

How Visible and Integrated are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Families: A Survey of School  
Psychologists Regarding School Characteristics

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HOW VISIBLE AND INTEGRATED ARE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER FAMILIES: A  
SURVEY OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS REGARDING SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

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## Abstract

This study examined what elementary schools in New York State are doing to recognize lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) families in terms of curriculum, policies, and practices. One hundred and sixteen participants were recruited through the New York Association of School Psychologists email listserve and completed a brief online survey. Results indicate that schools that had a higher per pupil expenditure had more inclusive curriculum, policies, and practices regarding LGBT-headed families. The type of community in which a school district was located did not relate to the level of recognition LGBT-headed families receive. There was a mild correlation between the curriculum and practices, as well as the policy and practices, indexes. The findings demonstrate that even though LGBT families live in school districts, few schools have comprehensive curricula, practices, and policies that create a welcoming environment for them. An interesting finding of this study was that even though most of the respondents indicated that LGBT families were visible and included within their district, they did not perceive the school environment to be very open and welcoming for LGBT-headed families. Although findings suggest some awareness of these families and their needs within the school system, schools still have a long way to go before the needs of all families are met.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **U.S. Culture and Homophobia**

Currently, United States culture considers heterosexuality to be the norm, a term known as heteronormativity (Macgillivray, 2000). For this reason, people tend to believe that everyone is or should be heterosexual and naturally accept the fact that others are denied the privileges that heterosexuals receive. For example, our society tells homosexuals through our laws, prejudice, and ignorance that they are unacceptable individuals. Heterosexual privileges are often taken for granted in our culture and social institutions such as schools fail to acknowledge the existence of homosexuality.

Depending on one's exposure to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) population, these words bring forth a range of thoughts and feelings. Some people experience feelings of discomfort and fear which is defined as homophobia (Schneider & Owens, 2000). Homophobia is a learned fear that individuals gather from watching others conform to heterosexist norms (Macgillivray, 2000). As a result of homophobia, damaging myths and negative stereotypes about LGBT individuals tend to prevail over common sense and even empirical research studies (Koziak-Rosabal, 2000). People may internalize these hateful attitudes and beliefs about LGBT individuals, leading to discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Furthermore, silence contributes to homophobia, leading to detrimental ramifications, especially when it excludes the most important people in an individual's life. The silence and invisibility of LGBT individuals can indirectly result in harassment and violence that often happens without adult intervention (Burt & Lesser, 2008). For example, some of the most common insults used by children beginning in elementary school are 'gay' or 'faggot.' Children

do not even understand these words, yet they are used in a derogatory way (Burt & Lesser, 2008). Feelings such as self-doubt, self-hatred, and depression are common among LGBT people, potentially leading to poor school performance, drug and alcohol abuse, and suicide (Koziak-Rosabal, 2000).

Silence, fear, or negativity about LGBT parents in an educational setting gives students the message that they are not safe or welcome. LGBT parents and their children experience the discomfort and fear of others and realize that they do not fit in to what our society has determined the norm. For this reason, children of LGBT parents often experience harassment. In fact, his group experiences harassment to the same degree as students who are LGBT themselves (Ray & Gregory, 2001). According to research done by Roberts and Coursol (1996), harassment and discrimination in schools jeopardizes the learning environment by producing fear and causing a division among those in the school community. Therefore, there is a need to improve the school climate for sexual minority students and parents.

### **Schools as Social Institutions**

Social institutions, such as schools, have the stated or unstated goal of socializing children to mainstream cultural norms. Our society's dominant cultural values are reflected when schools define a family either explicitly through a non-inclusive curriculum or implicitly through the illustration of heterosexual-headed families in books or other media. Schools rarely take the lead when it comes to addressing issues that are not the norm; schools tend to respond to the political influences of the group in power (see Kozik-Rosebal, 2000, for a review). Related decisions regarding curricula and social events are usually based on the assumption that everyone is heterosexual (Macgillivray, 2000; Schneider & Owens, 2000). This assumption is

frustrating for LGBT parents because heterosexism as the norm contributes to school life being so difficult for their children.

Schools today are teaching children from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, living in a traditional nuclear family is no longer the norm, which is apparent in the families represented in classrooms (Johnson & O'Connor, 2002). Children are now living with parents who are biological, adoptive, foster, step, single, or homosexual. LGBT parenting has been on the rise in the past two decades and families are being redefined. According to a report by the Human Rights Campaign, it is estimated that there are over 3 million gay and lesbian couples in the U.S. and over 27% have children living at home (Black, Gates, Sanders, & Taylor, 2000; Smith & Gates, 2001). In fact, 99.3% of U.S. counties have at least one gay or lesbian family (Smith & Gates, 2001). This movement among gay and lesbian couples to rear children has been termed the “gayby boom” by sociologists (Ryan & Martin, 2000, p. 207). Due to the changing structure of family constellations, schools are beginning to recognize the need to acknowledge all types of families in order to allow full participation of all parents and students (Jeltova & Fish, 2005).

In response to changing families, more and more school districts are striving to create an inclusive education that promotes diversity, where students from all different backgrounds are respected and treated equally. According to Stainback and Stainback (1990, p. 3), “an inclusive school is a place where everyone belongs, is accepted, supported, and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met.” Therefore, to create a fully inclusive education, experts believe that the curriculum must reflect all members of society.

### **Educating Students about LGBT Individuals**

If schools want to create an inclusive environment that represents a diverse society, then they should be addressing the needs of all students, including those who come from LGBT-headed families. Thus, it has been argued that schools should reflect the diversity that is found within the community at large (Wickens, 1993). For this reason, many schools take the opportunity to include minority history lessons in the curriculum. An example is celebrating Black History Month. Even though many schools have a multicultural education that includes race, cultural heritage, and socioeconomic level, few also include LGBT issues (Rubin, 1995). Learning about diversity can decrease prejudice and prepare children to live in a multicultural society.

Children reared in any type of family who see only heterosexual families acknowledged may come to the conclusion that LGBT homes are abnormal. Furthermore, it is important for children of LGBT parents to see their families reflected in all aspects of the population just like it is for African-American children to see representations of themselves. When schools are silent about LGBT individuals and families, children from non-diverse families may feel excluded and develop negative feelings about their families. By teaching about different family constellations, all children can be made aware of sexual minority families and are more likely to develop an accepting viewpoint.

Although the main fear of LGBT parents in one study was that their children would be teased or bullied in school, the second concern was a lack of an inclusive curriculum (Ray & Gregory, 2001). About one-third (32%) of LGBT parents with children in primary school and 39% of those with children in secondary school felt that there was an omission of gay and lesbian issues in the curricula. This study also highlighted that gays and lesbians were discussed so little that children of LGBT parents often felt frustrated because their peers had so many

questions and found it hard to understand their family structure. Another theme was that parents think that school officials believe that no problems about this issue exist in their schools at all. Although this study found that LGBT parents believe there is a need to include LGBT issues in school curricula, the research is still unclear as to whether schools fail to recognize the importance of this issue or if they purposely choose to ignore it.

Schools may help support LGBT families by fostering an atmosphere where students understand and respect differences. Unfortunately, when it comes to developing curricula, decisions are still largely based on the assumption that students and their families are heterosexual (Kozik-Rosabal, 2000; Macgillivray, 2000). Related, most school curricula fail to discuss gay and lesbian issues or even acknowledge their presence (Casper, Schultz, & Wickens, 1992). Despite this, there has been a steady increase in research stressing the importance of including LGBT-headed families in the educational curriculum (see Casper et al., 1992; Casper & Schultz, 1999; Ryan & Martin, 2000). An inclusive curriculum has been shown to enhance the school experiences of LGBT students by decreasing homophobic remarks, lessening victimization, creating a greater sense of belonging in the school community, and making it easier for students to talk with teachers about LGBT issues (GLSEN, 2008). When an LGBT curriculum is embedded into a multicultural education, students are taught how to interact and accept individuals from diverse groups.

### **Previous Research**

There seems to be a gap in the professional literature regarding the roles that schools take in addressing the needs of LGBT families. Previous research has noted that experiences of LGBT parents in school are often similar to that of LGBT students when it comes to the school environment being either gay hostile or gay friendly (e.g., Kozik-Rosabal, 2000; Lamme &

Lamme, 2002; Woog, 1995). Even though several studies have reported children reared by LGBT parents struggle socially and emotionally in school because of their family constellation, little has been reported on what schools are doing to handle this issue (see Short, Riggs, Perlesz, Brown, & Kane, 2007, for review). For example, Kosciw and Diaz (2008) surveyed 588 LGBT parents and 154 students of LGBT parents to obtain information regarding school-related experiences and the presence of LGBT-related supports in school. The results demonstrated a critical need to create safe and inclusive schools for all students and their families. With this in mind, it is important to focus on what schools are doing to meet the needs of LGBT families based on school and community characteristics to ensure ongoing efforts that promote a safe learning environment.

