

LGBTQ YOUTH IN CALIFORNIA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS: DIFFERENCES ACROSS THE STATE

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CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4
Background	8
Methods.....	9
Measures.....	9
Sexual orientation and gender identity	10
School environment	11
Student performance	11
Victimization and school safety.....	11
Tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use.....	12
Results	13
LGBTQ Youth in California.....	13
Demographic Characteristics.....	13
School experience, safety and well-being of youth.....	15
School climate	15
School performance	15
School safety and victimization experiences	17
Tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use.....	17
LGBTQ youth in rural and urban areas in California	18
Demographics.....	18
School experience, safety and well-being of youth.....	20
School climate	20
Student performance	20
School victimization and perceived safety.....	20
Tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use.....	21
Conclusions	22
References.....	23

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In California, like a few other states, there are a host of state-level laws that are intended to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ) youth from the types of disparities observed in national or other-state specific research. These laws prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity within schools and foster homes, require LGBT-inclusive cultural and historical education in schools and LGBTQ-inclusive sex and health education, and enumerate these social statuses within anti-bullying statutes.¹ Though there are state-wide protective laws, California is a highly diverse state and there are likely to be variations in how the laws are implemented across regions. In this complex context, the current report examined whether LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth in California differed on key indicators related to school experiences and well-being. The report also assessed differences in school outcomes and well-being between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth by rural and urban areas and within six regions in California to assess any geographic disparities.²

We used the California Student Survey (CSS) and the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) to understand the experiences of California youth and the ways sexual orientation and gender identity are related to their well-being. Both are large scale surveys conducted within middle and high schools in the state. Specifically, we used the CSS dataset, which is representative of the state youth population, to look at differences between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth in terms of their demographic information, school climate, victimization reports, and substance use at the state level. We used the CHKS dataset to examine differences between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth by rural and urban areas and within six regions in California. Regional analysis available in the Addendum.

MAIN FINDINGS

LGBTQ Youth Estimates

- Overall, 10.3% of California's students in public middle and high schools identified as LGBTQ. In rural areas, 10.0% of students surveyed identified as LGBTQ. In urban areas, 10.5% of students surveyed identified as LGBTQ.

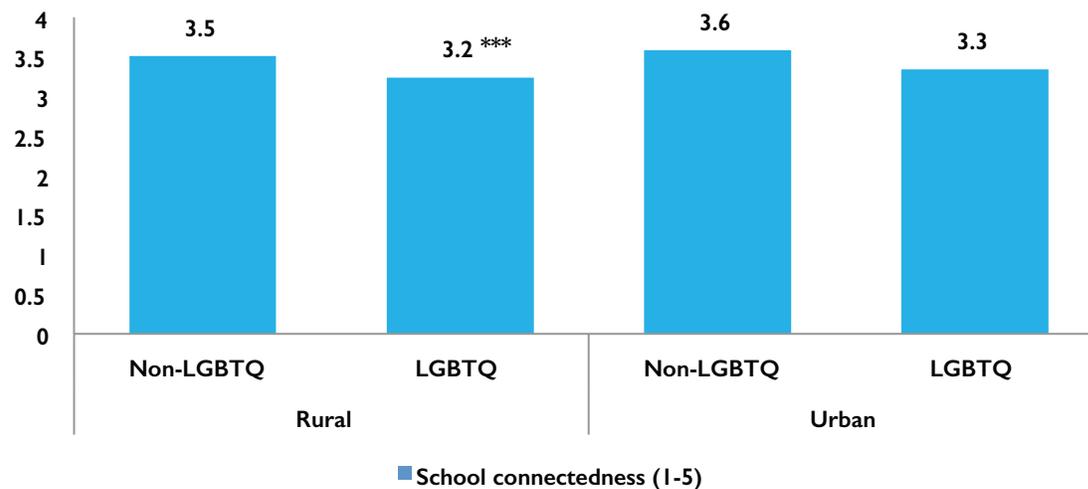
1. Welfare & Institutions Code Section 16001.9 (24); California Comprehensive Sex Education Law (SB 71); FAIR Education Act (Education Code Sections 51204.5 and 60040); California Education Code Section 51500; California Education Code Section 220; California Education Code Section 221.5.

2. Regions include: Bay Area, Southern California without Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, Central/Southern Farm, Central Valley, and North and Mountain region. These regions are defined by the California Department of Social Services/Data Analysis and Publications Branch (2001).

School Environment

- Across the state, LGBTQ youth reported having less meaningful school participation, lower expectations from adults, fewer caring adult relationships at school, and a lower level of school connection than non-LGBTQ youth.
- LGBTQ youth in rural areas experienced a more negative school environment than LGBTQ youth in urban areas. LGBTQ youth in rural communities reported lower levels of school connectedness, fewer caring adult relationships, and less meaningful participation at school than urban LGBTQ youth.
- Analyses by rural and urban areas and within regions showed that LGBTQ youth were more likely to attend non-traditional schools, which are mostly continuation and alternative schools, than non-LGBTQ youth.

School connectedness by LGBTQ youth and non-LGBTQ youth in rural and urban areas



Note: ***p< .001 significance between rural and urban LGBTQ youth.

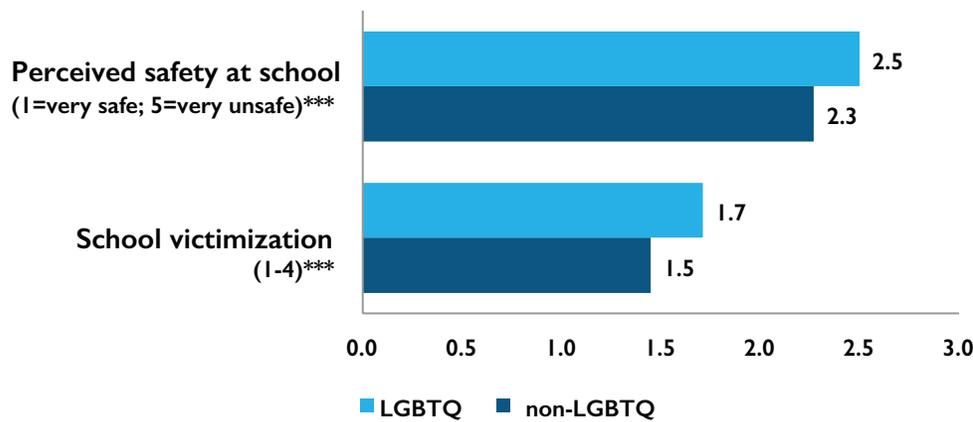
School Performance

- Overall, LGBTQ youth had lower grades and more school absences in the past year compared to non-LGBTQ youth in California. However, there were no significant differences in school performance levels between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth in rural and urban areas.

