

Recent Anti-LGBTQ+ Laws Are Hindering the Lives of LGBTQ+ Youth in Schools

These discriminatory laws contribute to an unsafe environment and mental health struggles for LGBTQ+ students

By Sofia Marcus | Dec. 16, 2022



High school students in Florida protesting the “don’t say gay” bill. Photo credit: [The Guardian](#)

This year, 23 states have introduced anti-LGBTQ+ bills, while 13 states have signed these bills into law, according to [a report](#) by The Human Rights Campaign (HRC), a LGBTQ+ advocacy group.

Among these bills are ones that have negatively impacted the lives of LGBTQ+ youth in schools.

Florida's "don't say gay" bill, or the Parental Rights in Education Act, was signed into law by Governor Ron DeSantis on March 28. This [bill](#) prohibits public school districts from holding classroom instruction regarding sexual orientation or gender identity from kindergarten to third grade. These lessons will remain prohibited until a student reaches a developmentally appropriate age.

"This law was intentionally written in a very vague manner and in a very broad way to really pressure school boards into carrying it out," said Maxx Fenning, president of PRISM, a non-profit LGBTQ+ advocacy group based in South Florida. "We've really seen more school board members be emboldened by legislation like this."

An [article](#) published by The Guardian stated that pediatric psychologists believe the law creates a stigma around being gay and/or transgender, and creates an unsafe environment for LGBTQ+ youth.

"The school districts have been intimidated into weakening or, in some cases, removing altogether inclusive and LGBT affirming policies across the state, which is extremely damaging," said Fenning.

Florida was not the only state that signed anti-LGBTQ+ bills into law this year.

In November, two north Texas school districts adopted policies that discriminate against transgender, nonbinary, gender diverse, and intersex students. The American Civil Liberties

Union (ACLU), among other organizations, filed complaints against both districts. ACLU argued that both school districts violated [Title IX](#), the federal civil rights law that prohibits sex-based discrimination in any school or education program that receives federal funding.

The [first complaint](#) was made towards Frisco Independent School District; they adopted policies restricting access to bathrooms, locker rooms, and shower rooms that align with a student's sex assigned at birth. The [second complaint](#) went against Keller Independent School District; they voted to ban library materials that discuss or depict "gender fluidity" from schools.

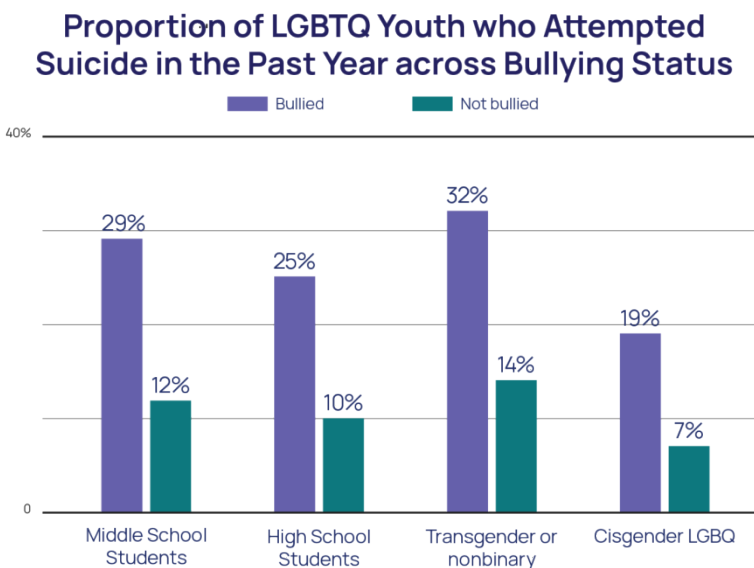
Arizona is another state that enacted a [bill](#) to ban library materials in schools containing "sexually explicit material," which includes acts of masturbation, sexual intercourse, and homosexuality.

"Whether or not you're in a blue state, red state, or purple state, these issues don't stop at the border," said Mark Eckstein, advocacy co-chair for Metro DC PFLAG, a nonprofit organization that promotes the equality and well-being of the LGBTQ+ community. "The impact is very hard on these students, even those that are not affected by that exact legislation."

As more discriminatory legislation such as the 'don't say gay' bill is passed, support and protection for LGBTQ+ youth in schools becomes limited, which can severely impact their mental health.

LGBTQ+ youth are [more likely to suffer](#) from mental health issues than cis-gendered, straight youth due to the increased amounts of oppression they face.

According to data from The Trevor Project's 2021 [national survey](#) on LGBTQ+ youth mental health, LGBTQ+ students who reported being bullied were three times more likely to attempt suicide than those who were not bullied.



Proportion of LGBTQ youth who attempted suicide in the past year across bullying status. Credit: [The Trevor Project](#).