One study looked at how the resources of elementary and middle school libraries meet the needs of children of LGBT parents and the attitudes of school personnel (including school administrators, pupil-services personnel, classroom teachers, and librarians) concerning this population (Rubin, 1995). Twenty-nine school districts in the Midwest were examined and it was found that schools are educating students on other aspects of family diversity, but failed to discuss LGBT families. Furthermore, when asked to what extent their school educates students on alternative family structures, 14 out of the 29 school districts endorsed “little coverage” or “not sure if covered at all” (p. 36). This was an interesting finding because the school personnel in this sample endorsed support groups, individual counseling, and referral to community resources for children of LGBT parents. There were several limitations to this study, including a small sample size and an uneven representation of districts with respect to location (i.e., urban, suburban, rural), making it difficult to generalize these findings. Therefore, it would be useful to



obtain information on what schools are doing in other parts of the country to meet the needs of children growing up in LGBT-headed families.

A nationwide study that was conducted found that most school districts are not offering recommended program elements related to sexual orientation issues (Rienzo, 1996).

Furthermore, socioeconomic factors such as race, income, and population size were found to determine public policy and also impact school policies related to sexual orientation as well. For this reason, Rienzo (1996) found school districts within localities with gay rights protection to be offering more programs related to sexual orientation issues than areas without such protection. However, this research was conducted over a decade ago and many changes have occurred since 1996 regarding LGBT rights, therefore a more recent study is needed to see what school districts are now offering.

Similarly, Hoffman (2001) surveyed 11 elementary school teachers to investigate the reasons behind their decisions regarding whether to include gay and lesbian issues in the classroom. The teachers reported that education about gay and lesbian issues in their classrooms were minimal to none. Five of the eleven teachers indicated that there was no need to include gay and lesbian issues in the elementary classroom. Two of those teachers said they would discuss LGBT issues if a student in the class brought it up and the final four teachers believed in the importance of teaching about diversity. Furthermore, ten out of the eleven respondents felt LGBT issues were not appropriate for the classroom. Three teachers also expressed feelings of discomfort discussing this topic; since it is such a controversial issue, they also feared opposition from parents, administration, and fellow colleagues. All of the teachers answered that they were unsure of what type of support they would receive from the school board, administration, and fellow colleagues. The limitation to this study was a relatively small sample size of only eleven

teachers who were predominantly from small towns. To better understand the comfort level and acceptance of teaching LGBT issues to elementary students, a larger sample should be surveyed and research should include different regional viewpoints to understand the global nature of this issue.

Another study surveyed the attitudes and feelings of school psychologists regarding LGBT parents and their children (Choi, Thul, Berenhaut, Suerken, & Norris, 2005). Overall, school psychologists had a positive attitude towards LGBT parents, especially school psychologists who were female, homosexual/bisexual, or living in the Western region of the United States. These results are consistent with those of previous studies (Bailey, 1996; Fraser, Fish, & Mackenzie, 1995; Maney & Cain, 1997; Sears, 1992). Those school psychologists who had some training about LGBT issues or had more exposure to homosexual individuals indicated more positive feelings. Given that Choi et al. (2005) found that school psychologists in rural school districts had significantly less exposure to LGBT parents and homosexuals in general compared to those in urban districts, it follows that rural school psychologists may hold more negative feelings. Even though this study examined the relationship between attitudes and feelings of school psychologists and demographic characteristics, it did not explore how this relationship impacts the level of recognition LGBT families receive in school.

### **Current Study**

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the level of recognition LGBT-headed families receive within school districts. Most of the research on LGBT issues in schools has focused on LGBT students and not students who have LGBT parents (Jeltova & Fish, 2005). Still, the limited literature does suggest that the experiences of LGBT students are often similar

to the experiences of students from LGBT-headed households (e.g., Kozik-Rosabal, 2000). For this reason, this study will specifically examine LGBT families in schools.

Most of the research on including LGBT families in schools has focused on the perception of parents and students, but few have investigated the view of educators. For example, a study conducted by Kosciw and Diaz (2008) asked parents whether trainings about LGBT issues have occurred in their child's school, but neglected to survey the schools themselves. The current study will look at the training school personnel have had regarding diversity issues, LGBT individuals, and LGBT families from the viewpoint of the educators.

Previous research has mentioned that most schools fail to meet the needs of LGBT families because staff lack the information, experience, comfort level, and resources to address these needs. Even though there is evidence that schools may not have the ability to support LGBT families, the literature fails to fully describe what exactly schools are doing to address this problem. Most of the studies that have been conducted focus more on experiences and perceptions, but not how schools are meeting these needs. To fill this gap, the current study will investigate what schools are doing to meet the needs of LGBT families.

Previous research that has been done to identify what schools are doing only sampled a few schools either across the country or in a specific area. The research is also unclear as to how sociodemographic factors influence a school's decisions about supporting LGBT families. The current study will examine schools in New York State. Participants from New York State were chosen because there are a wide variety of school types (i.e., rural, suburban, urban) available across the state which will allow for a larger comparison between school sociodemographics and the representativeness of LGBT families. In addition, New York appears to be less proactive than other states regarding LGBT families in schools. For example, states like California and

Massachusetts provide guidelines and curricula for educators to use regarding LGBT issues, but New York State does not. Therefore, this study will explore what schools are doing in New York, which tends to be fairly liberal but lacks safe-school guidelines to educate their students about LGBT families.

This study will use school psychologists as the spokesperson for their district because they tend to be very familiar with the school climate, practices, and curriculum. School psychologists also serve as child advocates and promote the emotional and educational well-being of all children, including those who are sexually and culturally diverse. Since they work with a diverse population, they are trained to check for potential biases and to be accepting of all types of individuals. Furthermore, this population tends to be more responsive in studies with a sensitive subject matter. More specifically, prior research attempts regarding the topic of LGBT issues with educators/mental health professionals generated return rates of 29% for school counselors (Sears, 1988) to 62% for secondary school counselors (Price & Telljohann, 1991) and 53.4% for school psychologists (Choi, Thul, Berenhaut, Suerken, & Norris, 2005). Pettinger (1995) conducted a similar study which generated a return rate of 32.4% for school psychologists. However, it must be noted that these studies were mailed whereas the current study used electronic mail surveys.

Additionally, this study chose to focus specifically on the policies, practices, and curricula of elementary schools regarding LGBT families for several reasons. First of all, the topic of family diversity is typically discussed in elementary school settings. Second, children begin to develop social beliefs at an early age, and schools are a potential place to broaden awareness and acceptance of different people. In order to help students become more accepting and tolerant, diversity education needs to start at an early age (Aronson, 1995). Owens (1998)

argued that children can learn that there are a variety of family constellations, including same-sex households, as early as first grade. For this reason, it is important to know if educators are becoming more proactive in starting activities or discussions in this subject area.

Overall, the focus of this study is to develop an understanding of what schools are doing to recognize LGBT families in the elementary school. The research questions in this study are:

1. To what extent do schools incorporate information regarding LGBT-headed families into their curriculum? It is hypothesized that because of the lack of professional exposure to or training in issues relevant to sexual minorities, few schools incorporate topics about LGBT-headed families into their curriculum (Issa & Lauback, 2009; O'Connell et al., 2007; Ryan & Martin, 2000).
2. To what extent do school policies address LGBT issues? It is hypothesized that most schools have a policy regarding harassment and victimization but fail to specifically address issues related to sexual orientation or gender identity/expression (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008).
3. To what extent have school personnel had training on LGBT issues, or diversity training that included LGBT issues? It is hypothesized that relatively few school personnel have had training on LGBT issues and even fewer have had training regarding LGBT families (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008).
4. How do school characteristics (i.e., school location, size) and community characteristics (i.e., level of diversity, average income) relate to the elementary school's curriculum, policies, and practices. It is hypothesized that schools located in more diverse areas, such as larger urban environments, will have a more welcoming environment for LGBT families (Choi et al., 2005; GLSEN, 2008; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008).

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter will examine the literature regarding the challenges that LGBT parents and their children face in schools and the benefits of creating a diverse and supportive learning environment. It will also investigate the support and opposition schools face when incorporating LGBT issues into their curriculum and policies.

### **Challenges Faced by LGBT Parents and their Children**

#### **Children of LGBT Parents**

The family rights of same-sex couples have been a source of controversy for many years. This has led to a surge of research studies examining the effects of children being raised in LGBT-headed families (Chan, Raboy, & Patterson, 1998; Golombok & Tasker, 1996; Golombok, Spencer, & Rutter, 1983; Millbank 2003; Patterson, 1992; Patterson 1995). The increase in this body of research started in the 1970s and developed partly out of court cases involving LGBT parents seeking custody of children (Patterson, 1992).

