, an LGBTQ advocate who was bullied in school. Both are powerful resources for schoolwide programs.

Ask for Help

Students often, for good reason, view teachers as compassionate authority figures with all the answers, but there are certain situations teachers cannot handle alone. Seek out the advice of school counselors, who can serve as mental health resources for students in need.

Since students sometimes lack the emotional maturity and external support systems to handle difficult experiences, learn the signs students may exhibit when they are in trouble and direct them to professional help. Visit Share My Lesson for a presentation by Samantha Nelson, a National Board Certified Teacher, on identifying the warning signs for suicide.

–THE SHARE MY LESSON TEAM

ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

Recommended Resources

- "Share My Lesson Collections: Bullying Prevention Resources": **http://go.aft.org/AE416sml1**
- "What's So Bad about 'That's So Gay?'": **http://go.aft.org/AE416sml2**
- "Developing LGBT-Inclusive Classroom Resources": **http://go.aft.org/AE416sml3**
- "*A Place in the Middle*": **http://go.aft.org/AE416sml4**
- "Working with LGBT Students of Color: A Guide for Educators": **http://go.aft.org/AE416sml5**
- "Bullied: A Student, a School and a Case That Made History": **http://go.aft.org/AE416sml6**
- "Jamie Nabozny: Bullying, Language, Literature": **http://go.aft.org/AE416sml7**
- "Suicide Prevention PowerPoint Presentation": **http://go.aft.org/AE416sml8**

Creating a Safe and Inclusive Classroom

IN MANY WAYS, schools have become safer and more welcoming places in the past 10 years. Yet a common challenge educators still face is exactly how to support their students—how to provide safe spaces in their classrooms, and how to be inclusive of all identities.

According to results from a 2015 survey conducted by GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network), many teachers still do not feel comfortable addressing bullying behavior based on sexual identity, and few incorporate LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning) people and topics in their teaching. (For more on how educators address bias in schools, see page 23.)

The following resources can help educators address LGBTQ issues in their classrooms and schools.

Teaching Tolerance

The Teaching Tolerance website, produced by the Southern Poverty Law Center, offers lessons and activities on topics that include appearance, gender expression, and sexual orientation, as well as race, religion, immigration, and gender equity. These resources, available at **www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources**, are searchable by keyword, topic, grade level, and subject.

Lessons are geared toward kindergarten through fifth grade and encourage students to think through characteristics they ascribe to either boys or girls. These lessons enable students to challenge gender norms and stereotypes they may have already internalized.

GLSEN's Safe Space Kit

GLSEN's mission is to ensure that "every member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression." To further that goal, the organization has created a toolkit to help educators be allies to LGBTQ youth.

This resource provides strategies to support LGBTQ students, educate all students about anti-LGBTQ bias, and advocate for changes in school. The kit includes GLSEN's *Guide to Being an Ally to LGBT Students*, which provides strategies for assessing and improving school climate, policies, and practices, as well as for creating safe spaces.

To download the free guide, or to download and print a Safe Space sticker or poster, go to **www.glsen.org/safespace**.

GLSEN also offers classroom resources and professional development materials on its website. One such resource, *Ready, Set, Respect!*, is designed for elementary school educators. Available at **www.glsen.org/readysetrespect**, it offers lessons on name-calling, bullying, and bias; LGBTQ-inclusive family diversity; and gender roles and diversity.

Anti-Defamation League

The Anti-Defamation League provides many classroom lessons on bias, bullying, diverse perspectives, and discrimination. To browse them by age group and topic, go to **www.bit.ly/2fRu28Z**. The website also includes a list of 700 titles of anti-bias and multicultural literature available for educators and parents of children of all ages. Find this list at **www.bit.ly/2ey4qy5**.

–AFT EDUCATIONAL ISSUES DEPARTMENT

RESOURCES

ASSESSMENT HELP

The Performance Assessment Resource Bank is a free platform for sharing high-quality performance assessments and resources. The bank features open access; personalized dashboards; a user-rating system; and a growing library of high-quality performance tasks, portfolio frameworks, learning progressions, and assessment research. The site was developed by educators and educational organizations, and materials are vetted by experts trained by Understanding Language and the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity. Learn more and sign up at **www.performanceassessmentresourcebank.org**.