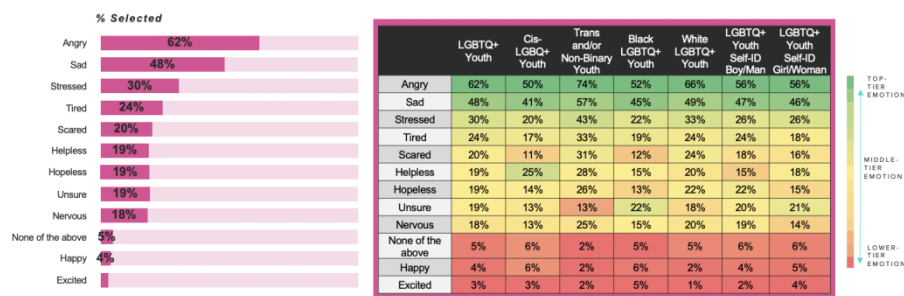
Many of these individuals are bullied because of their sexual identity and/or gender identity, which can [contribute to mental illnesses](#) like anxiety and depression. A 2016-2017 HRC survey [reported](#) that almost 30 percent of LGBTQ+ youth said they felt depressed most or all of the time compared to the almost 15 percent of non-LGBTQ+ youth.

“The perception is that there’s something wrong with LGBTQ experiences, especially in youth, and especially in elementary school or secondary school,” said Eckstein. “There has been an increase in bullying and, sometimes, that’s acted upon things like violence.”

Violence against LGBTQ+ youth is a prevalent issue. A 2019 [survey](#) released by the CDC found that more than 15 percent of gay and lesbian youth, and less than 30 percent of transgender youth, were threatened or injured with a weapon on school grounds. On the other hand, only seven percent of cisgender and straight youth were victimized in school.

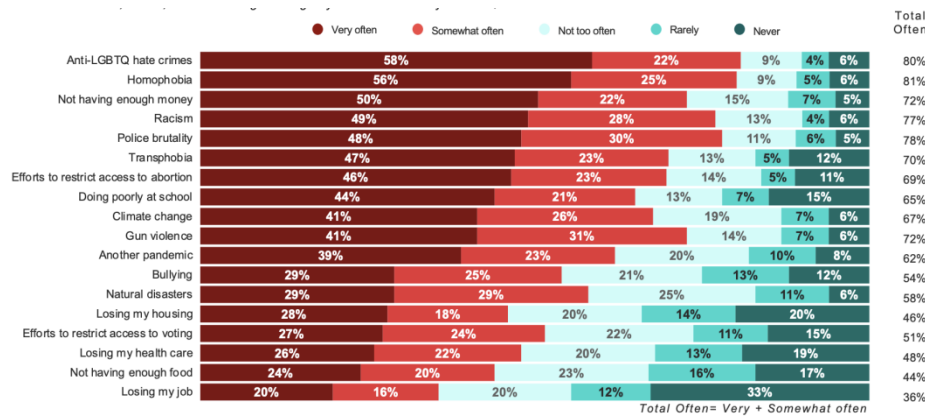
Due to laws in place that contribute to the stigmatization surrounding the LGBTQ+ community in schools, these students are extremely worried about their safety, which strikes feelings of anger and fear.

A 2021 [analysis](#) conducted by The Trevor Project found that more than 60 percent of the LGBTQ+ youth community felt angry towards a new policy that would ban transgender girls from playing on girls’ sports teams and transgender boys from playing on boys’ sports teams.



LGBTQ+ youth reported having a certain reaction towards the new policy. Credit: [The Trevor Project](#).

The data also found that, overall, anti-LGBTQ+ hate crimes and homophobia contribute to feelings of stress and anxiety among LGBTQ+ youth. Almost 60 percent of LGBTQ+ youth reported that they experience stress and anxiety very often from the existence of hate crimes.



The extent to which anti-LGBTQ hate crimes and homophobia affect LGBTQ+ youth. Credit: [The Trevor Project](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/).

The catalysts responsible for these increased rates of bullying, violence, mental illness, and unwanted feelings of anger and fear among LGBTQ+ youth is a lack of support and resources.

“What we’re seeing is LGBT, young adults that were not given family support when they were younger. What would happen is, when they’re trying to thrive on their own, they’re not able to because they don’t have the basic skills,” said Scarlet Levy, youth and young adult specialist at Friendship Place, a non-profit that strives to end homelessness in DC.

Levy works with many LGBTQ+ youth who, after [coming out](#), felt unsupported.

“The biggest thing is that they’re not getting support and assurance at home. If we take away the support that they could get at school, I just don’t know where they’re expected to go, especially if they have housing issues,” said Levy.

What LGBTQ+ youth need to feel some level of support is an advocate or someone to look up to. Levy believes that these individuals need someone who will stand up for them and defend them.

Someone who will tell them that everything will be okay.

Source List

1. Maxx Fenning, President of PRISM FL, Zoom Interview, 561-221-8809, maxxfenning@prismfl.org
2. Scarlet Levy, Youth and Young Adult Specialist at Friendship Place, Zoom Interview, 240-909-1215, slevy@friendshipplace.org
3. Mark Eckstein, Advocacy Co-Chair at Metro DC PFLAG, Zoom Interview, 305-773-3393, markeckstein@hotmail.com
4. Photo: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/04/florida-dont-say-gay-bill-children-mental-health>
5. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/state-maps/anti-lgbtq-bills-in-2021>
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/04/florida-dont-say-gay-bill-children-mental-health>
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13. <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/lgbtq-youth/health-depression-and-suicide>
14. <https://www.hrc.org/news/new-cdc-data-shows-lgbtq-youth-are-more-likely-to-be-bullied-than-straight-cisgender-youth>

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