School Safety and Victimization Experiences

- LGBTQ youth reported higher rates of experiencing victimization in the form of verbal and physical harassment and abuse compared to non-LGBTQ youth. LGBTQ youth also reported feeling less safe at school than their non-LGBTQ peers.

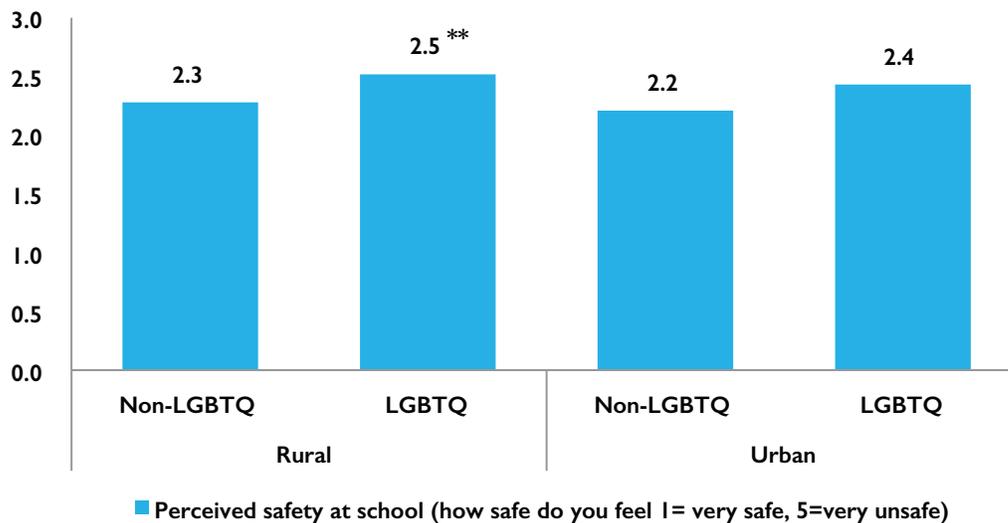
School victimization and perceived safety by LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth



Note: ***p < .001

- When looking at geographic differences in terms of rural and urban areas, LGBTQ youth in rural areas reported higher levels of feeling unsafe at school compared to urban LGBTQ youth.

Perceived safety at school comparing LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth in rural and urban areas



Note: **p < .01 significance between rural and urban LGBTQ youth

Tobacco, Alcohol, and Other Drug Use

- Overall, LGBTQ youth reported more frequent usage of cigarettes and marijuana compared to non-LGBTQ youth over their lifetime and more frequent use of cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana in the past 30 days. LGBTQ youth in rural areas reported higher levels of lifetime cigarette use compared to urban LGBTQ youth. There were no differences in marijuana and alcohol use among rural and urban LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth.

This study demonstrated that LGBTQ youth across the state experienced disparities in school climate, victimization reports, and substance use. The research also highlighted the regional diversity of California by pointing out the significance of various experiences of youth in rural versus urban areas. The findings showed that where LGBTQ youth lived and went to school mattered for their experiences with school safety, school climate, and cigarette use. Future public policy and community-based research projects should focus on better understanding how rural settings may create challenges, as well as potential resources, for LGBTQ youth. These results may also inform social action and interventions for LGBTQ youth state-wide.

BACKGROUND

Nationally, research has shown that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) youth experience high rates of victimization and discrimination while at school and often feel that school is unsafe (Kosciw, et al., 2016). Many LGBTQ youth also report their schools partake in and condone LGBT-discriminatory policies and practices in the form of allowing anti-LGBT remarks from classmates and teachers, implementing disciplinary actions for gender nonconforming expression, and discouraging LGBTQ students from school activity participation (Kosciw, et al., 2016). LGBTQ youth also face difficulties at home as they often experience verbal and physical harassment and rejection from family members once they disclose their sexual or gender minority identity (D'Augelli et al, 1998; Berberet, 2006). Such stigma, stressors, and experiences are related to worse educational outcomes (Kosciw, et al., 2016), poor mental health (Meyer, 2003), and negative health behaviors, such as drug and alcohol usage (Kann et al., 2016).

In California, like a few other states, there are a host of state-level laws that are intended to protect LGBTQ youth from the types of negative experiences observed throughout the U.S. These laws prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity within schools and foster homes, require LGBT-inclusive cultural and historical education in schools and LGBTQ-inclusive sex and health education, and enumerate these social statuses within anti-bullying statutes.³ Though there are state-wide protective laws, California is a highly diverse state and, as such, there are varying experiences across regions. One report found that while Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Bay Area had high LGBT-affirming social climates, Central/Southern Farm region had the lowest social acceptance rate of LGBT individuals in California (Williams Institute, 2015). The Central/Southern Farm region also had a 28% college completion rate among LGBT individuals which was lower than that of LGBT individuals in the Southern (33%) and Midwest (29%) regions of the U.S. (Williams Institute, 2015). Analysis by rural and urban areas and within regions is also important because qualitative information from youth advocates and legal service organizations indicate LGBTQ youth in rural settings face additional challenges with limited resources and access to LGBTQ youth communities and services (Bell & Valentine, 1995; Pace, 2004; Oswald & Culton, 2003; California Rural Legal Assistance Inc, 2014).

In this complex sociopolitical context, the current report examined whether LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth in California differed on key indicators related to school experiences and well-being. The report also assessed differences in school outcomes and well-being between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth by rural and urban areas and within six regions in California.⁴

³ Welfare & Institutions Code Section 16001.9 (24); California Comprehensive Sex Education Law (SB 71); FAIR Education Act (Education Code Sections 51204.5 and 60040); California Education Code Section 51500; California Education Code Section 220; California Education Code Section 221.5.