WATER AND SCHOOLS

The National Drinking Water Alliance has a new digital clearinghouse oriented to school settings. **DrinkingWaterAlliance.org** provides hundreds of tools, research studies, fact sheets, promotional materials, and policy papers, as well as timely news updates. The site is organized in five sections—news, research, policy, access, and education—and is frequently updated with new resources.

HEALING THE HURT

Early trauma at home, in school, or in the community can affect children throughout their lives, and a new national campaign is aiming to raise awareness of childhood trauma and some solutions for dealing with it. Called "Changing Minds," this multiyear campaign teaches the skills and inspires the leadership and public action needed to address children's exposure to violence and trauma. It features new and evolving research that reveals how children's experiences can literally shape, and reshape, their brains. Learn more at **www.changingmindsnow.org**.

ESSA'S NONACADEMIC INDICATORS

"Social and Emotional Skills in School: Pivoting from Accountability to Development" can help educators weigh in on the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requirement for states to select a nonacademic indicator to assess students' success in school. The blog post, based on a paper coauthored by David Blazar of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Matthew A. Kraft of Brown University, explains why accountability doesn't have to be the only mechanism to encourage social and emotional skills. Find the post at **http://go.aft.org/AE416res1**.

More Than a Safe Space

(Continued from page 9)

We also can hear it in the voices of the students in Nixa, Missouri, and Park City, Utah, who are meeting with elected officials in their state capitals and advocating for change. The educators who support these students are fostering qualities such as self-efficacy, empowerment, and pride among their LGBTQ students, and the fact that some are doing it in the face of intense political and religious opposition makes clear that achieving to a standard beyond "safe" is possible anywhere. □

Endnotes

1. Many writers and advocates also include the letter *I* to refer to intersex individuals—people born with sexual characteristics that would be considered both male and female in the binary paradigm. Intersex rights advocates have called for change in the medical community to end practices aimed at "normalizing" children at birth to conform to one sex or another. Because none of the school programs I profile here address this issue discretely, I do not include this letter in the abbreviation.

2. This organization is now known as the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth.

3. Michael Sadowski, "Creating Safer Schools: The Beginning of Gay and Lesbian Student Rights in Massachusetts" (unpublished paper, Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, 2002).

4. For a description of the Safe Schools Coalition and links to its research publications, visit www.safeschoolscoalition.org.

5. John Colapinto, "The Harvey Milk School Has No Right to Exist. Discuss," *New York*, February 7, 2005.

6. "The Harvey Milk High School: Education for the Real World," Hetrick-Martin Institute, accessed August 25, 2016, www.hmi.org/hmhs.

7. Dean Praetorius, "Jamey Rodemeyer, 14-Year-Old Boy, Commits Suicide After Gay Bullying, Parents Carry On Message," *Huffington Post*, September 20, 2011, www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/20/jamey-rodemeyer-suicide-gay-bullying_n_972023.html.

8. Carol Greta, "Safe Schools Law Explained," Iowa Safe Schools, accessed August 25, 2016, www.iowasafeschools.org/index.php/safe-schools-law.

9. GLSEN, "Enumeration," accessed August 25, 2016, www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/Enumeration_0.pdf.

10. GLSEN, "Enumeration."

11. Nan Stein, "Bullying or Sexual Harassment? The Missing Discourse of Rights in an Era of Zero Tolerance," *Arizona Law Review* 45 (2003): 789.

12. "GLSEN's Safe Space Kit: Be an Ally to LGBT Youth!," GLSEN, accessed August 25, 2016, www.glsen.org/safespace.

13. "Project 10—Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Students Support," Los Angeles Unified School District, accessed August 25, 2016, http://notebook.lausd.net/portal/page?_pageid=33,1159973&_dad=ptl&_schema=PTL_EP.

14. Joseph G. Kosciw, Emily A. Greytak, Neal A. Palmer, and Madelyn J. Boesen, *The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools* (New York: GLSEN, 2014); and Emily A. Greytak, Joseph G. Kosciw, Christian Villenas, and Noreen M. Giga, *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate Revisited; A Survey of U.S. Secondary Schools and Teachers* (New York: GLSEN, 2016), 35.

15. Kosciw et al., *2013 National School Climate Survey*.

16. Stephen T. Russell, Anna Muraco, Aarti Subramaniam, and Carolyn Laub, "Youth Empowerment and High School Gay-Straight Alliances," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 38 (2009): 891–903.

