ESSER Funding Recommendations

According to 2019 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, across all determinants of health, students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual face disproportionate risks compared to their peers:

- 31% were bullied in the last month (compare to 15% of heterosexual, cisgender peers)
- 50% purposefully hurt themselves in the last month (13%)
- 36% made a suicide plan (9%)
- 19% attempted suicide (4%)

Outright Vermont’s 2020 Needs Assessment suggested COVID-19 has compounded these disparities. COVID-19 has made youths’ ability to connect with supportive peers/adults or access resources “Worse or Harder” for at least 41% of respondents. 97.7% of LGBTQ+ youth (66.7% of peers) reported one or more unmet needs. 50% of respondents signaled a need for connection and 15% expressed an increased need for mental health/counseling support.

Social support is essential for LGBTQ youth to build resilience and self efficacy, and connect to caring community. In other words, to have a chance to thrive. To respond to these stark disparities, we offer these recommendations for all schools:

- **Create and sustain Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs)**
  According to 2017 YRBS data: Among LGBT youth who believed they mattered to people in their community, 20% made a suicide plan within the past 12 months. Among those who did not believe they mattered to people in their community, 43% made a suicide plan within the past 12 months. A community of belonging is a critical suicide prevention tool. Gender & Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) create spaces for youth to build the communities they need within their school setting.

- **Implement supportive policies & practices**
  13% of LGBT youth skipped school in 2019 because they didn’t feel safe, as opposed to 5% of their heterosexual and cisgender peers. Structural and interpersonal homophobia and transphobia in schools create the conditions for poor mental health and increased truancy. Funding dedicated personnel or consultants and providing ample time for school leadership to consider equity in policy development creates a sustainable scaffolding for better outcomes for youth in the long term.

- **Ensure all staff and faculty are equipped to support LGBTQ+ students**
  Feeling safe, seen, and accepted at school dramatically improves mental health, engagement, and academic achievement. Students who don’t need to expend energy defending their right to dignity and respect can put that effort into academic and social-emotional growth. Investing in the professional growth of staff and faculty creates well–resourced adults who are supported as they in turn support their students.

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1. [2019 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance](#)
2. [Read the Needs Assessment Report](#)
3. See [GLSEN’s GSA Study Report](#) for information on why GSAs matter and how they help
4. Vermont Agency of Education [Continuing Best Practices for Schools Regarding Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students](#)
5. [Outright Vermont’s FAQ–style clarification of the AoE’s Best Practices document](#)