In addition to the legal concerns regarding gay and lesbian parents themselves, there have been three major fears about the influence of same-sex parents on children: (1) personal/emotional development, (2) social development, and (3) sexual identity development (Patterson, 1992). The majority of the research has focused on comparing these three developmental factors of children with heterosexual parents to those with homosexual parents.

There is no evidence that suggests that children of LGBT parents differ significantly in any type of adjustment, including psychological well-being or cognitive functioning (see Stacey & Biblarz, 2001, for review). Furthermore, Stacey and Biblarz (2001) found across studies that parenting styles or levels of investment in children among LGBT parents are the same as or

higher than those of heterosexual parents. Therefore, the long-standing myth that LGBT individuals are unfit to be parents is not supported by scientifically-based research.

Some studies have even suggested that these children show more favorable adjustment and tend to be more open-minded compared to children of heterosexual parents (Golombok et al., 1983; Patterson, 1992; Resnick et al., 1997; Steckel, 1987). One study found that sons of lesbian mothers were more caring and less aggressive and that daughters of lesbian mothers had a higher self-esteem than daughters of heterosexual women (Patterson, 1992). Additionally, lesbian mothers have indicated that their unique family structure provides their children with strength, sensitivity and compassion, making it easier for these children to be independent and different (Clay, 1990). Therefore, it appears to be a misconception that LGBT individuals are unfit to be parents, because the literature suggests their children experience typical development when compared to their peers.

There are three main areas of research that have been examined concerning the parenting style of LGBT individuals: (1) comparative research on parenting and children's outcomes across family types; (2) studies that explore aspects of family life; and (3) assumptions and social discourses about parenting by non-heterosexual people (Short et al., 2007). The area of comparative literature is the largest, giving implications for public policy and legal reform. The majority of this research has been conducted on lesbian-parented families, rather than male homosexual-parented families. Even less is known about the development of offspring from bisexual and transgendered parents. In a review conducted by Biblarz and Stacey (2006), it was noted that this area of research has intensified and advanced since 2001, by including increased sample sizes, more studies with representational samples, and more longitudinal studies tracking children as they grow older. By and large, the research on LGBT parenting has moved away

from explaining their ability to be parents and has started to explore the importance of social justice and responding to the needs of LGBT families. However, there is a need for more research exploring the how race, gender, class, and ethnicity may impact LGBT parenting (Riggs, 2006).

### **Home-School Collaboration**

The two most important aspects of a child's life are family and education. There are many benefits for students when their families are involved in their education, such as more positive attitudes towards school and learning, higher achievement, improved behavior, and greater participation in academic activities (Esler, Yvonne, & Christenson, 2002). Thus, schools that create a more sensitive and positive environment for families from all cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds are likely to increase parental involvement (Swick, 1998). School systems that have an out-dated, stereotyped view of families may be limiting their interaction with LGBT parents.

A number of studies have examined the differences in school-related outcomes between children with LGBT and heterosexual parents. Previous research has found that LGBT parents are highly committed to their children and their education, even when the system was designed for heterosexual two-parent households (Mercier & Harold, 2003; Patterson, 1995). In a recent study, children of gay and lesbian parents were found to be as likely to make normal progress through school as those from other family structures, taking family income into account (Rosenfeld, 2007). Thus, there is no evidence to suggest that the education is compromised for children of LGBT parents.

Two recent studies found that LGBT parents were even more likely to be involved in their child's education than the general parent population, including attending school activities



and communicating with school personnel (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Wainright, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Specifically, LGBT parents were more likely to participate in parent-teacher conferences than heterosexual parents (94% vs. 77%), and more likely to volunteer (67% vs. 42%) (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Although research has shown that LGBT parents are involved in the school, few empirical studies have investigated the school experiences of LGBT families, including family-school relationships, negative experiences of both parents and children, and LGBT-related supports in school (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008).

Even though LGBT parents are often unaccepted by schools, they still tend to remain actively involved when compared to other parents (see Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). However, research has also found that there is a decrease in parental comfort when attending parent-teacher meetings when there are high frequencies of mistreatment and anti-LGBT comments (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Hence, negative experiences were related to the parents' comfort level in attending school meetings but did not change their level of involvement.

To gain a better understanding of home-school collaboration, previous research has explored the perceptions of LGBT parents, teachers, and administrators through interviews (Casper et al., 1992; Wickens 1993). More specifically, Casper et al. (1992) conducted a study to identify what LGBT families wanted schools to know about them and what school personnel wanted to know about LGBT families. They found that if the fact that gay and lesbian people exist is accepted, both school staff and parents can more easily discuss LGBT-family issues. However, LGBT parents often lack the resources necessary to educate school staff about their needs.

### **Negative School Experiences: Families**

Unfortunately, school does not appear to be a very safe environment for LGBT families. In a national study conducted by Kosciw and Diaz (2008) examining the school experiences of LGBT-headed families, 53% of parents indicated feeling excluded from their school communities. LGBT parents reported hearing negative comments and experiencing mistreatment from other parents (26%), as well as students (21%). Similarly, Morris, Balsam and Rothblum (2002) found that 16% of lesbian mothers had experienced harassment, threats, or discrimination at their child's school or by other parents. In another study, 16% of parents reported that they had been mistreated or received negative reactions by their child's teacher or daycare provider (Kosciw, 2003). Overall, parents felt invisible, in that they were prevented or excluded from fully participating in school activities and excluded from policies and procedures.

Research has shown that students from LGBT families felt similar isolation and alienation from their school environment as reported by parents (Casper et al., 1992; Gartrell et al., 2000). In a longitudinal study of lesbian-headed families, 18% of mothers reported that their school-age children encountered homophobic interactions with peers or teachers (Gartrell et al., 2000). In another study, about half (51%) of LGBT parents reported that their child felt unsafe in school because of their family constellation and because of their own actual or perceived sexual orientation (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008).

It is clear that LGBT parents are proactive in their child's education but do not feel welcome in the schools. Only one study has investigated the ways in which LGBT parents work with schools to prevent problems (Mercier & Harold, 2003). This study reported that good parent-school working relationships have a positive impact on children's academic achievement and social/emotional development. Additionally, these parents found that by increasing the direct contact they had with teachers and administrators, they were able to promote acceptance of

LGBT families. All of the parents were hopeful that their children would be successful in dealing with the school system and viewed the school experience to be an important component of their child's overall development.

### **Negative School Experiences: Students**

Although some studies have documented the difficulties LGBT families face in schools, few studies have reported about school experiences from the child's perspective. For instance, Tasker and Golombok (1997) interviewed young adults with lesbian mothers and found that 36% had been teased by their peers because of their mother's sexual orientation. Furthermore, 42% of these participants said they had been verbally harassed at school because of their parents' sexual orientation. About a quarter (22%) of students said that they had been discouraged by a school staff member from talking about their family at school and 36% felt that the school did not acknowledge their LGBT family. Results from this study suggest that just like LGBT parents, their children also feel unwelcome and mistreated by their school communities.

Ray and Gregory (2001) also focused on the child's perspective and found that early elementary school children tend to talk freely about their parents' sexual orientation. However, by grades five and six, almost half of the students did not share any information. Similarly, the younger children did not report being teased or bullied, whereas almost half (44%) of the older students did; by junior and senior year, the number of bullying incidents dropped to 14%. The bullying in middle school was found to be most severe, and even included physical abuse. These children were often labeled as gay or lesbian themselves and experienced emotions such as anger and extreme hurt. In these situations, teachers did not take the bullying and harassment seriously and were even reported to have made homophobic remarks. This study found that children dealt with being bullied in various ways. More specifically, children in grades three and four tended to

talk to a parent or older sibling, ask other children to help, or tell a teacher. Students in grades five and six often sought to educate other students by explaining that their parents were just the same as heterosexual parents. A large number of children reported ignoring the bullies, some shouted them down, and a few used self-talk.

### **Support and Opposition from Schools Regarding LGBT-headed Families**

#### **Demographics**

LGBT parents were found to take several factors into consideration when selecting a school for their children. These include local proximity (59%), academic reputation (54%), diversity of the school population (31%), that they knew other families at the school (29%) and the non-academic status of the school (e.g., music or arts) (29%) (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). In another study, it was found that even though a majority of LGBT parents placed their children in public schools, the percentage is lower than the national percentage (78% vs. 89%, respectively) (Wirt et al., 2004). Kosciw and Diaz (2008) also found that a large difference between urban parents (42%), as opposed to suburban (25%) and small town/rural (15%), was selecting a school based on its diverse student population. Reasons for this difference could be that urban parents have a large variety of schools to choose from and urban schools typically vary with regard to school climate, reputation, and safety. Another reason could be that LGBT couples are more likely to live in racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods that would be the most accepting and tolerant of their family (McKenzie & Good, 2004).

