

# VTmtss Educational Equity Brief

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## Inside This Issue

### Supporting LGBTQ Students

### Best Practices

### Resources for Consideration

### Share Your Best Practices with Us

### Events and Announcements

### References

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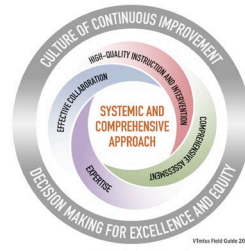
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## Supporting LGBTQ Students

This *VTmtss Educational Equity Brief* offers educators and administrators resources that support our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students. This corresponds to the Agency of Education's (AOE) goal to decrease hazing, harassment, and bullying through established [policies](#) and [procedures](#).

Vermont schools should always be welcoming environments for all students. [The VTmtss Framework](#) supports this ongoing work by ensuring all aspects of school climate are aligned with equity in mind – *best practices can be found later in this brief*.

[GLSEN's 2017 National School Climate Survey](#) found that 59.5% of LGBTQ students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation and 34.8% of LGBTQ students missed at least one day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

In Vermont, LGBTQ youth can face similar difficulties at school. According to the [Vermont Department of Health's 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#), LGBTQ youth were:

- 2x more likely to have been bullied in the past 30 days
- 3x more likely to have skipped school in the past 30 days from feeling unsafe
- 4.5x more likely to have attempted suicide in the past 12 months

The AOE firmly advocates for educational equity for all, meaning that all students have a gender identity which is self-determined, have privacy rights, have a right to feel safe at school, and have a right to a school environment free from discrimination. The AOE encourages schools to adopt a student-centered focus; no single policy, approach, or accommodation will apply in all circumstances. See more on the state's stance [here](#).

## Best Practices

In order to be sustainable, any efforts to protect LGBTQ students must be employed on a systemic level. The [Vermont Department of Health's 2018 School Health Profiles](#) analyzes six strategies to create safe and supportive environments for all youth, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. The data shows that most schools prohibit harassment based on a student's perceived or actual sexual orientation or gender identity (99%) and have identified "safe spaces" (84%) where LGBTQ youth can receive support from administrators, teachers, or other school staff. However, only a third of schools (33%) implemented all six strategies identified to meet the needs of LGBTQ youth.

The following are just a few examples of how schools can employ the components of The VTmtss Framework to increase their support for all students, staff, and families:

### **Component 1: Systemic and Comprehensive Approach**

In order to create a school-wide culture of acceptance and inclusion, schools must integrate LGBTQ supports into all aspects of school policies for both students and staff. Refer to Teaching Tolerance's [best practices guide](#) for ideas, including:

- All school-wide policies must ensure all students are free from harassment, are not to be "outed," free to be "out," and to express their gender as they wish
- Anti-bullying or harassment policies must explicitly state LGBTQ identities

### **Component 2: Effective Collaboration**

Staff, family, and community engagement is key to supporting LGBTQ youth. Refer to Teaching Tolerance's [best practices guide](#) for ideas, such as:

- Including families of all types in classroom activities
- Inviting LGBTQ organizations or activists to contribute to your classroom
- Starting the year with a survey to get to know families

### **Component 3: High-Quality Instruction and Intervention**

Classrooms are an important space to model LGBTQ inclusion. According to the [Vermont Department of Health's 2018 School Health Profiles](#), 65% of lead health educators are given LGBTQ-specific curricula for sexual health teaching material. To find ideas outside of health class, see Teaching Tolerance's [best practices guide](#):

- Integrate queer voices into curriculum and texts; teach queer history focusing on strong identities and resilience, not just oppression
- Never let homophobic remarks go uninterrupted
- Teach with intersectionality in mind: understand that everyone has multiple identities (visible or invisible) and acknowledge that some people experience multiple forms of oppression
- Examine posters, visible materials, and classroom materials: do they portray individuals with diverse gender expression or nontraditional family structures?
- Avoid the term "boys and girls" but rather use "students, scholars, class, etc."
- Model inclusive pronoun use and state own pronoun; if you misgender, apologize briefly and note error without calling more attention to it

### **Component 4: Comprehensive and Balanced Assessment System**

- It is important to periodically review LGBTQ policies to ensure they reflect current best practices. Teams should use SU, school, and student data (academic, behavior, and social emotional) in making decisions about supports for LGBTQ students.

### Component 5: Expertise

Vital to cultivating a safe, healthy environment is a staff with expertise to integrate LGBTQ-practices into their classrooms. It is necessary to teach teachers and students alike to be good allies. To do so, consider adding LGBTQ-specific trainings into your annual professional learning plans. It is also important to examine hiring policies to ensure diverse community members are being recruited and hired. Refer to Teaching Tolerance's [best practices guide](#) to assist teachers in:

- Being willing to learn terms such as gender identity, cisgender, transgender, etc.
- Not assuming cisgender identity or heterosexual orientation for staff or students

### VTmtss in Action: Culture of Continuous Improvement and Decision-Making for Equity and Excellence

According to the 2018 report [States Leading for Equity](#), "educational equity means that every student has access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background, and/or family income." Schools should examine their entire school system to ensure both students and staff are safe. Have open conversations about implementing anti-bullying policies and ensure that staff will intervene to stop harassment. One example is to show support for a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) club formation. According to the [Vermont Department of Health's 2018 School Health Profiles](#), 51% of Vermont schools currently have a GSA.

## Resources for Consideration

### Bullying Intervention

- [Guide to Responding to Anti-LGBTQ Comments](#)
- [Preventing Bias-Based Bullying](#)
- [Speak Up at School: Pocket Guide](#)

### Classroom Support

- [Gender and LGBTQ Lesson Planning](#)
- [Educator Guides](#)
- [Responding to Students' Questions](#)

### Creating a Safe School Environment:

- [Ally Training](#)
- [Definitions of LGBTQ+ terms](#)
- [Guide to Supporting LGBTQ Youth](#)
- [Improving the School Climate](#)
- [Resources and Services: The Trevor Project](#)
- [Supporting Non-Binary Educators](#)

### Vermont-Specific Supports

- [Outright Vermont](#)
- [Pride Center](#)
- [Vermont Commission on Women's local and national LGBTQ resources](#)



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## Share Your Best Practices with Us

We would like to hear about the best practices taking place in your SU/SD or school around your VTmtss Framework and educational equity. You may email materials, ideas, suggestions, or general feedback to Tracy at [tracy.watterson@vermont.gov](mailto:tracy.watterson@vermont.gov).

## Events and Announcements

### MTSS Listserv

Contact us to join the MTSS mailing list and let us know how it can support your work.

### VTmtss Office Hours

Join us again for Office Hours on the first Wednesday of the month from 3-4 p.m. You may sign up to participate through the [Weekly Field Memo](#) or on our [website](#).

### Technical Assistance Request Form

Looking for technical assistance to support your school's VTmtss? Submit our short online [TA Request Form](#) and we will be in touch shortly.

### VTmtss Field Guide 2019

Explore the AOE's [recently revised guidelines for the field](#). This document supports SU/SDs and their schools in designing comprehensive systems that expand and improve a system of layered supports that can ensure equitable outcomes for all students.

## References

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*Check out our updated website!*

<https://education.vermont.gov/student-support/vermont-multi-tiered-system-of-supports>