17. Massachusetts was one of the first states to track youth risk behaviors by sexual orientation and arguably has the most comprehensive data on the risk behaviors of LGBTQ adolescents and how patterns have changed and/or remained consistent over the last two decades. See Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "Massachusetts High School Students and Sexual Orientation: Results of the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey" (Malden, MA: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2013), www.mass.gov/cgly/YRBS13_FactsheetUpdated.pdf.

18. "Gay and Lesbian Rights," Gallup, accessed August 25, 2016, www.gallup.com/poll/1651/gay-lesbian-rights.aspx.

19. Kosciw et al., *2013 National School Climate Survey*.

20. Kosciw et al., *2013 National School Climate Survey*.

21. Kosciw et al., *2013 National School Climate Survey*.

22. Greytak et al., *From Teasing to Torment*, 36.

23. Kosciw et al., *2013 National School Climate Survey*.

24. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "Massachusetts High School Students and Sexual Orientation."

25. Kosciw et al., *2013 National School Climate Survey*; and Greytak et al., *From Teasing to Torment*.

Gay-Straight Alliances

(Continued from page 14)

Several large organizations, such as the Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network (www.gsanetwork.org) and GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, www.glsen.org), offer free materials for GSA advisors and students for establishing and sustaining a GSA. These materials offer a range of ideas for activities that can foster support and connection among members and address important LGBTQ-related issues. They also provide strategies for overcoming common challenges faced by GSAs.

As the number of GSAs continues to increase in schools that are geographically, socioeconomically, and culturally diverse, greater investment in them is required to ensure they can meet a growing range of students' needs. Alongside this investment, ongoing research must document how GSAs promote healthy outcomes for students. Together, research-based recommendations for best practices, institutional resources and support, and the dedicated efforts of educators who work with GSAs will all serve to maximize the benefits of these groups for the students and schools they serve. ☐

Endnotes

1. Richard F. Catalano, M. Lisa Berglund, Jean A. M. Ryan, Heather S. Lonczak, and J. David Hawkins, "Positive Youth Development in the United States: Research Findings on Evaluations of Positive Youth Development Programs," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 591 (2004): 98–124; David L. DuBois, Bruce E. Holloway, Jeffrey C. Valentine, and Harris Cooper, "Effectiveness of Mentoring Programs for Youth: A Meta-Analytic Review," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 30 (2002): 157–197; Jacquelynne Eccles and Jennifer Appleton Gootman, *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2002); and Jean Baldwin Grossman and Joseph P. Tierney, "Does Mentoring Work? An Impact Study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters Program," *Evaluation Review* 22 (1998): 403–426.

2. Joseph G. Kosciw, Emily A. Greytak, Neal A. Palmer, and Madelyn J. Boesen, *The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools* (New York: GLSEN, 2014); and Stephen T. Russell and Jessica N. Fish, "Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth," *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 12 (2016): 465–487.

3. Jeffrey M. R. Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morrell, *The Art of Critical Pedagogy: Possibilities for Moving from Theory to Practice in Urban Schools* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008); Mica Pollock, *Schooltalk: Rethinking What We Say About—and to—Students Every Day* (New York: New Press, 2017); and Carola Suárez-Orozco, Allyson Pimentel, and Margary Martin, "The Significance of Relationships: Academic Engagement and Achievement among Newcomer Immigrant Youth," *Teachers College Record* 111 (2009): 712–749.

4. Pat Griffin, Camille Lee, Jeffrey Waugh, and Chad Beyer, "Describing Roles That Gay-Straight Alliances Play in Schools: From Individual Support to School Change," *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education* 1, no. 3 (2004): 7–22; and Stephen T. Russell, Anna Muraco, Aarti Subramaniam, and Carolyn Laub, "Youth Empowerment and High School Gay-Straight Alliances," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 38 (2009): 891–903.

5. V. Paul Poteat, Jillian R. Scheer, Robert A. Marx, Jerel P. Calzo, and Hirokazu Yoshikawa, "Gay-Straight Alliances Vary on Dimensions of Youth Socializing and Advocacy: Factors Accounting for Individual and Setting-Level Differences," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 55 (2015): 422–432.

6. "National Directory," GSA Network, accessed August 18, 2016, www.gsanetwork.org/national-directory.

7. Virginia Uribe, "Project 10: A School-Based Outreach to Gay and Lesbian Youth," *High School Journal* 77 (1994): 108–112.

8. Kosciw et al., *2013 National School Climate Survey*.

9. Mary L. Gray, *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

10. Eccles and Gootman, *Community Programs*.

11. "Our Approach," GSA Network, accessed August 18, 2016, www.gsanetwork.org/about-us.