LGBT families reported having different school experiences based on location (urban, suburban, or rural), region of the country (Northeast, South, Midwest, or West), type (public, private-religious, or private-other), and level (elementary, middle, or high school) according to Kosciw and Diaz's (2008) findings. The general philosophical approach of the school and the

school administration also has a powerful impact on the degree to which LGBT issues are addressed. Students from religious-affiliated private schools were almost twice as likely as students in public schools to be discouraged by school staff from talking about their LGBT family (43% vs. 23%), and seven times as likely as students in non-religious private schools (43% vs. 6%). Students in high school were twice as likely to be discouraged from talking about their LGBT families in schools as to middle school students (27% vs. 13%).

Students in the South, rural areas, small towns, or areas with high poverty levels have reported higher levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation (GLSEN, 2008). LGBT parents in the South have reported fewer supportive teachers when compared to parents from other geographical regions (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Likewise, Choi et al. (2005) found that school psychologists who were employed in Southern or Midwestern regions of the United States tended to be more negative in attitudes and feelings towards LGBT parents than those employed in the Western regions. These results are consistent with Owens' (1998) findings that negative attitudes towards gays and lesbians are more prevalent in the Midwestern and Southern states than on the coasts. One explanation for regional differences in attitudes and feelings could be related to levels of conservatism within the Southern and Midwestern regions of the United States.

In addition, students in the West were more likely to report that a school staff intervened regarding biased language, where as students in the South were least likely to report an intervention (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). As the poverty level of a school district decreased, so did the level of homophobic remarks heard. Furthermore, students in urban areas were less likely to report hearing homophobic remarks (e.g., "that's so gay") and students in small town/rural schools reported the highest frequency of these remarks. A study conducted by Rubin (1995)

found that the “rural” group of educators reported knowing the most number of students growing up in LGBT families when compared to suburban and urban school districts. This is an interesting finding considering the fact that most people would associate urban settings with more diversity.

When it comes to access to LGBT-related resources, students in small towns/rural schools and Southern school were less likely to have LGBT-related curricula, textbooks, and resources. Students in the Northeast (40%) and students in the West (37%) were more likely to report representation of LGBT families in their curriculum when compared to students in the Midwest (14%) and South (13%). Furthermore, non-religious private schools were more likely to include LGBT-inclusive materials, as reported by parents (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008).

### **Barriers to Inclusion**

In fact, most school curricula fail to teach about diverse family structures despite the fact that a major mission of schools is to educate and provide accurate information (Macgillivray, 2000). It has been found that less than a third of both students (27%) and parents (29%) reported the presence of LGBT-families in school curricula (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Parents from non-religious private schools were more likely to believe that the school was inclusive of nontraditional families and reported more supportive teachers.

The issue of homosexuality is very controversial and homophobia still creates an enormous bias within our society (GLSEN, 2008). LGBT families may seem different from the rest of the parents and differences often produce fear. More specifically, school personnel may be uncomfortable addressing these issues because of homophobic views, religious beliefs, and heterosexist assumptions (Ryan & Martin, 2000). For example, educators may hold views that consider LGBT-headed families to be questionable, harmful, or problematic (Millbank, 2003).

Teachers may feel torn between their personal beliefs and the beliefs of parents, shying them away from addressing LGBT issues (Boyd, 1999). Furthermore, school personnel may be reluctant to address LGBT issues because they fear being viewed as homosexual themselves (Skattebol & Ferfolja, 2007). In addition, educators may lack information about these families, or lack experience and comfort when addressing these issues with children (Ryan & Martin, 2000).

One study found that school staff (i.e., teachers, support professionals, mental health staff, and administrators) viewed sexual minority youth less favorably than other minority groups even though respondents reported being comfortable interacting with these students and willing to assist them (O'Connell et al., 2007). Respondents also revealed a negative view about the general school climate and resources for LGBT youth and their families. Interestingly, mental health personnel were more willing to attend workshops, have their office be a safe place, and discuss issues with colleagues than other school professionals. Moreover, mental health professionals rated available resources significantly less positively than administrators, which may be related to their focus on the social and emotional well-being of others. Findings suggest that school staff is willing to improve the school climate, particularly when it comes to LGBT students. However, this study focused only on sexual minority children, but not on LGBT parents.

Another obstacle to supporting LGBT families is that some school personnel feel that discussing same-sex orientation is private and inappropriate for children (Casper et al., 1992; Ryan & Martin, 2000). More specifically, school personnel may feel that children are too young to be exposed to the sexual issues involved in teaching about LGBT families (Wickens, 1993). Perhaps this is why Kosciw and Diaz (2008) found that when LGBT issues were taught, they

were more likely to be presented in high school (44%) than middle school (28%) and elementary school curricula (24%).

Furthermore, even when early childhood educators considered multicultural issues to be important, they still found that discussing LGBT issues often created a high degree of discomfort and fear (Robinson, 2002). For example, some teachers fear that if they openly discuss LGBT families, they may be asked specific questions regarding sexual behavior that they are not able to manage (Ryan & Martin, 2000). Even those educators who value multiculturalism and diversity often find it difficult to address family differences appropriately (Casper & Schultz, 1996).

School personnel's reluctance to address issues concerning LGBT families may also be due to a lack of information. It has been found that teachers lack training and preparation on how to deal with LGBT families (Bower, 2008). For example, professionals about to enter roles within schools, including school psychologists, do not feel prepared enough to create change in school systems relative to attitudes and behaviors towards LGBT students (McCabe & Robinson, 2007). Furthermore, Kosciw and Diaz (2008) surveyed parents and only 10% reported being aware that school personnel had any training on LGBT issues. However, parents who did report that their schools had such trainings were also more likely to feel acknowledged by the school as LGBT families, and were less likely to report bullying or harassment in school. Thus, there is a need to educate school professionals and prepare them to address the specific issue of LGBT families. Furthermore, when schools implement programs that incorporate LGBT families, it can to help provide teachers with the language, structure, and resources they need to teach this complex topic.

Even though teachers often lack training, one study found they were willing to attend trainings related to improving school practices for LGBT families (Bliss & Harris, 1999). This



situation is similar to the challenge faced by schools in the 1970s when they needed to expand the curricula to address African-American, Asian American, and Hispanic-American populations (Ryan & Martin, 2000). Therefore, there may be a time delay before trainings and resources related to LGBT families become available for school professionals.

A few studies have examined the differences between teacher and administrators' perceptions on making schools inclusive of all students. Anderson (1994b) gave teachers and administrators throughout the state of Connecticut a questionnaire concerning their school's practices regarding LGBT issues. He found that teachers felt that their schools were not promoting a climate of tolerance and acceptance, where in contrast, administrators were confident in their school's practices. Similarly, in another study, LGBT parents believed school officials felt that no problems existed in their schools because the abuse and neglect suffered by students of gay families does not reach an extreme level of violence (Kozik-Rosabal, 2000).

A similar study by Caspar et al. (1992) found school administrators to be a powerful force in determining curriculum content and the tone that is set that either welcomed or discouraged inclusion of all types of families. Some administrators supported teachers' attempts to incorporate a diverse family curriculum, while others overtly or covertly forbade them. Nevertheless, many teachers were still determined to include LGBT-headed families into the curriculum even though some school environments may limit the extent to which the topic is taught (Wickens, 1993). The constraints the teachers encountered depended on the kind of school in which they were working, the community, and the direction of leadership provided by the administrations.

School personnel may also be concerned with violating administration policy and whether administration will support their actions (Ryan & Martin, 2000). It would be risky for

teachers and other school staff to take a proactive stance toward LGBT families if they believe their administrators would object. For instance, one study found that most teacher respondents did not believe that their school had a clear policy for dealing with LGBT parents and would not feel comfortable addressing this issue with administrators (Bliss & Harris, 1999). Thus, due to a lack of policy, teachers may feel uncomfortable teaching LGBT issues and approaching administrators. LeCompte (2000) noted that one way to amend this discrepancy is to instill a clear policy on LGBT harassment and handling of issues of sexuality and gender identity in the classroom. Since many teachers fear retribution from administrators, a clearly written policy and supportive school district could help protect teachers.

Similarly, schools could be faced with objections from parents. Recently, parents have complained in school districts where young children were learning about same-sex couples. For example, in 2007, two couples sued the Lexington Public School System in Massachusetts, saying that teaching children about same-sex marriage violated their constitutional rights (Saltzman 2007). The judge of the U.S. District Court ruled that under the Constitution, public schools are “entitled to teach anything that is reasonably related to the goals of preparing students to become engaged and productive citizens in our democracy” (p. 1). Even though the Lexington Public School District received hate mail and threats over the curriculum, the superintendent applauded the judge’s decision. However, Kozik-Rosabal (2000) points out that if parents do not want their children to learn and discuss issues of sexual orientation, schools must consider their request. This is just one example of what schools might face if they choose to address LGBT families in their curriculum.