⁴ Regions include: Bay Area, Southern California without Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, Central/Southern Farm, Central Valley, and North and Mountain region. These regions are defined by the California Department of Social Services/Data Analysis and Publications Branch (2001).

METHODS

In this report, the California Student Survey (CSS) and the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) datasets were used to study disparities in school experience and well-being between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth in California's public schools.

The 2013-2015 biennial statewide CSS data are a randomly-selected sample of middle and high school students (7th, 9th, and 11th graders). This dataset includes two modules: a Core module that assessed key indicators related to school experience and student performance, and an Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) supplemental module that examined students' experiences with alcohol and drugs. Results from the Core module (105 schools participated) and AOD module (69 schools participated) were reported separately in this report because of the sample size difference. Results from both modules are representative of California's student population.

Schools volunteered to participate in the CHKS annual data and thus the dataset is not a randomly-selected sample of schools nor representative at the state, region, or county level. However, a larger number of schools were included in the dataset, providing information about schools by county and region. For this report, we used 2013-2014 data from 49 counties⁵ and 2014-2015 data from the 6 counties⁶ that did not participate in the 2013-2014 CHKS to get a close to complete dataset of all 58 counties in California.⁷ Sierra County is not included in the analysis because no school in Sierra County participated in CHKS during 2013-2015. Santa Cruz and Sonoma County were also excluded in the analysis because the sexual orientation and gender identity question was not part of the survey administered in those schools at that time.

Analysis comparing rural and urban located schools and regional analysis found in the addendum of this report used the combined CHKS data. Data are only representative of the students who participated in the survey and are not representative of the region or of all Californian schools in rural or urban areas.

Measures

Measures used in this report are structured identically in both the CSS and CHKS surveys.

⁵ 2013-2014 counties include: Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Ventura, Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, Fresno, Imperial, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Monterey, San Benito, San Joaquin, San Luis Obispo, Stanislaus, Tulare, Colusa, El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, Yolo, Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Del Norte, Glenn, Humboldt, Lake, Mariposa, Mendocino, Modoc, Mono, Nevada, Plumas, Siskiyou, Tehama, Tuolumne

⁶ 2014-2015 counties include: Sutter, Yuba, Inyo, Lassen, Shasta, Trinity

⁷ We did not combine 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 data from the same counties to minimize any chance of duplicate respondents who may have taken the survey in both years.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

Sexual orientation and gender identity was measured with one item that allowed for more than one response:

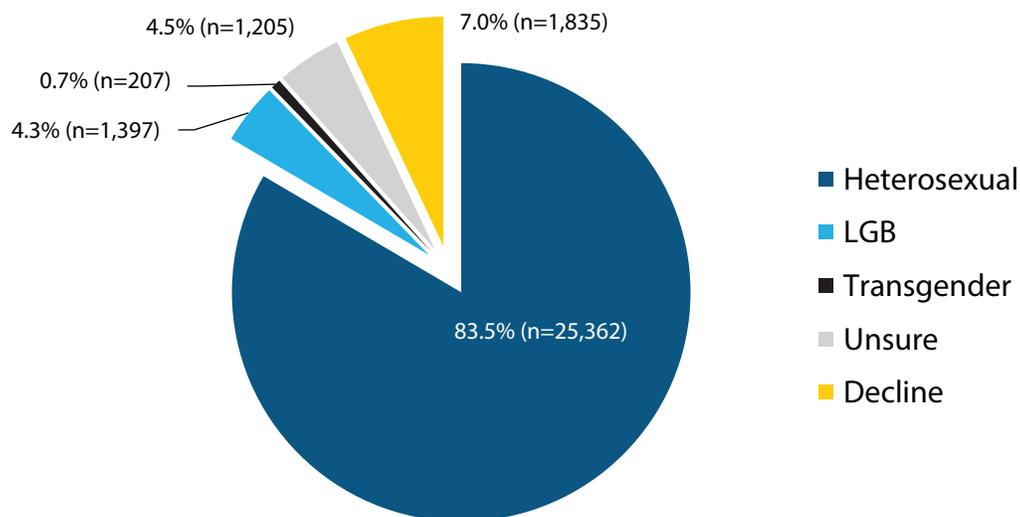
Figure 1 shows the distribution of the sexual orientation and gender identity of California's youth population. The majority of youth (83%) identified as heterosexual (marked only heterosexual, heterosexual and unsure, or heterosexual and decline). About 4% identified as LGB (and not transgender) (marked only LGB, LGB and unsure, or LGB and decline) and 4.5% reported they were unsure (marked only unsure) of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Which of the following best describes you?
(Mark all that apply)

- Heterosexual (straight)
- Gay or Lesbian or Bisexual
- Transgender
- Not sure
- Decline to respond

Seven percent declined to respond (marked only decline). Less than 1% identified as transgender (with varying sexual orientations) (marked only transgender, transgender and heterosexual, transgender and LGB, transgender and unsure, transgender and decline).

Figure 1.
Distribution of sexual orientation and gender identity status of youth in California



Note: Unweighted sample n and weighted percentages are categorized.

For this report, LGBTQ students were categorized as any youth who marked LGB, transgender, or unsure (which we interpreted as “questioning”), and the various combinations of options that are described above such as LGB and unsure, LGB and decline, and transgender and heterosexual. Non-LGBTQ students were categorized as youth who marked only heterosexual, heterosexual and unsure, and heterosexual and decline. Students who marked all five options, a combination of four or three options, both heterosexual and LGB, or both unsure and decline, or only decline were not included in the analysis.⁸