12. Kosciw et al., *2013 National School Climate Survey*; Brennan Davis, Marla B. Royne Stafford, and Chris Pullig, "How Gay-Straight Alliance Groups Mitigate the Relationship between Gay-Bias Victimization and Adolescent Suicide Attempts," *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 53 (2014): 1271–1278; Nicholas C. Heck, Annesa Flentje, and Bryan N. Cochran, "Offsetting Risks: High School Gay-Straight Alliances and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth," *School Psychology Quarterly* 26 (2011): 161–174; V. Paul Poteat, Katerina O. Sinclair, Craig D. DiGiovanni, Brian W. Koenig, and Stephen T. Russell, "Gay-Straight Alliances Are Associated with Student Health: A Multischool Comparison of LGBTQ and Heterosexual Youth," *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 23 (2013): 319–330; Russell B. Toomey and Stephen T. Russell, "Gay-Straight Alliances, Social Justice Involvement, and School Victimization of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Youth: Implications for School Well-Being and Plans to Vote," *Youth & Society* 45 (2013): 500–522; and N. Eugene Walls, Sarah B. Kane, and Hope Wisneski, "Gay-Straight Alliances and School Experiences of Sexual Minority Youth," *Youth & Society* 41 (2010): 307–332.

13. Russell et al., "Youth Empowerment"; Alicia Anne Lapointe, "Standing 'Straight' Up to Homophobia: Straight Allies' Involvement in GSAs," *Journal of LGBT Youth* 12 (2015): 144–169; Camille Lee, "The Impact of Belonging to a High School Gay/Straight Alliance," *High School Journal* 85, no. 3 (2002): 13–26; and Melinda Miceli, *Standing Out, Standing Together: The Social and Political Impact of Gay-Straight Alliances* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

14. Walls, Kane, and Wisneski, "Gay-Straight Alliances and School Experiences."

15. Poteat et al., "Gay-Straight Alliances Vary"; and V. Paul Poteat, Hirokazu Yoshikawa, Jerel P. Calzo, et al., "Contextualizing Gay-Straight Alliances: Student, Advisor, and Structural Factors Related to Positive Youth Development among Members," *Child Development* 86 (2015): 176–193.

16. Russell et al., "Youth Empowerment"; Poteat et al., "Contextualizing Gay-Straight Alliances"; and V. Paul Poteat, Jerel P. Calzo, and Hirokazu Yoshikawa, "Promoting Youth Agency through Dimensions of Gay-Straight Alliance Involvement and Conditions That Maximize Associations," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 45 (2016): 1438–1451.

17. Laura L. Brock, Tracy K. Nishida, Cynthia Chiong, Kevin J. Grimm, and Sara E. Rimm-Kaufman, "Children's Perceptions of the Classroom Environment and Social and Academic Performance: A Longitudinal Analysis of the Contribution of the Responsive Classroom Approach," *Journal of School Psychology* 46 (2008): 129–149; and David E. Campbell, "Voice in the Classroom: How an Open Classroom Climate Fosters Political Engagement among Adolescents," *Political Behavior* 30 (2008): 437–454.

18. V. Paul Poteat, Nicholas C. Heck, Hirokazu Yoshikawa, and Jerel P. Calzo, "Greater Engagement among Members of Gay-Straight Alliances: Individual and Structural Contributors," *American Educational Research Journal* (forthcoming).

19. Heck, Flentje, and Cochran, "Offsetting Risks."

20. Laurel B. Watson, Kris Varjas, Joel Meyers, and Emily C. Graybill, "Gay-Straight Alliance Advisors: Negotiating Multiple Ecological Systems When Advocating for LGBTQ Youth," *Journal of LGBT Youth* 7 (2010): 100–128.

21. Tina Fetner and Kristin Kush, "Gay-Straight Alliances in High Schools: Social Predictors of Early Adoption," *Youth & Society* 40 (2008): 114–130; and Cris Mayo, "Obscene Associations: Gay-Straight Alliances, the Equal Access Act, and Abstinence-Only Policy," *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 5, no. 2 (2008): 45–55.

22. Mayo, "Obscene Associations."

23. Poteat et al., "Contextualizing Gay-Straight Alliances."

24. Catalano et al., "Positive Youth Development"; and Eccles and Gootman, *Community Programs*.

25. Nicholas C. Heck, Lauri M. Lindquist, Brandon T. Stewart, Christopher Brennan, and Bryan N. Cochran, "To Join or Not to Join: Gay-Straight Student Alliances and the High School Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youths," *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services* 25 (2013): 77–101.

