

# FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

## CREATING AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR LGBTQ+ PARENT FAMILIES

What you do can make a big difference in the lives of LGBTQ+ parent families. Specifically, you can play a significant role in creating a welcoming atmosphere and inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ parent families. When LGBTQ+ parents report positive school climates (e.g., being accepted by other parents, perceiving schools as inclusive and accepting, and regarding teachers as respecting their input), they are:

- more involved in schools (e.g., volunteering, taking on leadership positions)
- more satisfied with schools
- report less victimization of their children
- report fewer emotional/behavioral issues in their children, up to three years later

### CREATING AN LGBTQ+ INCLUSIVE CLIMATE

#### PAPERWORK + POLICIES

- Include options for parent 1, parent 2, even parent 3 and parent 4—as opposed to Mother and Father
- Provide a variety of gender options for parent and child (male, female, nonbinary, something else)
- Ensure that your nondiscrimination policies are inclusive of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression

#### COMMUNITY

- Consider ways to make events more inclusive for diverse families (e.g., Parents and Caregivers Day as opposed to Mother's Day/Father's Day)
- Consider establishing affinity groups such as those for adoptive-parent families or LGBTQ+ parent families
- Ensure that the language that you use to communicate with parents and families communicates a welcoming and inclusive spirit and does not discourage certain types of parents from participating (e.g., fathers, trans parents)
  - For example, do not use terms like "Room Moms"

#### CLASSROOMS AND CURRICULUM

- Ensure that the classroom (including images and books) encompass diverse kinds of families, including multiracial families and two-mom and two-dad families
- Ensure that the curriculum is inclusive of children with LGBTQ+ parents, such as by:
  - Acknowledging diverse family building routes (e.g., adoption)
  - Not suggesting that children are biologically related to both of their parents
  - Not assuming that children have been with their parents since birth



### DID YOU KNOW?

- Same-sex couples are at least 3x as likely to adopt as different-sex couples. They are also more likely to foster children
- Same-sex couple parents and their children are more likely to be racial/ethnic minorities than their different-sex counterparts
- Same-sex couples with children have a lower annual household income than their different-sex counterparts

## COMPETENCY AND REPUTATION

- Seek to attract LGBTQ+ parent families to your area and/or school by:
  - Seeking out LGBTQ+ centered trainings (especially for staff and teacher) to enhance your LGBTQ+ competency.
  - Partnering with LGBTQ+ organizations (e.g., for a local Pride parade or fundraiser) as a way of developing credibility as an inclusive school.
  - Establish a network of current and alumni LGBTQ+ parents at your school who would be happy to speak with LGBTQ+ parents who are considering your school

## COMMUNICATING & ENACTING MEANINGFUL INCLUSION: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What do your website, brochures, and signage communicate to prospective families? Are the visuals and language explicitly inclusive of LGBTQ+ parents and their children?
- Are staff members prepared to be warm and welcoming to all kinds of families? What type of language do staff members use when referring to and talking to families?
- (How) diverse are administrators, teachers, and staff with regard to family structures and social identities? (How) are you actively working to diversify the family structures and social identities that are represented?
- Is the paperwork that you use flexible enough to account for all kinds of families? How can you modify it to allow diverse families to represent themselves accurately?
- (How) are new parents approached for leadership positions or opportunities in the school (e.g., room parent, volunteering, parent-teacher organizations, committee work)? Are certain types of parents (e.g., white, heterosexual, cisgender female, not employed) overly represented in these types of positions? How might you engage diverse parents to participate without tokenizing them (e.g., asking them to serve on the “diversity committee”)?
- How welcoming and inclusive is your school with regard to other elements of diversity that intersect with LGBTQ+ parent families (e.g., race, family building status)? LGBTQ+ families are often diverse in many ways; for example, they may be adoptive, multiracial, and/or have children with special needs.

## THINK ABOUT THE BROADER COMMUNITY

It matters where your school is located, and what type of school it is—private or public, large or small, racially diverse or not. LGBTQ+ families who live in states or communities that have a history of anti-gay policies and are less gay-friendly tend to report more mistreatment at their children’s schools. LGBTQ+ parents in rural areas report feeling highly visible at their children’s schools. LGBTQ+ parents who adopt children of color report experiencing multiple forms of exclusion at their children’s schools when those schools are relatively White and non-diverse.

Consider what *you* can do to anticipate and address various challenges. For example, do you need to do extra education of teachers and parents about the guiding principles (e.g., inclusion of all families) that guide your school? Would it be worthwhile to pair incoming families with other LGBTQ+ parent families at the school for onboarding and connection?

## COMMUNITY AND ADVOCACY

Sometimes, gay dads encounter female-dominated, “cliquey” parent communities that discourage their school involvement. Zach, a White gay dad whose daughter and husband are both Black, shared that his daughter’s school “moms community” was characterized by a “high-school feeling...you can feel the competitiveness.” Finding this dynamic to be a “turn off,” Zach explained that they minimized their involvement in the school, such that their contact with other parents was on an “as needed basis.”

On the other hand, LGBTQ+ parents may feel that they need to be staunch advocates for their children and families, because they are fearful of being misunderstood or overlooked. Brad, a White gay dad with two children of color, said: “We realized we’re going to have to push ourselves. At the Open House, we chose to sit in front, not the back. That was a conscious decision. We can’t afford to sit in back. We’re going to have to do a little more, push a little more, but we’re not going to be obnoxious.”

## Handling “Pushback”

With every step towards LGBTQ+ inclusion, you may encounter pushback from parents or community members. This may especially be the case in certain communities and regions. When dealing with parents or community members who question the need or appropriateness for LGBTQ+ family inclusion, emphasize (a) the school’s values or guiding principles (e.g., respect for diverse backgrounds, the right for all children to learn in an environment free from fear), and (b) highlight how the specific actions that you have taken align with these guiding principles. You may also point out that children need to know about the world around them, and that world includes LGBTQ+ people and families. For more tips on responding to concerns about LGBTQ+ inclusion in school, see:

[welcomingschools.org/resources/research/responding-to-concerns](https://welcomingschools.org/resources/research/responding-to-concerns)

## SUGGESTIONS FOR SCHOOLS FROM LGBTQ+ PARENTS

- “More inclusion of family diversity, like more ‘two moms’ or ‘two dads’ stories and games, giving more of a sense of normalcy to that.”
- “Discuss adoption and foster care as routes to family building.”
- “Have adoption, multiracial, and gay family books. Don’t depend on the families to provide or suggest them.”
- “Use inclusive language. Don’t always say ‘moms and dads.’”
- “Ask parents how child celebrates holidays, such as Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. Allow the child to make multiple items/gifts.”
- “Ensure that outdated or offensive books are not included in the classroom or library. Check with an LGBT knowledgeable librarian.”

## REFERENCES

- <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/09/fifteen-percent-of-same-sex-couples-have-children-in-their-household.html>
- <https://www.lgbtmap.org/rural-lgbt-family>
- <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-parenting-us/>

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