### **School Factors that Cause Invisibility**

In addition to remaining invisible in school curricula, LGBT families are often not acknowledged in school policies, social events, students clubs, and common conversations (Macgillivray, 2000). About 12% of parents in Kosciw and Diaz's study (2008) felt that their needs were not addressed by the schools. Several parents mentioned district and state-wide policies that barred schools from providing positive representations of LGBT people. School forms and documents also failed to recognize the fact that not all families consist of a mother and father. For example, permission forms that schools send home often require a signature from a mother and a father, failing to acknowledge the fact that some children may have two mothers or two fathers (Kozik-Rosabal, 2000). Schools can try to prevent heterosexism by making small changes in order to provide a safer environment for all types of families.

School libraries and classroom media centers can provide resources for children. However, very few children's books include LGBT families in their texts and illustrations (Siegel, 2003). Furthermore, these books typically fail to depict LGBT individuals living average lives. For example, the book, *Heather Has Two Mommies*, focuses on the sexual orientation of the parents rather than the family being involved in day-to-day activities. When children of LGBT parents see characters like themselves represented in both fiction and nonfiction literature, it normalizes their own family and makes them feel less unusual (Lamme & Lamme, 2003). Thus, there is a need for quality media material that supports a diverse society, representing LGBT families in an equal fashion.

In terms of the accessibility of LGBT resources in schools, few students reported having LGBT topics included in their textbooks (14%) and only 29% said that their school library contained materials with LGBT-related topics (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). In the same study, only 45% of students reported being able to use the internet in order to gather LGBT-related

information. Since many textbooks fail to include LGBT issues, course content could include relevant news articles, giving teachers an opportunity to hold classroom discussions. Schools that lack LGBT-related resources can provide information to students by discussing current media coverage and allowing internet exploration.

## **Including LGBT Families in Schools**

### **Providing an LGBT-Inclusive Curriculum**

Over the past decade, there has been a steady increase in research highlighting the importance and relevance of addressing LGBT issues and the importance of including LGBT-headed families in the broad education of what constitutes a family (see Robinson, 2002, for review). According to Owens (1998), when schools do try to promote diversity, it is typically in terms of racial or religious differences. Only in recent years have schools been addressing diversity issues such as multiculturalism and homosexuality (Jeltova & Fish, 2005). Since schools have been slower to recognize LGBT issues in their curriculum, it may be easier to start off small when venturing into this sensitive area. For example, Lamme and Lamme (2003) suggest that schools have a Gay Pride Month or Week to introduce important influences or events in the LGBT movement.

School professionals struggle with the dilemma of what grade level and subject to address the issues of LGBT families. Since early childhood and elementary curricula most frequently discuss the meaning of family, the topic of LGBT families is most salient to this age group (Casper et al., 1992; Wickens, 1993). Research has cited the value of teaching issues related to family diversity, suggesting the potential to enrich early childhood and elementary teaching practices. It is recommended that instead of focusing on sexual behaviors of family

members, schools should focus on discussing different types of family constellations (Macgillivray, 2000; Ryan & Martin, 2000).

Casper et al. (1992) found that when children of LGBT parents first entered school, they began to recognize how their family arrangements differ from the norm and they started to struggle with the fact that their family is either not represented or represented as abnormal at school. Children are made aware of negative images of what it is to be gay and what gay people are like before they can even understand the meaning of the words (Chasnoff & Cohen, 1997).

In addition, the issues of LGBT families can be taught in middle and high school curricula. It appears that these issues are taught in History/Social Studies, English, and Health classes most often (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). For example, some History and English classes include LGBT issues in the curriculum by providing information on gay or lesbian historical figures, writers, or authors and their contributions. LGBT issues are also found to be a part of most comprehensive sexual education programs (People for the American Way, 1995). These curricula may address the general issues of same sex attraction and the harmful effects of prejudice without going into detail about specific sexual acts.

Additionally, teachers need to recognize the bias that exists in their curricula in order to dispel any stereotypes in the materials. Research has found that when discussions about homosexuality arose in schools, they were generally placed in a negative context (Friend, 1993; Prince, 1996). For example, in relation to health education classes, homosexuality is discussed as having physical consequences during the topic of AIDS/HIV (Friend, 1993). Another study found that only 21% of all students surveyed reported positive representations of LGBT people, history, or events in their curricula (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Students often receive the message that the LGBT lifestyle is immoral through various forms of media (Turner-Vorbeck, 2005b).

Thus, when LGBT people are mentioned in schools, it is often in terms of myths that encourage stereotypes.

In general, knowledge about human sexuality and gender development is lacking in school curricula (Jeltova & Fish, 2005; Walling, 1997). Friend (1993) described a process called systematic exclusion, “whereby positive role models, messages, and images about lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are publicly silenced in schools” (p. 212). Similar to the systematic exclusion, Friend also describes systematic inclusion, where schools’ curricula and practices reaffirm and institutionalize heterosexism. The National Education Association (1999a) goes on to confirm that because LGBT issues are excluded from the curriculum, misunderstandings are perpetrated and the ability of LGBT students to reach their fullest potential is diminished. Still they note that, “including education about sexual orientation, sex roles, and gender identity in the curriculum will enable heterosexual youth to better understand and develop healthy attitudes towards gay and lesbian students and adults” (p. 3).

### **School Policies**

Comprehensive safe school policies against bullying and harassment promote a place for students to feel safe, yet they often do not exist. For example, in one study, students reported that 73% of their schools had a policy in place for harassment and victimization, however few reported that those policies mentioned sexual orientation or gender identity/expression (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Further, in another study, students reported that most schools (81.3%) do not have a policy regarding sexual orientation (GLSEN, 2008). However, parents with children at non-religious private schools were more likely to report that their school had a comprehensive policy (63%) than both public school parents (38%) and religious school parents (33%).

The above findings may send the message to parents and students that LGBT-related issues are not taken seriously by school administrators. Furthermore, when gender identity and expression are not in a school's nondiscrimination policy, LGBT faculty and staff are unable to be open about their sexual orientation. Reis (2000) found that in order to develop a safe and welcoming climate for LGBT families, schools need to seek a diverse staff with regard to sexual orientation. Additionally, one study found that students wished for more school faculty and staff members to be open about their sexual orientation (Ray & Gregory, 2001). Thus, having a more diverse staff normalized the environment and provided positive role models for LGBT families.

Schools that had either a school-level policy or state-level legislation that specifically addressed sexual orientation and gender expression were found to be associated with a better school climate for LGBT families (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Parents were more likely to feel acknowledged and included when their child attended schools with comprehensive policies. Additionally, students from states with safe school legislation were less likely to hear homophobic remarks regarding their LGBT parents. Unfortunately, the majority of states have not yet implemented such laws, leaving the majority of students unprotected.

### **Best Practices**

There are a variety of ways that schools are addressing the needs of children with sexual minority parents. Some schools already use a curriculum that aims to address various prejudices (e.g., Derman-Sparks, 1989). Other schools choose to focus on teaching tolerance and building respect for others as a natural way to treat gay parents (Amdur, 1998). At Latin School in Chicago, there is no formal programming for children of gay parents but there is a core faculty equipped to work with children with LGBT parents (Amdur, 1998). For example, each faculty member serves as an advisor for six to twelve students, and the students can choose to be paired

with a gay or lesbian teacher. The family diversity curriculum, passed by the San Francisco Unified School District Board of Education in 1992 and reinforced in 2006, encourages students to learn about diverse families, including LGBT parents (Hemmelgarn, 2006).

In order to promote acceptance of LGBT individuals, there are a couple of structured programs that schools could institute. The GLSEN Jump-Start Guide for Gay-Straight Alliances and the GLSEN Safe Space Guide for Starting an Allies Program are driven by scientific-based theory, provide training for participants, help establish policies and environmental supports, and can be used in multiple settings (GLSEN, 2008). These programs aim to develop an awareness of LGBT issues and are easily accessible to school personnel.

One particular aspect of the Jump-Start program is the establishment of a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). Ray and Gregory (2001) found GSAs to be one of the few places of safety for both children from LGBT families as well as LGBT students. According to the 2005 National School Climate Survey by GLSEN, LGBT students who attend schools with GSAs are less likely to miss school, and more likely to feel safe and a sense of belonging compared to students at schools without GSAs (GLSEN, 2008). Support groups provide a safe space for students to share personal stories, countering feelings of isolation and helping students learn techniques for dealing with harassment.

Another program used around the nation is Safe Zone, which aims to increase visibility of LGBT people, as well as increase support and awareness of LGBT issues. School faculty/staff can create a program that meets the needs of their school by using the resources and tips provided by the Safe Zone Foundation (n.d.). Similarly, GLSEN (2008) recommends the Safe Space program which visibly marks people and places that are “safe” for LGBT students and families. This program provides a manual that directs professionals through the process of



implementing a Safe Space program by teaching them how to train allies, provide support and intervention when anti-LGBT bias occurs, and providing ideas for making the program visible.