26. Poteat et al., "Greater Engagement."

27. Poteat, Calzo, and Yoshikawa, "Promoting Youth Agency."

28. Poteat et al., "Contextualizing Gay-Straight Alliances."

29. Eccles and Gootman, *Community Programs*.

30. Jennifer A. Fredricks and Sandra D. Simpkins, "Promoting Positive Youth Development through Organized After-School Activities: Taking a Closer Look at Participation of Ethnic Minority Youth," *Child Development Perspectives* 6 (2012): 280–287.

31. Poteat et al., "Contextualizing Gay-Straight Alliances."

32. Rudolf H. Moos and Sonne Lemke, "Assessing and Improving Social-Ecological Settings," in *Handbook of Social Intervention*, ed. Edward Seidman (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1983), 143–162.

33. Lapointe, "Standing 'Straight' Up."

34. Jillian R. Scheer and V. Paul Poteat, "Factors Associated with Straight Allies' Current Engagement Levels within Gay-Straight Alliances," *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 43 (2016): 112–119.

35. Jean E. Rhodes and David L. DuBois, "Mentoring Relationships and Programs for Youth," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 17 (2008): 254–258.

36. Russell et al., "Youth Empowerment."

37. Maria Valenti and Rebecca Campbell, "Working with Youth on LGBT Issues: Why Gay-Straight Alliance Advisors Become Involved," *Journal of Community Psychology* 37 (2009): 228–248.

38. Poteat et al., "Contextualizing Gay-Straight Alliances"; and Emily C. Graybill, Kris Varjas, Joel Meyers, and Laurel B. Watson, "Content-Specific Strategies to Advocate for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth: An Exploratory Study," *School Psychology Review* 38 (2009): 570–584.

39. Watson et al., "Gay-Straight Alliance Advisors."

40. Valenti and Campbell, "Working with Youth on LGBT Issues."

41. Carola Suárez-Orozco, Hirokazu Yoshikawa, Robert T. Teranishi, and Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco, "Growing Up in the Shadows: The Developmental Implications of Unauthorized Status," *Harvard Educational Review* 81 (2011): 438–472.

42. V. Paul Poteat and Jillian R. Scheer, "GSA Advisors' Self-Efficacy Related to LGBT Youth of Color and Transgender Youth," *Journal of LGBT Youth* 13 (2016): 311–325.

43. "Our Approach," GSA Network.

44. Poteat et al., "Contextualizing Gay-Straight Alliances."

45. Poteat et al., "Contextualizing Gay-Straight Alliances."

46. Russell and Fish, "Mental Health"; Mark L. Hatzenbuehler and Katherine M. Keyes, "Inclusive Anti-Bullying Policies and Reduced Risk of Suicide Attempts in Lesbian and Gay Youth," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 53 (2013): S21–S26; Ryan M. Kull, Emily A. Greytak, Joseph G. Kosciw, and Christian Villenas, "The Effectiveness of School District Anti-Bullying Policies in Improving LGBT Youths' School Climate," *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity* (forthcoming); and Shannon D. Snapp, Jenifer K. McGuire, Katarina O. Sinclair, Karlee Gabrion, and Stephen T. Russell, "LGBTQ-Inclusive Curricula: Why Supportive Curricula Matter," *Sex Education* 15 (2015): 580–596.

Bullying Behavior

(Continued from page 29)

Contemporary bullying is different; it's now more often played out as psychological, rather than physical, attacks. What we call *cyberbullying* can be intentionally cruel or (sometimes) just thoughtless digital behavior; either way, it may still be experienced as bullying by the recipient. What happens online and what occurs offline are inextricably linked, especially among teens. Children start online interactions very young—early in elementary school. The older they get, the more bullying migrates online.

It's critical to recognize the beginning level of abusive behaviors—gateway behaviors—and stop them when you see them. Teach your students how digital interactions lack a lot of social information, and how that can lead to problems with others if they're not careful. Encourage friendships and friendly actions between peers. That's the best defense.