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

School environment was measured with four constructs. The *school connectedness* construct was composed of 5 items assessing the student's degree of connection with the school (i.e., I feel close to people at this school) and was measured using a 1-5 scale with 1 indicating no connection with school and 5 indicating a strong connection with school (CSS data, $\alpha=0.81$; CHKS data, $\alpha=0.83$). *Caring relationship* was a 3-item construct assessing whether the student felt there was a teacher or another adult who cared about them (i.e., At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who notices when I'm not there) on a scale of 1-4, with 1 meaning the student felt no adult cared for them at school and 4 indicating the student had a strong caring relationship with a teacher or adult at school (CSS data, $\alpha=0.79$; CHKS data, $\alpha=0.79$). *High expectations* construct was also measured on a 1-4 scale and included 3 items assessing whether the student felt there was an adult or teacher at school who had high expectations for the student (i.e., At my school there is a teacher or some other adult who believes I will be a success) (CSS data, $\alpha=0.84$; CHKS data, $\alpha=0.84$). *Meaningful participation* was a 3-item construct that measured if students felt they had an opportunity to participate in school activities that were meaningful (i.e., At school I help decide things like class activities or rules) on a 1-4 scale (CSS data, $\alpha=0.76$; CHKS data, $\alpha=0.77$). As with the other school environment constructs, a lower score indicated few opportunities and a score closer to 4 indicated the student felt they had opportunities to participate meaningfully at school.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Grades in the past 12 months and truancy in the past 12 months measured student performance. Students were asked how they would describe the grades they mostly received in school on a scale of 1-8, with 1 being mostly As and 8 being mostly Fs. Students were also asked how many times they skipped school or cut classes in the past 12 months on a 1-6 scale, with 1 being zero times and 6 being more than once a week. The report also assessed reasons for school absence in the past 30 days. Students were provided with a list of reasons and asked to mark all reasons that applied.

VICTIMIZATION AND SCHOOL SAFETY

Student experience with victimization was measured on a scale of 1-4, with 4 indicating frequent experience (4 or more times) of victimization. The scale included 7 items that measured the number of times a student experienced various types of verbal harassment or physical victimization on school property (i.e. During the past 12 months, how many times on school property have you been afraid of being beaten up?). Cronbach's alphas for the experience with victimization scale in the CSS and CHKS data were 0.80 and 0.81, respectively. Perceived safety at school was measured on a 1-5 scale with 1 indicating a student felt very safe and 5 indicating a student felt very unsafe at school.

8 Across the CSS and CHKS datasets, 0.2-0.3% of the sample marked all 5 answer options, 0.1% marked 4 answer options, 0.3-0.4% marked 3 answer options, 0.4-0.5% marked both heterosexual and LGB, 0.2-0.3% marked both unsure and decline, and 5.1-6.2% marked only decline to the sexual orientation and gender identity measure. These respondents were not included in the analyses.

TOBACCO, ALCOHOL, AND OTHER DRUG USE

Lifetime use and use in the past 30 days of cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana were measured on a 1-6 scale with 1 indicating no use and 6 indicating 7 or more times use. Number of times a student has been drunk on alcohol or high on drugs on school property (1-6 scale) was also assessed.

ANALYSIS PLAN

All analyses using CSS data were weighted to adjust for the probability of student participation, school non-participation, student non-participation, and representation of grade, gender, and race/ethnicity of students in public schools in California. All analyses using CHKS data were clustered at the school level to account for school effect for respondents from the same school. Statistical comparison tests between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth were conducted for demographic characteristics. Given the descriptive nature of this project, bivariate linear regression analyses were conducted for school experience and well-being outcomes on CSS data. Mixed regression analyses were conducted to account for clustering of schools on CHKS data.

For rural and urban analysis of LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth, youth were categorized as residing in a rural or urban area in California by first matching CHKS school zip codes with zip codes from the California Department of Education database. Second, zip codes were matched with rural-urban commuting area (RUCA) zip codes.⁹

All statistically significant differences in outcomes were noted in graphs and figures.

Limitations

These data provided a unique opportunity to understand how LGBTQ youth experienced school systems throughout the state. The use of the CSS data in particular allowed for estimates that are representative of the state's youth population. Nonetheless, a few limitations in the data should be noted. First, the sexual orientation and gender identity measure included both sexual orientation and gender identity measures in one question. Current research recommends surveys ask about sexual orientation separately from gender identity to better understand the different populations and their unique challenges (SMART, 2009; GenIUSS Group, 2014; Temkin et al., 2017). Second, in terms of analyses, we did not control for characteristics such as age or gender when testing outcome differences by LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth. Though this limits our understanding of which demographic characteristics impact the outcomes "more", the results below provide important insight into disparities between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth in school experiences and well-being.

⁹ Rural-Urban Commuting Area Codes categorize U.S. census tracts based on population density, urbanization, and regular commuting flows. Using these measures, areas are classified into 10 levels with 1 depicting a metropolitan area and 10 a rural commuting area (Economic Research Service). For this report, 1-3 are categorized as "urban" and 4-10 are categorized as "rural".

RESULTS

LGBTQ Youth in California

Based on a sample of 28,171 youth age 11-17 in the 2013-2015 CSS, 10.3% of California's public middle and high school youth population identified as LGBTQ. This translates to 101,618 of California's 7th, 9th, and 11th grade public school population who identified as LGBTQ. Then the remaining, 89.7% (translates to 889,046 California's public school students in 7th, 9th, and 11th grade) identified as heterosexual, or heterosexual and unsure or decline. For analysis purposes, they were categorized as non-LGBTQ.

Demographic Characteristics

There were several differences in demographic characteristics between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth (Table 1). A higher proportion of LGBTQ youth were female (63.3%) and Black/African American (8.7%) compared to non-LGBTQ youth. In terms of residence, compared to non-LGBTQ youth, a higher proportion of LGBTQ youth lived outside of a traditional home setting, such as at a relative's or friend's home, in the child welfare system, or in a shelter or some type of temporary residence. Additionally, about two times as many LGBTQ youth had a caretaker in military service compared to non-LGBTQ youth.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics Of LGBTQ Youth And Non-LGBTQ Youth

