

WPS LGBTQ Education

Current research by Harvard, GLSEN, DESE, and the CDC indicate that to develop and sustain a welcoming school environment all students must feel they belong and in doing so must be able to identify themselves among peers, teachers, school leadership, and the content they are learning. We can teach a handful of gender identity and orientation lessons in our health classes, but believe the greater impact will come from embedding a culture of inclusivity across all disciplines.

At this time, we have not been able to identify separate, evidence-based curriculums particularly and solely about LGBTQ. However, there are multiple resources for lessons across the grades which are easily embedded into standards based discipline instruction.

Based on the current literature that we have reviewed, 2014-2018, we feel that focusing on: 1. Ensuring a school level inclusive community and 2. Supporting the classroom level inclusive curriculum work with resource support and modeling is our best first step. For example, asking educators to look at their class material and ensuring the writers, historians, and artists selected represent the diversity of the students, and the families, they teach.

Take into consideration, same-sex marriage was illegal in the United States until 2015 and Massachusetts is one of the few states without sexual health legislation. These two factors greatly limit the availability of comprehensive, evidence-based LGBTQ curriculum. In addition, research indicates that stand alone units of curriculum are more effective when the basic principles are embedded into the culture of the school.

Evidence based curriculum takes years to develop between research, design, implementation, analysis, peer reviewing, and publishing. An arduous task in any discipline, proves exceedingly challenging in areas of health and wellness. Only recently has Social Emotional Learning been widely accepted as a best-practice. Through the SEL lens there is renewed focus on the wellbeing of the whole child. As we search for comprehensive curriculum that meets the needs of all students, little can be found in the area of gender identity.

Teaching units on gender identity and orientation are important. Recognizing the needs of LGBTQ students are equally important. Our recommendation to School Committee is to set a precedence of inclusivity for all students by integrating LGBTQ initiatives across the district through increasing professional development for all staff and to develop inclusive curricular content across disciplines.

Action Steps Spring-2019 through Spring 2021

1. Develop and provide administrative and staff trainings in LGBTQ related policies and regulations (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/lgbtq/GenderIdentity.html>)
2. Develop and provide administrative and staff trainings to support developing and sustaining inclusive practices at the community level with specific attention to LGBTQ in regard to welcoming schools and cultural competence (e.g., The ability to interact effectively with all community members and ensure their needs are addressed.)
3. At the classroom level, across disciplines, provide an LGBTQ –inclusive curriculum : (<https://www.glsen.org/educate/resources/creating-lgbt-inclusive-lessons>)
 1. Ensure our LGBTQ students see themselves reflected in lessons
 2. Ensure all students gain a more complex and authentic understanding of the world
 3. Require and model respectful behavior, critical thinking and a social justice stance
 4. Develop and provide staff with resources and support to develop and implement standards based lessons that are inclusive (For an example see: <https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/teaching-strategies>)
 5. Provide developmentally appropriate classroom libraries that reflect the diversity in our school communities.

Best practice in the current educational literature is to ensure we provide an LGBTQ inclusive school environment and can be summed up as:

“To feel safe and to feel seen. To feel valued and capable of growth. These are simple concepts—basic pillars of student achievement and the results of good pedagogy.

For many queer students these rights remain out of reach. But LGBTQ students who go to school in a fully inclusive environment—where both curriculum and schoolwide policies value their identities—experience more positive outcomes. They also experience less harassment, feel more valued by school staff and face fewer barriers to success.

We also know that an LGBTQ-inclusive school benefits *all* students. Seeing LGBTQ identities valued in the classroom, in the curriculum and in day-to-day interactions inspires empathy, understanding and respect.”

(Retrieved 1-31-19 at <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/best-practices-for-serving-lgbtq-students>)