Meetings with parents can be difficult, but keep in mind that most parents are trying their best. Their job is not easy. Just as important, don't minimize the concerns of children who seek you out. Connect with them and remember: working with children is never just about the academic content. □

Endnotes

1. Elizabeth K. Englander, "Spinning Our Wheels: Improving Our Ability to Respond to Bullying and Cyberbullying," *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 21 (2012): 43–55; and Dan Olweus, *Aggression in the Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys* (Washington, DC: Hemisphere, 1978).

2. U.S. Department of Education, "Bullying: Peer Abuse in Schools," LD Online, November 3, 1998, www.ldonline.org/article/6171.

3. See, for example, Rachel Dinkes, Jana Kemp, Katrina Baum, and Thomas D. Snyder, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2008* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, 2009), 36–37; U.S. Department of Education, *Student Reports of Bullying and Cyber-Bullying: Results from the 2009 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2011); M. McKenna, E. Hawk, J. Mullen, and M. Hertz, "Bullying among Middle School and High School Students—Massachusetts, 2009," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 60, no. 15 (April 22, 2011): 465–471; and David Finkelhor, Heather Turner, Richard Ormrod, and Sherry L. Hamby, "Trends in Childhood Violence and Abuse Exposure: Evidence from 2 National Surveys," *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 164, no. 3 (2010): 238–242.

4. Elizabeth K. Englander, "Cyberbullying—New Research and Findings" (paper presented at the 2012 National Cyber Crime Conference, Norwood, MA, 2012). Although I prefer to emphasize statistics that come directly from the subjects, in this case, parent reports may be a reasonable approximation of the truth. The youngest children are actually the most likely to report everything to their parents, so parents of very young children may have, relatively speaking, the most accurate knowledge about their child's victimization.

5. Englander, "Spinning Our Wheels"; Elizabeth Englander, "Is Bullying a Junior Hate Crime? Implications for Interventions," *American Behavioral Scientist* 51 (2007): 205–212; Petra Gradinger, Dagmar Strohmeier, and Christiane Spiel, "Traditional Bullying and Cyberbullying: Identification of Risk Groups for Adjustment Problems," *Zeitschrift für Psychologie / Journal of Psychology* 217 (2009): 205–213; and McKenna et al., "Bullying among Middle School and High School Students."

6. U.S. Department of Education, "Bullying."

7. Elizabeth K. Englander, *Bullying and Cyberbullying: What Every Educator Needs to Know* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2013).

8. Tara Parker-Pope, "Web of Popularity, Achieved by Bullying," *Well* (blog), *New York Times*, February 14, 2011, http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/02/14/web-of-popularity-weaved-by-bullying.

9. Laura Kann, Emily O'Malley Olsen, Tim McManus, et al., "Sexual Identity, Sex of Sexual Contacts, and Health-Related Behaviors Among Students in Grades 9–12—United States and Selected Sites, 2015," *MMWR Surveillance Summaries* 65, no. 9 (2016): 1–202.

10. Diane Felmlee and Robert Faris, "Toxic Ties: Networks of Friendship, Dating, and Cyber Victimization," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 79 (2016): 243–262.

11. Marian Wright Edelman, "Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies: A Failing Idea," *Huffington Post*, August 5, 2011, www.huffingtonpost.com/marian-wright-edelman/zero-tolerance-discipline_b_919649.html.

12. Stan Davis and Charisse L. Nixon, *Youth Voice Project: Student Insights into Bullying and Peer Mistreatment* (Champaign, IL: Research Press, 2014).

A Matter of Health and Safety

(Continued from page 39)

scores, school buildings themselves have been neglected and left to languish. As someone who has spent his career visiting and assessing school facilities, I have seen firsthand the importance of educators' teaching conditions and students' learning conditions. If those conditions are unsafe, teachers can't teach and students can't learn.

Improving the environmental conditions inside school facilities requires labor-management collaboration and the involvement of educators, parents, and other community members. The condition of our school buildings—and the health and safety of our students and school staff—is ultimately a social justice issue that we can no longer afford to ignore. □

Endnotes

1. "Why Detroit's Teachers Are 'Sick' of Their Inadequate Schools," *PBS NewsHour*, February 9, 2016, www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/why-detroits-teachers-are-sick-of-their-inadequate-schools; and Valerie Strauss, "How Bad Are Conditions in Detroit Public Schools? This Appalling," *Answer Sheet* (blog), *Washington Post*, January 20, 2016, www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2016/01/20/how-appalling-are-conditions-in-detroit-public-schools-this-appalling.