	LGBTQ (n=2,809)	non-LGBTQ (n=25,362)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Age	14.5 (1.7)	14.52 (1.7)
	%	%
Sex		
Male	36.7	49.7
Female	63.3	50.3
Grade		
7th	38.8	29.6
9th	32.1	35.6
11th	29.0	34.8
Race		
Hispanic/Latino	54.4	56.2
White	20.4	22.3
Black/African American	8.7	6.6
Asian	11.3	10.7
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.9	0.6
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1.6	1.5
Mixed (two or more) races	2.8	2.2
Type of home		
Home w/ one or more parents/guardian	86.3	92.6
Other relative's home	3.2	1.6
A home with more than one family	5.0	3.2
Friend's home	0.6	0.3
Foster home, group care, or waiting placement	1.4	0.3
Hotel/motel	0.3	0.1
Shelter, car, campground, or other transitional or temporary housing	0.8	0.3
Other living arrangement	2.4	1.5
Parents highest level of education		
Did not finish high school	15.9	13.6
HS degree or some college	29.9	32.0
Graduated from college	30.3	36.4
Don't know	24.0	18.0
Caretaker in military	8.3	4.3

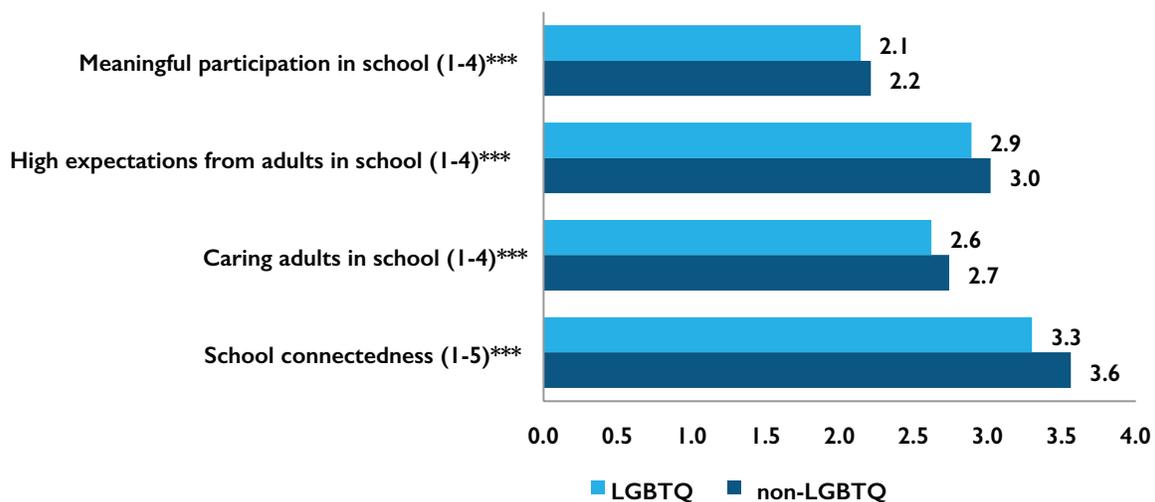
Note: Weighted percentages and means, and unweighted sample n is reported.

SCHOOL EXPERIENCE, SAFETY AND WELL-BEING OF YOUTH

SCHOOL CLIMATE

Overall, LGBTQ youth reported they had a lower level of connection with school than their non-LGBTQ peers (Figure 2). LGBTQ youth also reported having slightly less meaningful participation in school, lower expectations from adults, and fewer caring adults in school compared to non-LGBTQ youth.