Similarly, Chasnoff and Cohen (1997) have created resources for educators to help teach cultural awareness specific to non-traditional families. The documentary called, “It’s Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in School,” addresses how and why schools are finding age-appropriate ways to address LGBT issues in education. Additionally, teachers can show students “That’s a Family!” a film that helps children understand different family constellations and interviews children who have grown up in a non-traditional family. These resources allow children to see that there are all types of families, encouraging them to respect differences. Subsequently, teachers are given the opportunity to discuss differences and lay the foundation for a tolerant and accepting environment.

School brochures and information sheets should welcome families of all types and sexual orientations (Ryan & Martin, 2000). All forms should be non-biased, such as by providing space for up to four parents. For example, they can replace “Mother’s name” and “Father’s name” with “Parent’s name.” School information forms should also ask if there is anyone else involved in the child’s life who assumes the role similar to a parent. By create an open and welcoming environment, schools can decrease the chances of families remaining invisible.

Few school systems are prepared to meet the challenges of LGBT families but a beginning step is to institute a district-wide policy and then create a diversity awareness program. Jeltova and Fish (2005) offer ways for school consultants to institute change in order to create a welcoming school environment for LGBT families. More specifically, school staff can empower change by establishing communication between the “top” level of the system (i.e., administrators) and the “bottom” level (i.e., students, parents, and teachers). By involving

everyone in the system, all individuals can voice their opinions regarding policy changes or programs. Additionally, individuals who have more expertise regarding LGBT issues will be able to provide information and educate other individuals about the importance of implementing discrimination and harassment policies for all students.

In addition to making policy changes, there is a need to provide ongoing professional development for all school personnel. The National Association for School Psychologists (NASP) recommends that all school personnel be provided anti-bias training (Ford, 2004). According to Holcomb-McCoy and Chen-Hayes (2007), multicultural competence is a process and should be incorporated in continued education through both formal learning (i.e., in-service training) and informal learning (i.e., reviewing the current literature). The training should focus on helping individuals separate their personal beliefs from the needs and rights of all. It should also help educators to become more comfortable interacting with all minority groups including LGBT individuals and how to treat all students and families equally.

It has also been suggested to have LGBT parents from either the school or outside community come in to discuss sexual minority parenting with educators. Ryan (1998) found that both school personnel and parents believed that training for educators should involve sexual minority parents themselves. School professionals would be able to talk to LGBT parents and gain a greater insight into their family issues.

## **Chapter 3: Method**

### **Participants**

School psychologists were asked to participate in this study on a voluntary basis and 116 participants completed the survey from start to finish, the majority of the participants were female (81.7%). The researcher emailed a letter to 813 school psychologists using a list provided by the New York Association for School Psychologists (NYASP) to ask them to participate in this study<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the overall response rate was 14.3%. To encourage participation, regional chapters of School Psychologists in New York were also emailed the same letter.

### **Measures**

A questionnaire developed by the researcher (see Appendix A) was used to gather information about the district's elementary school policies, practices, curriculum, and overall school environment regarding LGBT-headed families. This was developed because no other instruments were found which specifically addressed the information desired. The content was based upon a literature review of relevant issues and includes questions asking basic demographic information, policies about diversity, practices, curricula, and attitudes (GLSEN, 2008; Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008).

Survey research offers several advantages; for example, it is economical and researchers have the ability to collect a large amount of data to sample a large population (Babbie, 2007). There are several disadvantages in that it is somewhat artificial, inflexible, and does not offer a full sense of the natural setting. Using surveys is generally weaker on validity and stronger on reliability. The survey in the current study was developed in order to assess the specific constructs needed to answer the research questions in order to increase content validity.

The format of a questionnaire can influence the quality of data collected. For this survey, development was based upon recommendations by Fink and Kosecoff (1985). A clear format ensures that the respondents will answer all of the questions intended for them as well as increase reliability. Since the order of items can influence the responses given, questions in the survey are grouped based on similarity and organized in a natural, logical sequence. The survey was developed to avoid biased words, phrases, and views, so respondents' responses were not unfairly influenced. SurveyMonkey, a private company, was used to create a web-based survey that the research participants could easily access on their own computers while still remaining anonymous (SurveyMonkey.com, LLC). The survey was designed to prevent participants from dropping out because they were allowed to skip certain questions. The questions that participants were allowed to skip were determined by the researcher because they were sensitive in nature or difficult to answer. Since the participants had the option of skipping some of the questions, each question has a different number of respondents. Other participants started the survey but did not complete it from start to finish. It is not known if this was due to the nature of the survey. It should be noted that the participants were allowed to leave the survey and complete it later, which a few participants chose to do.

Based on the initial hypotheses, three different indexes were developed: school curriculum, practices, and policies. According to Howard (2004, p. 175), "the principal steps in constructing an index include selecting possible items, examining their empirical relationships, scoring the index, and validating it." See Appendix B for Items and Scoring Protocols for each index. Each item was given a weight, coded and scored to create an index. The curriculum index used items 9e, 11 (weighted .5 for responding "yes" to informal curriculum and 1 for formal), 12 (also weighted the same as item 11), and 14a. In this index, formal curriculum was given more

weight in Items 11 and 12 than a less structured, informal curriculum. The policies index used items 6, 7, and 8 where “yes” responses were coded as 1 and then added together to create the index. The practices index used items 10, 13 (“very available” and “available” were coded as 1 and “neutral,” “unavailable,” and “very unavailable” were coded as 0), 21 (“strongly agree” and “agree” were coded as 1 and “neither agree nor disagree,” “disagree,” and “strongly disagree” were coded as 0), 24, 25a, 25b, 25c, and 25d. In order to examine school location, two dummy variables were created to compare urban to rural and suburban locations (called rural and suburban, respectively). After the items were coded, they were added together within each index.

A pilot test of five school psychologists was conducted to determine the time it took to complete the survey, sources of difficulty by clarifying hard-to-follow directions, eliminating poorly-worded questions, and obtaining feedback regarding format and content. Several experts in education and survey methodology reviewed the questionnaire as well. The results of the pilot study were used to change the order of some of the questions and for minor re-wording. The purpose of pilot testing and analysis of results was to increase reliability and validity.

## **Procedure**

School psychologists were sent a letter (see Appendix C) via email telling them the purpose of the survey, encouraging them to participate, explaining who was being surveyed, providing instructions on how to complete the survey and emphasizing confidentiality. The letter attempted to get the participants to take the survey seriously by stressing the importance of the accuracy of their responses for research purposes, which is one way to improve the reliability and validity of measured variables (Stangor, 2004). The email also provided a link to [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) where participants were able to take the survey. School psychologists were asked to complete the survey within two weeks. After two weeks, a reminder email (see

Appendix D) was sent out thanking those who completed the survey and asking those who did not complete the survey to do so within two weeks. In compensation for completing the survey, participants were asked if they wanted to receive the results of the study and/or materials on how to incorporate information about LGBT-headed families into the curriculum. Participants who completed the survey were entered in a drawing to win one of four \$50 amazon.com gift certificates. The four gift certificates were issued a month after the original email was sent out.

There are several advantages to email surveys, including cost savings, time savings, and an increased willingness of subjects to respond (Bachmann, Elfrink, & Vazzana, 1996). Results from a study conducted by Conderre, Mathiew, and St-Laurent (2004) indicated that the quality of the information gathered through email surveys is similar to that of information gathered through mail or telephone surveys. For example, the average number of items obtained by open-ended questions in the email survey did not vary from the number obtained in mail and telephone surveys. Schaefer and Dillman (1998) found electronic mail surveys to come in more quickly and with a slightly lower item non-response rate compared to paper surveys. One disadvantage to email surveys is dealing with the potential high percentage of non-deliverable surveys in the email group (Bachmann et al., 1996). In the current study, out of the 911 emails on the NYASP listserve, 98 emails were un-deliverable, therefore 813 individuals received the email.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

The data collected for this study were analyzed using descriptive, inferential, and correlational statistics on SPSS. Descriptive analyses were used to develop a complete understanding of what is currently happening in schools across NYS before performing other analyses. A chi-square test was run to observe the predicted relationship between school policy and the level of visibility of LGBT families. Next, analyses were conducted to determine the relations between the indexes and demographic variables.

### **Demographics of school districts**

According to responses provided by the school psychologists in this sample, approximately 38.8% of schools were in a rural setting, 33.6% in a suburban setting, and 27.6% in an urban setting. Over half of the districts had 80 to 100% white students. The largest single group of school districts had between approximately 1,001 and 5,000 students (37.9%). Socioeconomic status was determined by the number of students receiving free or reduced lunch and was on average between 31 and 40%. The average total per pupil expenditure was \$10,000. The majority of respondents were female (81.7%). See Table 1 for a more specific breakdown of these findings.

