



Florida LGBTQ+ Student Concerns

Perhaps there is nothing more instructive than hearing from our LGBTQ+ students during the time of COVID-19 and virtual learning statewide. Students are relaying their challenges below via their youth-serving agencies that some students interact with during the present pandemic. Remember that most LGBTQ+ youths do not have access to youth-serving agencies but the ones that do are pointing us toward their challenges at home and school. **The below youth concerns have been relayed via LGBTQ+ youth-serving nonprofits statewide from the Panhandle to South Florida that speak with LGBTQ+ students regularly.**

Our district students have shared the following:

Newly Summarized Challenges for Florida LGBTQ+ Students as of Summer 2020:

- LGBTQ+ youth of color, especially Black LGBTQ+ youth, are feeling the compounded pressure of their racial/ethnic and LGBTQ+ identities. Some of their most pressing concerns are continued feelings of isolation and a great deal of fear regarding their safety and health, largely due to COVID-19 and other social/political events.
- The recent overturn by the federal administration preventing discrimination against trans individuals in the health care system has left transgender youth currently undergoing HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy) feeling very concerned about how they will be affected.
- Youth may also experience sorrow because of the senseless deaths of so many Black Americans, including numerous Black trans women over many years. This grief isn't simply about recent events; for many, this grief has compounded over time (Trevor Project, 2020).
- LGBTQ+ youth have increasingly become involved with current social and political events, resulting in feelings of exhaustion and frustration. They have been struggling with wanting to be more involved, yet feeling restricted because of COVID-19.
- Regarding voice and video chats, many transgender and nonbinary are triggered and uncomfortable seeing themselves over video chat due to voice, appearance, fear of being misgendered, seeing them reflected back, and feeling dysphoric.
- Even though the stress of school has decreased, the stress of living in a non-affirming household, not having a community or access to one, and the inability to live as who they are is still a weight that our LGBTQ+ teens are bearing.
- Rising family tensions continue to be a serious point of concern as families are often unable to understand or affirm their youths' identities and social needs due to isolation.





- Many youths log on in unsupportive or semi-supportive environments, and those that do not/cannot log on to virtual youth nonprofit chats or zooms are the ones who are often in the most unsupportive households. Others find places they can go to be alone and log on such as garages, bedrooms, and closets.

The below denotes points where Florida LGBTQ+ students tell us that these challenges have been present since the pandemic began (March 2020).

- During this time, it is very important to check in with LGBTQ+ students. The Trevor Project research shows that LGBTQ+ youth who report having at least one accepting adult were 40% less likely to report a suicide attempt in the last year.
- Dead names (birth names) on online platforms have been a highly common occurrence in virtual school district platforms throughout the state. Research reminds us that misgendering a student can lead to very high rates of depression and suicidal ideation. Please work with your I.T. Department to update your Student Information System to reflect students' affirmed names. (Note: there is a link in this email pertaining to how FOCUS and SKYWARD have been used by Martin and St. Lucie school districts to add student affirmed name fields.)
- Many LGBTQ+ students no longer have access to the affirming communities they may have found in schools. Those who rely on GSAs or friends at school for accepting communities may feel especially isolated. Schools should work to ensure that opportunities such as GSA involvement are available to students when virtual school is in session.
- Some students are not being affirmed at home and are often in unaccepting, unsupportive households and are sometimes frightened of being outed.

What School Staff Can Do:

- Those in contact with LGBTQ+ students can ask them directly about whether or not they feel safe and supported in their current living situation. Efforts to proactively support youth in nonsupportive environments can help them problem solve in order to provide physical and emotional safety.
- Ask: "Is this a good time for me to ask you some identity questions?", could be a prudent way to test the safety level of LGBTQ+ youth when at home.

QUESTIONS? REACH OUT TO US AT:

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