Figure 2.
School climate measures by LGBTQ youth and non-LGBTQ youth

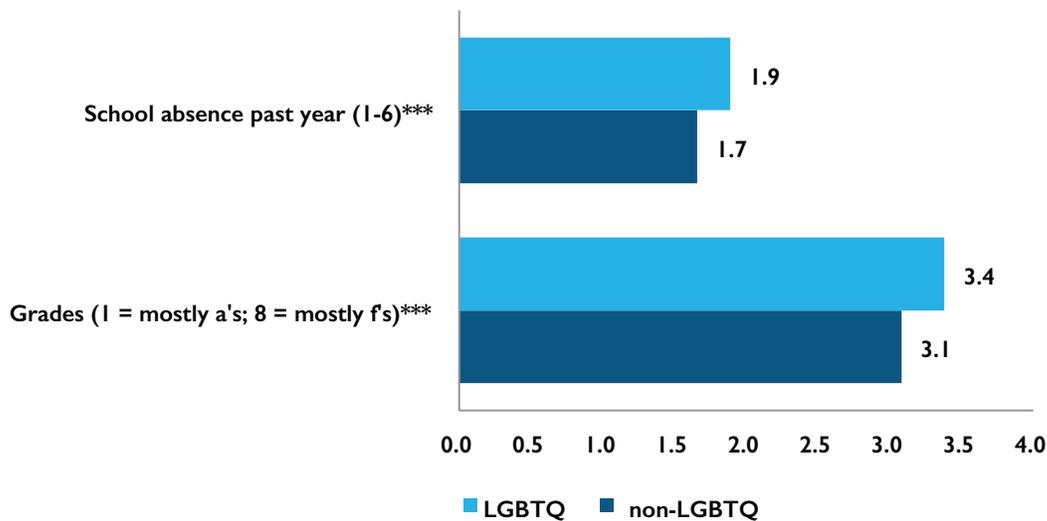


Note: ***p< .001

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

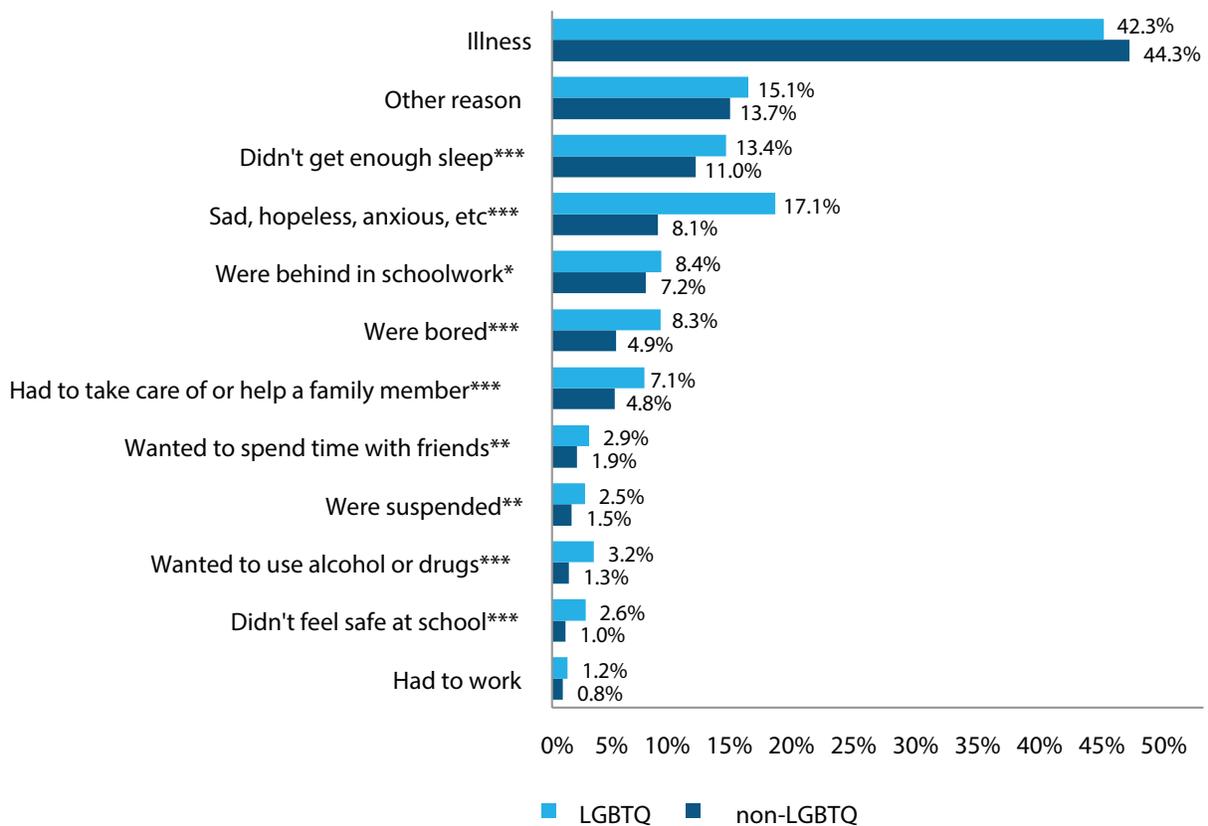
In terms of school performance, LGBTQ youth reported lower grades and more school absences in the past year compared to non-LGBTQ youth (Figure 3). Compared to non-LGBTQ youth, a higher proportion of LGBTQ youth were absent from school for a variety of reasons including because: they felt bored at school; didn't get enough sleep; had to care for a family member; wanted to use alcohol or drugs; and didn't feel safe at school (Figure 4). In particular, LGBTQ youth were two times more likely to cite feeling sad, hopeless, and anxious as a reason for missing school than non-LGBTQ youth.

Figure 3.
School performance measures by LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth



Note: ***p < .001

Figure 4.
Reasons for school absence in the past 30 days

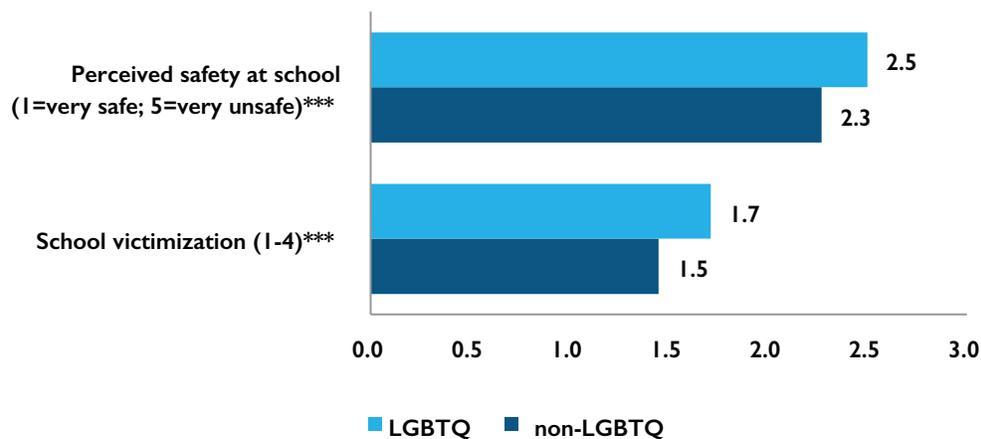


Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

SCHOOL SAFETY AND VICTIMIZATION EXPERIENCES

LGBTQ youth reported experiencing higher rates of victimization such as incidents of verbal harassment or physical abuse, compared to non-LGBTQ youth (Figure 5). LGBTQ youth also reported feeling less safe at school than did non-LGBTQ youth.

Figure 5.
School victimization experience and perceived school safety by LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth



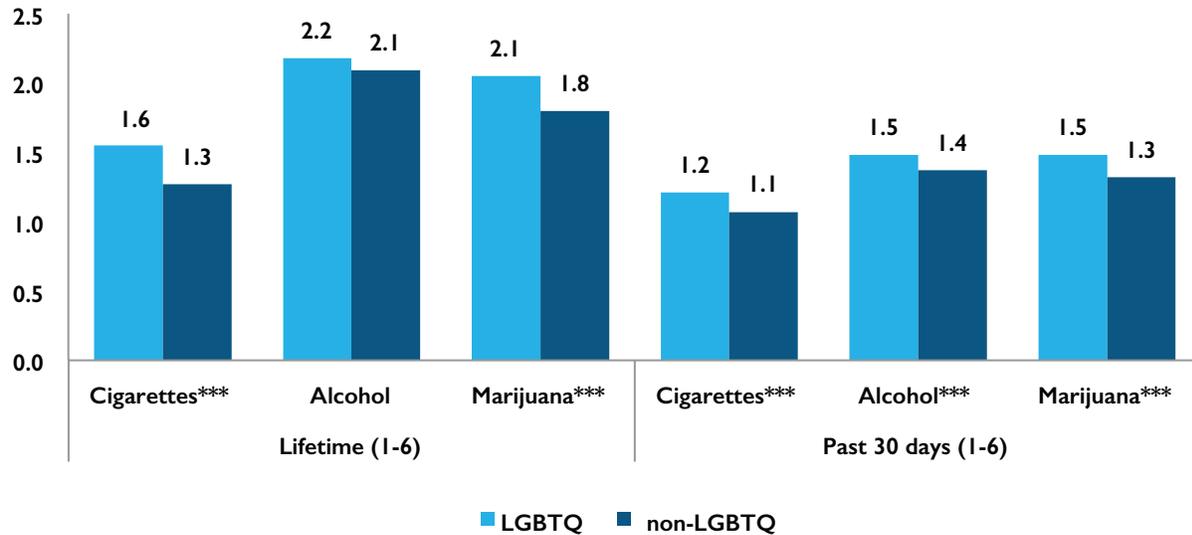
Note: ***p< .001

TOBACCO, ALCOHOL, AND OTHER DRUG USE

Substance use analysis was conducted on the CSS' AOD module dataset. About 10.5% identified as LGBTQ and 89.5% identified as non-LGBTQ. Looking across lifetime use and past 30 day use of cigarettes, alcohol, or marijuana, overall use was less than the midpoint 3 across middle and high school students in California. However, LGBTQ youth reported more frequent usage of cigarettes, alcohol, or marijuana compared to non-LGBTQ youth, with the exception of lifetime use of alcohol (Figure 6). LGBTQ youth (average 1.5 times) were also more likely to have been drunk or high on school property compared to non-LGBTQ youth (average 1.3 times) during their time at school.

Figure 6.

Tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use in lifetime and past 30 days by LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth



Note: ***p<.001

LGBTQ Youth In Rural and Urban Areas in California

DEMOGRAPHICS

Among youth living in rural areas, 10% identified as LGBTQ youth. Among youth in urban areas, 10.5% identified as LGBTQ.¹⁰ Across rural and urban areas, the patterns of differences and similarities between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth were parallel. LGBTQ youth across both settings were more likely to be female, attend non-traditional schools, and more likely African American, American Indian, or of mixed race than rural and urban non-LGBTQ youth. LGBTQ youth were also more likely to have unstable living arrangements compared to non-LGBTQ youth, and were twice as likely to have a caretaker in the military compared to non-LGBTQ youth in rural and urban areas.

¹⁰ Weighted population estimates are not reported for analyses by rural and urban areas because CHKS data are not representative. Sample n for LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth are reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographics of youth in California in Rural and Urban Areas by LGBTQ identity

	Rural (N=34,942)		Urban (N=380,079)	
	LGBTQ (n=3,486)	non-LGBTQ (n=31,456)	LGBTQ (n=39,985)	non-LGBTQ (n=340,094)
	Mean(S.D.)	Mean(S.D.)	Mean(S.D.)	Mean(S.D.)
Age (between 11-17 years old)	14.5 (1.7)	14.6 (1.6)	14.4 (1.7)	14.5 (1.7)
	%	%	%	%
Sex				
Male	38.7	50.0	38.2	49.8
Female	61.3	50.0	61.8	50.2
Grade				
6th-8th	31.1	26.9	35.0	28.4
9th-12th	63.7	70.0	61.6	69.4
nontraditional	5.3	3.1	3.4	2.2
Race				
Hispanic/Latino	49.9	52.0	49.0	49.1
White	28.9	31.6	19.0	21.4
Black/African American	2.4	1.6	4.8	3.9
Asian	2.8	2.4	12.5	13.3
American Indian/Alaska Native	3.8	2.4	1.3	0.8
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.9	0.7	1.6	1.9
Mixed (two or more) races	11.4	9.3	11.8	9.7
Type of home				
Home w/ one or more parents/guardian	83.1	92.0	83.6	91.9
Other relative's home	3.9	1.9	3.5	1.8
A home with more than one family	4.5	2.4	5.5	3.4
Friend's home	1.7	0.5	1.2	0.4
Foster home, group care, or waiting placement	1.6	0.6	1.4	0.4
Hotel/motel	0.8	0.2	0.7	0.2
Shelter, car, campground, or other transitional or temporary housing	1.3	0.4	1.2	0.3
Other living arrangement	3.2	2.0	3.0	1.7
Parents highest level of education				
Did not finish high school	16.4	15.4	14.7	13.3
HS degree and some college	32.9	34.3	27.8	28.8
Graduated from college	25.3	30.6	34.2	40.4
Don't know	25.4	19.7	23.3	17.5
Caretaker in military	10.0	5.4	8.4	4.4

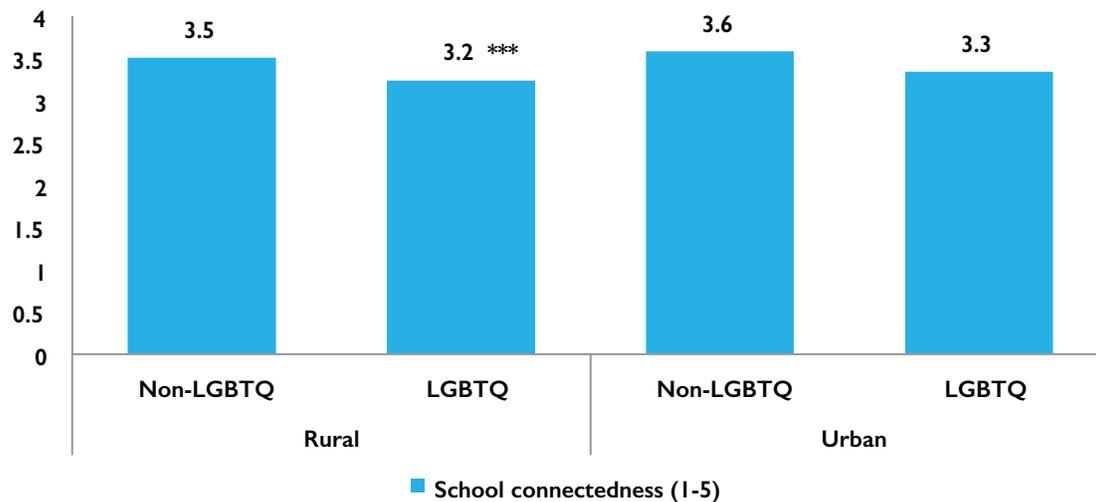
SCHOOL EXPERIENCE, SAFETY AND WELL-BEING OF YOUTH

SCHOOL CLIMATE

In terms of school climate, LGBTQ youth in rural areas appeared to have experienced a more negative setting than LGBTQ youth in urban areas. That is, LGBTQ youth in rural communities reported lower levels of school connectedness (Figure 7), fewer caring relationships, and less meaningful participation at school compared to urban LGBTQ youth.