### **Curriculum**

Participants were asked if the elementary school curriculum in their district educates students on a variety of alternative family structures that exist in our society. The curriculum responses by survey item are provided in Table 2. Elementary students were taught about single-parent families in 69.6% of districts, blended and stepfamilies in 67.8%, extended families in 65.5%, bi-racial marriages in 41.6%, and gay/lesbian families in only 23.0% of school districts. Only 23.3% of districts used an LGBT-inclusive curriculum (either informal or formal) that

gives attention to LGBT students, individuals and issues. Of those districts, 88.9% reported that they used an informal curriculum (unofficial lessons taught to students) and 11.1% reported using a formal curriculum (planned program of objectives, content, and resources offered by the school). Some of the formal curricula used included Collage, Safe Horizon (a community-based organization), and Open Circle. When asked if their school used an LGBT-inclusive curriculum regarding LGBT-headed families, only three districts responded “yes” (2.6%). One of those districts had a formal curriculum to teach about LGBT-headed families. A large majority of elementary schools had books available in the school library that represented alternative family structures (71.6%) yet a much smaller 30.7% had books that included LGBT-headed families.

### **Policies**

Participants were asked about the non-discrimination policies their district had in place to protect the LGBT population. Most of the elementary schools had a non-discrimination policy (87.1%). Further, the majority of school staff/faculty members knew how to gain access to the school policy (90.1%). The policy was on the school website (76.8%), in the handbook (87.5%), reporting procedures were in place (94.1%), and the policy was enforced (95.0%) according to respondents. When asked if the school policy was widely disseminated within the community, about half (49.1%) said it was. The non-discrimination policy included sexual orientation in 60.4% of school districts and included gender identity/expression in 24.8% of school districts. Results are provided in Table 3.

### **Practices**

Participants were asked to report about their district’s practices regarding LGBT issues. Nearly all of the participants reported that all school forms asked for “parent/guardian” rather than “mother/father” (97.0%). Only 30.2% of school districts had an LGBT student organization



(i.e., Gay/Straight Alliance, Pride Club). The support schools provided students who were growing up in families with an LGBT parent was also limited, with 17.4% of schools had support groups, 32.7% had discussions on family diversity, 27% had library books and videos, and 1% had parent groups. These results are shown in Table 4. Individual counseling was listed by several respondents as an “other” form of support.

Two questions were asked about more informal practices. The topic of LGBT-headed families was described as “available” for discussion in only 17.2% of elementary schools. When asked if there were indicators that LGBT people were welcome in the school or classroom, such as LGBT-inclusive posters, signs, or stickers, only 4.3% responded “agree.” Complete results are shown on Table 5.

### **Staff Training**

Several questions were asked about anti-bias and staff development training. Only 40% of school personnel were provided with anti-bias training. Out of the participants who received such training, 41.3% indicated that issues about LGBT individuals and 26.1% about LGBT families were incorporated. In contrast, 87% indicated that other issues about diversity were incorporated. The level of diversity training participants had in graduate school varied, with 38.3% indicating that their training was “good,” and 25.2% indicating “very good.” Refer to Table 6 for the specific results.

### **LGBT Climate**

Participants were asked several questions regarding the level of acceptance of LGBT individuals and families in the school and community, as well as their degree of visibility. Close to half (47.4%) of respondents indicated that LGBT-headed families in their school district were “visible and fully integrated into school life.” Respondents revealed that 11.2% of LGBT couples

were very accepted within the community. Similar results were received when participants were asked to rate the level of acceptance of LGBT-headed families in their community (see Table 7). Participants were asked to rate how well LGBT-headed families were received by school faculty/staff members and 11.2% indicated strongly agree. Only 0.9% of respondents marked “strongly agree” when asked if LGBT-inclusive programs (e.g., books/curriculum/training) were received well by the community and 2.6% by school faculty and staff. For more detailed results, see Table 7.

### **Exposure to LBGT Individuals in School**

When participants were asked if they were aware of students in their school who have LGBT parent(s), 65.5% responded “yes” and knew an average of 2.81 students with LGBT parents. The respondents’ source of knowledge varied, with parental disclosure being the most frequent response (33.6%) and comments by other staff/word of mouth being the second most frequent response (29.3%). Refer to Table 8 for results. Similarly, participants were asked if they were aware of any LGBT staff members and 65.5% responded “yes” and knew an average of 2.25 staff members. For this question, the most common source of knowledge was staff self-disclosure (38.8%).

### **Level of Knowledge**

Participants were asked about their level of knowledge regarding the elementary schools’ curriculum, policies, and practices. The majority of participants rated their level of knowledge regarding the elementary school’s policies, procedures, and practices in their district to be “good” (40.9%) and “fair” (34.8%). However, participants felt less knowledgeable about their district’s curriculum than the policies, procedures, and practices, with 25.2% rating their level of knowledge as “good” and 40% “fair.” Correlations were run with and without participants who

indicated a low level of knowledge and no differences were found, so all participants were included in the findings.

### **Correlations between Survey Indexes and Demographic Variables**

A series of analyses were conducted to examine the correlations between school (i.e., school location, size) or community characteristics (i.e., level of diversity, average income) and the elementary school's curriculum, policies, and practices. The per pupil expenditure were significantly correlated with the curriculum index ( $r = .22, p < .05$ , two-tailed), policy index ( $r = .25, p < .05$ , two-tailed), and practices index ( $r = .34, p < .01$ , two-tailed). Thus, wealthier districts were more likely to have curricula and practices that included LGBT families. No other demographic variables were related to the indexes. Although it was planned to conduct regressions, that was not needed given the small number of significant correlations. The inter-correlations between the curriculum and practices index were also significant ( $r = .29, p < .01$ , two-tailed) as well as policy and practices index ( $r = .22, p < .05$ , two-tailed). Therefore, schools that that incorporate LGBT families into their curriculum and policies have practices that include LGBT families as well. The policy index is not related to the curriculum index. See Table 10 for results.

### **Level of Integration of LGBT-headed Families and Policy Index**

A chi-square test was run to explore the association between the level of integration of LGBT families into schools and school policy. Among the 39 respondents who described their school as having the least welcoming policies (1 on the policy index), over half (51.3%) said that LGBT families are visible and fully integrated. Among those respondents who described their schools' policies as somewhat welcoming (1.5 on the policy index), fewer described LGBT families as being integrated (47.4%). Of the respondents who described their policies as the most

welcoming (2 on the policy index), only about one third of the respondents (33.3%) described LGBT families as being fully visible and integrated. The statistical results suggest that school policy and the integration level of LGBT families are not associated, therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected  $\chi^2 (4, N = 101) = 3.93, p = .41$ . However, the differences in percentages are suggestive of a relationship, which may have been stronger with a larger sample size. See Table 11 for results.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the level of recognition LGBT-headed families receive within school districts. A considerable amount of research has focused on LGBT students in schools and the experiences they face. However, few studies have examined the experiences that children with LGBT parents have in schools. A questionnaire was developed to gather information from school psychologists in New York State about what their school districts are doing to recognize LGBT families in their elementary schools. The first objective of this study was to determine the extent to which schools incorporate LGBT-headed families into their curriculum, practices, and policies. The next objective was to provide a greater understanding of how school characteristics (i.e., school location, size) and community characteristics (i.e., level of diversity, average income) relate to the elementary school's curriculum, policies, and practices.

### **Curriculum**

It was hypothesized that few schools would incorporate topics about LGBT-headed families into their curriculum. This was supported by the findings of the study, as only 23% educate their students about LGBT families. In contrast, most schools are educating their elementary students about single-parent, blended, and step-families. This implies that schools are more accepting of other forms of diverse families than LGBT families. Further, when schools incorporate LGBT families into their curriculum, the practice tends to be less formal, meaning that it is incorporated by the individual teachers and is not a system-wide decision. It was thought that because of the lack of professional exposure to or training in issues relevant to sexual minorities, staff may be hesitant to incorporate materials related to LGBT families the way they incorporate other forms of diversity.

Other reasons could be perhaps schools do not address LGBT families as much as other types of diverse families because children from single-parent, blended, or step-families are more common. Teachers may also be concerned that if they teach about LGBT issues, people might suspect that they are gay or lesbian themselves. Teachers might be reluctant to bring up issues regarding LGBT families because of the controversy surrounded by it. Past research has shown that schools seldom take the lead when it comes to addressing issues that are not the norm such as homosexuality (Kozik-Rosebal, 2000). Furthermore, a study conducted by Hoffman (2001) found that teachers were uncomfortable addressing this topic because they feared opposition from parents, administration, and colleagues. Finally, it could be that teachers do not want to include topics of LGBT families because they are unclear as to how to include it into their curriculum or they do not feel prepared enough to answer questions their students might ask. These are difficult decisions for teachers to have to make and if teachers were provided with a formal curriculum and guidance from administration, they may feel more comfortable addressing this sensitive topic.

