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A Call to Action to Support LGBTQI Pregnant, Expectant, and Parenting Students

Every young person deserves to learn in a school environment that supports them. Yet, too often, schools push out youth who are pregnant or parenting.¹ While some LGBTQI girls are as or more likely to become pregnant compared to their non-LGBTQI peers,² their experiences are largely ignored and their needs unmet. This call to action for schools and lawmakers highlights students' needs and the inclusive affirmative vision of young pregnancy and parenthood they deserve in their schools.

LGBTQI Youth and Pregnancy

A growing body of research indicates that when compared to straight teens, bisexual teen girls are more likely to become pregnant.³ **In one study from 2018, bisexual teen girls were nearly five times more likely than straight teen girls to become pregnant before age twenty.**⁴ Research on lesbian teen pregnancy is mixed—one study⁵ found lesbian girls were half as likely as heterosexual girls to become pregnant, while two other studies found lesbian girls were more likely than heterosexual girls to become pregnant.⁶ Studies have found transgender youth are just as likely to become pregnant as cisgender youth.⁷ Some teens with intersex traits can also become pregnant, though less is known about this population.

One possible explanation for these findings is that LGBTQI teens feel increased pressure to conform to heterosexuality and gender norms and “prove” that they are straight and cisgender, particularly if they experience bullying or other harassment based on their identity.⁸ Students who are bullied are more likely to become pregnant as a teen, and LGBTQI students experience bullying at higher rates than their non-LGBTQI peers.⁹ In 2019, **over a third of LGB (40%) students reported having been bullied at school in the last year, compared to 22% of straight students.**¹⁰ Likewise, according to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, over half (54%) of respondents reported experiencing verbal harassment while in school because they were transgender.¹¹ LGBTQI students of color face intersecting forms of bullying and harassment, with over half of Latinx, AAPI, and Black LGBTQ students, and 65% of Native and Indigenous LGBTQ students reporting that they felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation, according to a 2015 survey conducted by GLSEN.¹² **Similarly, about 42% of AAPI, Black and Latinx LGBTQ students, and 51% of Native and Indigenous LGBTQ students reported feeling unsafe at school because of their gender expression.**

In addition to being more likely to experience bullying, LGBTQI students are more likely to experience sexual violence than straight, cisgender students,¹³ which also increases the likelihood of pregnancy. **In 2019, more than one in five LGB students reported being the victim of sexual violence at least once during the past year, compared to 9% of straight students.¹⁴ In 2017, 23% of transgender students reported being forced to have sexual intercourse compared to 12% of cisgender female students and 3.5% of cisgender male students.¹⁵** Overall, pregnant teens are more likely to have experienced sexual abuse than teens who do not become pregnant.¹⁶

Creating Safer and More Inclusive Schools for Pregnant and Parenting LGBTQI Students

Pregnant and parenting LGBTQI students deserve educational spaces where all parts of their identity are acknowledged and supported. Schools should affirm LGBTQI students' needs and experiences and support their deeply personal reproductive decisions.

INCLUSIVE SEX EDUCATION¹⁷

Only 6 states and the District of Columbia require sex education to be inclusive of LGBTQ youth. In contrast, 7 states require LGBTQ identities to be portrayed in a negative light or not mentioned at all.¹⁸ Comprehensive sex education is associated with better health and well-being for all students. Moreover, LGBTQ students in communities with inclusive sex education report less victimization and better well-being.¹⁹ In addition, few curricula acknowledge and affirm diversity of sex characteristics, and no states expressly require sex or health education address the needs of intersex youth.

SEX EDUCATION SHOULD:

- Ensure students have the information they need to protect their health and make informed choices, including about birth control, abortion, and carrying a pregnancy to term.
- Be inclusive of all genders and of variations of sex characteristics, including trans and intersex students. Otherwise, students may not know that gender-affirming hormone therapy is not effective birth control, or that some youth with intersex traits can get pregnant.
- Address sexual harassment and assault. Lesbian and bisexual girls, and transgender and intersex students of all genders, are at high risk of harassment and sexual violence. Consent-based sex education that discusses what dating violence or abuse looks like in all kinds of relationships can be a valuable tool in preventing such violence.

AFFIRMING LANGUAGE

Not all cisgender women and girls can become pregnant, and not all people who can become pregnant are cisgender women or girls.

Students of any gender can be pregnant, expectant, or a young parent. Rather than assuming the gender identity of a student (or, if applicable, of their partner), default to gender-inclusive language.

When a student's gender identity is known, affirm that by using appropriately gendered language. (For example, while the term "breastfeeding" may be acceptable for many students, a pregnant transgender boy may prefer the term "chestfeeding".)

When speaking broadly (not about a particular student)			
Instead of ...	"pregnant girls"	say ...	pregnant students
Instead of ...	"birth mom" or "bio mom"	say ...	birthing parent
Instead of ...	"teen mom / mom and dad"	say ...	young parent/s

TARGETED FUNDING & SUPPORT

Out of 91 federally funded teen pregnancy prevention programs, only 3 are specifically targeted to support LGBTQI teens.²⁰ Young LGBTQI parents, like non-LGTBQI youth, need the support that inclusive and non-stigmatizing pregnancy support programs can provide.

PROTECTION FROM HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION

Title IX protects students from harassment and discrimination on the basis of pregnancy and LGBTQI identities.²¹ That means schools must:

- Allow pregnant students to continue participating in their regular classes or extracurricular activities;
- Excuse medically necessary absences related to pregnancy, such as prenatal appointments, doctor-ordered bedrest, childbirth, or termination of pregnancy.
- Provide accommodations to pregnant students, such as allowing more frequent bathroom breaks or providing a bigger desk;
- Allow students who miss school for pregnancy-related reasons to have adequate time to make up work, as well as whatever accommodations are provided to students who miss class for temporary medical conditions (e.g., homebound instruction);
- Ensure supports and flexibility are available for all pregnant and parenting students, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, or sex characteristics.
- Prevent and address harassment from students or school staff based on pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex characteristics.

Get Support

If you are a pregnant or parenting student seeking information about your rights in school, visit the [Legal Network for Gender Equity](#).

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- 8 Brittany M. Charlton et al., Teen Pregnancy Risk Factors Among Young Women of Diverse Sexual Orientations, *Pediatrics* (2018).
- 9 *Id.*
- 10 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2019 Interpersonal Violence Victimization among High School Students—Youth Risk Behavior Survey, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/su/pdfs/su6901a4-H.pdf>
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- 20 NWLC analysis of HHS Office of Adolescent Health Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program (TPP) Grantees. List of current grantees, <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/grant-programs/teen-pregnancy-prevention-program-tpp/current-grantees/index.html>. In analysis of all Tier 1 Phase 1, Tier 1A, Tier 1B, Tier 2, Tier 2A, and Tier 2B grants awarded, only three grantees identified their "target population" as including one or more groups of LGBTQ teens.
- 21 US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Enforcement of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 with Respect to Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Light of *Bostock v. Clayton County*, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/202106-titleix-noi.pdf>