Figure 7.

School connectedness comparing LGBTQ youth and non-LGBTQ in rural and urban areas



Note: ***p<.001

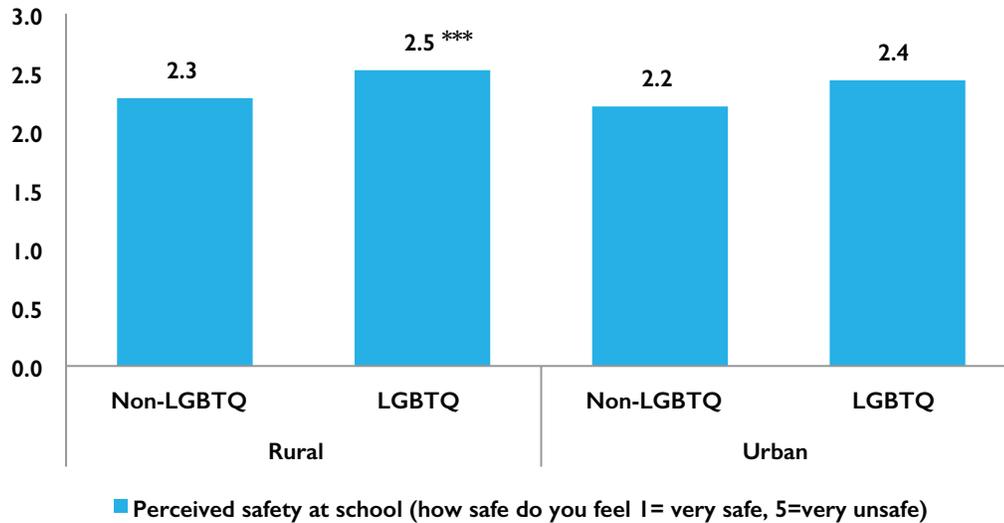
STUDENT PERFORMANCE

In terms of grades and rates of school absences, LGBTQ youth living in rural areas did not differ from LGBTQ youth in urban areas. There was also no difference across rural and urban LGBTQ youth around reasons for missing school.

SCHOOL VICTIMIZATION AND PERCEIVED SAFETY

LGBTQ youth living in rural areas reported feeling less safe at school, but did not differ in terms of instances of school victimization, compared to urban LGBTQ youth (Figure 8).

Figure 8.
Perceived school safety comparing LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth in rural and urban areas

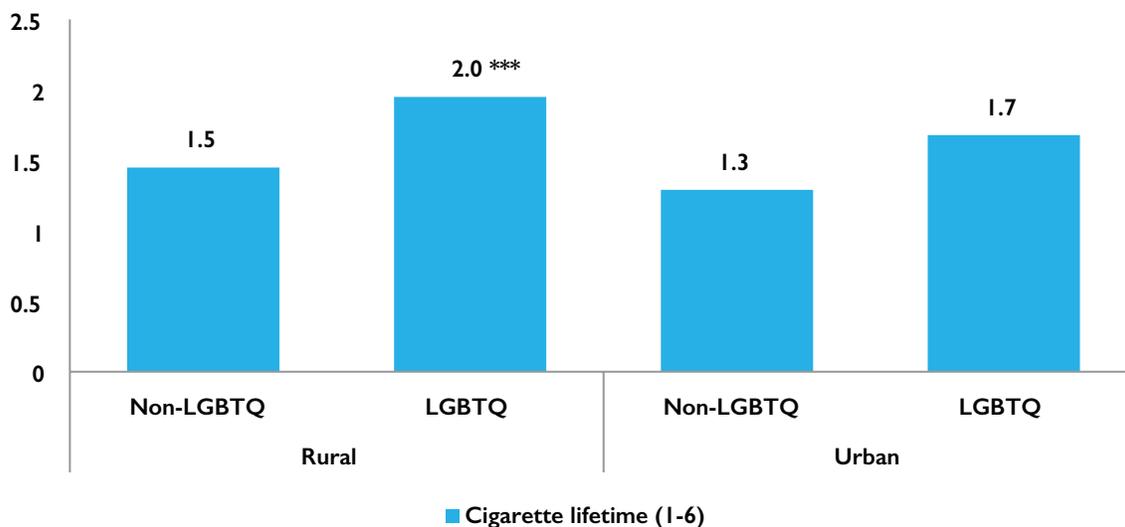


Note: ***p<.001

TOBACCO, ALCOHOL, AND OTHER DRUG USE

LGBTQ youth in rural areas reported higher levels of lifetime cigarette use, compared to urban LGBTQ youth (Figure 9). There were no differences in cigarette use in the past 30 days. There were also no differences between the groups in terms of alcohol or marijuana use for lifetime and past 30 days, or number of times students were drunk or high on school property.

Figure 9.
Lifetime cigarette use comparing LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth in rural and urban areas



Note: ***p<.001

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrated that LGBTQ youth across the state experienced disparities in school climate, victimization reports, and substance use. The report also highlighted the regional diversity of California by showing the differences in outcomes and experiences between youth in rural versus urban areas. The disparities we see between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth in schools and housing contexts in California reflect what other studies have shown at more local and at national levels. Given the protective policy setting of California, these data point to the need to better understand how well state public policies are implemented and enforced to promote the positive effects of these laws and regulations. Additionally, because public policies likely cannot address all factors contributing to the negative experiences of LGBTQ youth, these data indicate a need to identify community- and school-level interventions that target the ways poor school climates and substance use impact LGBTQ youth specifically. Finally, the findings showed that where LGBTQ youth lived and went to school mattered for their experiences with school climate, feeling safe at school, and cigarette use. Future public policy and community-based research projects should focus on better understanding how rural settings create challenges and potential opportunities for LGBTQ youth. These results may also inform social action and interventions for LGBTQ youth state-wide.

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