2. "Newark's Ironbound Schools: Neglected, Overcrowded and Crumbling," Education Law Center, November 7, 2013, www.edlawcenter.org/news/archives/school-facilities/newarks-ironbound-schools-neglected-overcrowded-and-crumbling.html.

3. Sameen Amin, "Inside Philadelphia's Filthy Schools," Al Jazeera America, December 9, 2015, http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/america-tonight/articles/2015/12/9/inside-philadelphias-filthy-schools.html.

4. American Society of Civil Engineers, *2013 Report Card for America's Infrastructure* (Reston, VA: American Society of Civil Engineers, 2013), 8.

5. Mary Filardo, *State of Our Schools: America's K–12 Facilities 2016* (Washington, DC: 21st Century School Fund, 2016).

6. David R. Day, *Environmental Law: Fundamentals for Schools* (Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association, 1995).

7. American Federation of Teachers, *Building Minds, Minding Buildings: Turning Crumbling Schools into Environments for Learning* (Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers, 2006); Glen I. Earthman, *Prioritization of 31 Criteria for School Building Adequacy* (Baltimore: American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Maryland, 2004); and Mark Schneider, *Do School Facilities Affect Academic Outcomes?* (Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, 2002).

8. Mary W. Filardo, Jeffrey M. Vincent, Ping Sung, and Travis Stein, *Growth and Disparity: A Decade of U.S. Public School Construction* (Washington, DC: 21st Century School Fund, 2006).

9. Carol Case and Travis Twiford, "Improving Student Achievement and School Facilities in a Time of Limited Funding," *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation* 4, no. 2 (2009); Earthman, *Prioritization of 31 Criteria*; Adele Willson, "Will Renovations Work for Your School Buildings?," *American School Board Journal*, October 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, *Condition of America's Public School Facilities: 1999* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2000); and Molly Hatfield, "School Facilities and Student Achievement" (Portland, OR: Center for Innovative School Facilities, 2011).

10. School District of Philadelphia Open Data Initiative, "Enrollment and Demographics (SY 2009–2010 to 2015–2016)," accessed August 19, 2016, http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/o/open-data-initiative.

AFT

A Union of Professionals

AFT + Member Benefits

Subscription Services

Serving AFT members for over 30 years!

YOUR MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTIONS MADE EASY!

When you order magazines through the AFT, you not only have access to exclusive prices on hundreds of popular magazines, you also support our mission to improve the lives of students and teachers everywhere. And whether you're shopping for yourself or looking for the perfect gift, you'll never have to deal with multiple publishers. By ordering through the AFT, you can take care of orders, renewals, and invoices in one easy place!

YOUR AFT PRICE: $12
COMPARE AT $30

TITLE	LOW AFT MEMBER PRICE
Better Homes and Gardens	$14.97
Bon Appétit	$18.00
Car & Driver	$12.00
Condé Nast Traveler	$12.00
Consumer Reports	$30.00
Cooking Light	$11.00
Country Living	$15.00
Elle Decor	$14.97
Entertainment Weekly	$20.00
Family Circle	$15.00

NOW JUST $40 PER YEAR!
COMPETITION'S PRICE: $121.37

TITLE	LOW AFT MEMBER PRICE
Field & Stream	$10.00
Golf Digest	$15.97
Golf Magazine	$8.00
Good Housekeeping	$10.00
Health	$10.00
Highlights for Children	$39.95
InStyle	$12.00
Men's Health	$24.94
Money	$8.00
Motor Trend	$10.00

YOUR PRICE: ONLY $16!
OTHERS PAY: $39

TITLE	LOW AFT MEMBER PRICE
O, The Oprah Magazine	$16.00
Parents	$9.97
Reader's Digest	$15.00
Real Simple	$15.00
Redbook	$10.00
Southern Living	$11.00
Sunset	$11.00
Us Weekly	$67.08
Wired	$12.00
Woman's Day	$12.00

Subscription prices are for one-year term

A SUBSCRIPTION IS A GIFT THAT LASTS ALL YEAR!

3 EASY WAYS TO ORDER: 1. **CALL** 800-877-7238 2. **VISIT** WWW.BUYMAGS.COM/AFT 3. **MAIL** THE FORM BELOW

Publication Name	Price
Total	

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

❑ **Please bill me**

❑ **Check** enclosed payable to: **AFTSS**

❑ **For a Gift?** Attach recipient's name, address, and a message.

Start saving today!

Mail this form to:

AFT Subscription Services

PO Box 830460 Birmingham, AL 35283