Similarly, most schools had library books about alternative family structures but few of the schools had library books about LGBT-headed families. This again implies more of an acceptance of alternative family structures other than LGBT families. This could be because school staff may not know these resources exist or there are not enough funds to purchase new books. Since this is a relatively new topic for children's books, we may see a change in the future. More books and free teaching materials are becoming available for teachers to use in the classroom, especially in the early childhood curriculum. Books are a way for teachers to gently approach the topic of LGBT families by discussing the range of possible family structures, which would be an easy way for schools to begin to include LGBT families.

One last finding regarding curriculum is that more schools educate their students about LGBT individuals than about LGBT-headed families. This could be due to the controversy surrounding LGBT individuals raising children which has transpired because of peoples religious, political, psychological, and moral values (Casper & Schultz, 1999). Additionally, educating about LGBT individuals has less of a sexual focus than educating about LGBT couples.

### **Policies**

Based on previous research, it was hypothesized that most schools would have a policy regarding harassment and victimization but would fail to specifically address issues related to sexual orientation or gender identity/expression (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). The difference between sexual orientation and gender identity is that sexual orientation involves both the psychosocial behavior and emotional attraction to others, whereas gender identity is the personal sense of being male or female (Casper & Schultz, 1999). Most of the schools in this study had a non-discrimination policy and well over half of schools in this study had a policy that addressed sexual orientation. According to previous studies, such schools are associated with a better school climate for LGBT families and teachers feeling more comfortable addressing administration regarding LGBT issues. Parents and students were more likely to feel acknowledged and included when their child attended schools with comprehensive policies. In addition, teachers may be more likely to voice their opinion regarding LGBT families in schools (Bliss & Harris, 1999; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008).

However, in this study, only a quarter of those schools' policies included gender identity/expression, which provides a greater protection against harassment and bullying to students. Whether or not a school district has a policy that includes sexual orientation and gender

identity/expression may indicate how welcoming the school environment is for LGBT parents. LGBT parents might feel safer when their district has a comprehensive safe school policy because they would know that their child is protected if he/she is victimized. When schools do not have an inclusive policy, it makes it more difficult for LGBT parents to feel safe being “out” because they fear harassment for their children as well as themselves. In addition, teachers might be less likely to incorporate an LGBT-friendly curriculum knowing that what they are teaching is not supported in the school policy.

Schools may not include language about gender identity/expression because they already feel like the issue is covered in the broad non-discrimination policy or they may not feel it is necessary. According to previous research, schools are often hesitant to address homophobic remarks and anti-gay harassment (Lamme & Lamme 2002), which could be another reason why schools fail to have an inclusive safe school policy. Without clarity about this issue, school staff who want to address this topic may not be sure they are protected. If schools had a clear and detailed non-discrimination policy covering both sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, staff members would have a firm ground for responding to discrimination knowing that there are backed by the school policy.

Another interesting finding of this study is that less than half of respondents answered “yes” when asked if the school policy is widely disseminated within the community. If parents understand the type of policy and what level of protection it provides, it would be easier for them to address a problem their child is having in school as well as have a sense of security knowing what protection policies are in place. Maybe schools fail to widely disseminate their policy because it is not comprehensive enough to include all types of individuals and families. On a



positive note, these findings are higher than in previous research, which could mean that school policies are moving towards a more LGBT-friendly focus.

## **Practices**

### ***Staff training***

According to this study, few school personnel have had training on LGBT issues and even fewer have had training regarding LGBT families, as was originally hypothesized based on previous research (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). This is similar to the finding that more schools educate students about alternative families or LGBT individuals than they do about LGBT families. However, most of the participants who were provided with anti-bias training said that other issues about diversity were incorporated. This study indicates that schools are comfortable providing diversity training in general but are less comfortable training their staff members about LGBT families which again, may be associated with people's values and beliefs.

If educators were given the opportunity to reflect about their own experiences with diversity they may be better prepared to approach the topic of LGBT individuals and families. School administration tends to set a powerful tone for the degree to which LGBT issues are included in the curriculum, practices, and policies. It would be difficult for a teacher to develop and teach an inclusive curriculum if the administration does not recognize the importance. By increasing staff trainings about LGBT families, school administration not only provide teachers with the structure and resources to teach this topic, they set a tone within the school that this is an important topic to address.

Most of the participants reported that all school forms asked for "parent/guardian" rather than "mother/father." These findings suggest that schools are creating a more inviting environment by having forms that acknowledge the fact that children come from all types of

families. This may be an initial step for schools trying to create a more welcoming environment for LGBT families.

This study found few school districts had an LGBT student organization (i.e., Gay/Straight Alliance, Pride Club). Ray and Gregory (2001) found GSA's to be one of the few places of safety for both children from LGBT families as well as LGBT students. A related finding was that schools are doing very little to support students who are growing up in LGBT families. Few school districts had support groups or parent groups and only about a third of schools had discussions on family diversity. In addition, few schools had indicators of LGBT support such as posters, stickers, and signs. Putting these findings together, it seems that most schools have a long way to go in helping LGBT students and families feel comfortable and welcome.

### ***LGBT Climate***

This study revealed that LGBT-headed families were viewed as either “visible and fully integrated into school life,” or were “moderately visible, feel safe being open.” This finding is interesting because previous research that examined the perspective of LGBT parents found they felt isolated and alienated from their school environment (Casper et al., 1992; Gartrell et al., 2000). Thus, school psychologists seem to view the school climate to be one way and parents view it to be another. This could be because school psychologists are submersed in the school climate on a daily basis and maybe feel that the school is doing the best they can to integrate LGBT families. Perhaps parents are not fully aware of all the things schools are doing to include LGBT families and feel that more needs to be done. If schools were to increase communication with parents about this topic, the perspectives might move closer together. In addition, parents who feel

alienated from the school community can have their voices heard, and perhaps feel more included.

Even though respondents reported LGBT-headed families are fully to moderately visible, the results show that schools are not doing anything to acknowledge LGBT families in their curricula, practices, and policies. This indicates a disconnect between practice and the perception of how welcoming the school is, again suggesting the need more collaboration among school personnel and parents. This study only surveyed one member of the school staff but future research is needed to examine the perspectives of multiple school staff members, students, and parents within the same district to determine differences.

Another finding of the current study was that most participants think LGBT couples and LGBT families were accepted within their community. The discomfort and fear that people experience about LGBT couples raising children may be a more general feeling of homophobia contributing to the controversy of LGBT parenting during the past decade. Homophobia and prejudice are manifested because of stereotypical views and myths of LGBT families. Thus, educating the community, starting with children, might help reduce homophobic fears and dismantle stereotypes.

When participants were asked if “LGBT-headed families were received well by school faculty/staff members,” less than half said “strongly agree” or “agree.” Maybe if LGBT-headed families were better received by school staff, then schools would be doing more to accommodate and welcome these families. When participants were asked about the level of acceptance of LGBT-inclusive programs (books/curriculum/training), school staff members tended to be slightly more accepting than they perceived community members to be. This may be the case because school personnel are trained to work with all types of families in a professional manner,

making them more accepting of differences. On the other hand, school personnel may perceive themselves to be more accepting than they really are, failing to recognize the needs of LGBT families.

Results from this study indicate that approximately two-thirds of school psychologists surveyed were aware of at least one student with LGBT parent(s). Respondents knew on average 2 to 3 students or LGBT families. The main source of knowledge for this was parental disclosure and comments by other staff/word of mouth. This could mean that LGBT parents who are “out” within the school community feel comfortable addressing the subject in person with school staff. Respondents indicated similar results when asked if they were aware of an LGBT staff member at their school. The most common source of knowledge was staff self-disclosure. The presence of openly gay and lesbian school personnel would convey a certain level of acceptance, making LGBT families feel more comfortable and opening up the doors of communication. If a school climate is not very accepting of LGBT individuals, it may be difficult for school staff to be open about their sexuality, thus, making it difficult for LGBT parents to disclose their family to the school and feel accepted within the school community. Importantly, the overall findings suggest that LGBT-headed families and staff members exist in the school setting, but a schools’ curriculum, policies, and practices does not seem to be meeting their needs.

### **Relations of Survey Indexes and Demographic Variables**

It was hypothesized based on previous research that schools located in more diverse areas, such as larger urban environments, would have a more welcoming environment and be more tolerant of LGBT families (Choi et al., 2005; GLSEN, 2008; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). However, in the current study, there was not a significant association between school curriculum, policy, or practices and location which was different than originally expected. When schools are

located in a more diverse neighborhood such as an urban environment, where we would expect a larger LGBT population, they are still not acknowledging everyone in their population. Urban schools may not have the financial ability to fund extra programs. Furthermore, “Proposition 8” eliminating the right for same-sex couples to marry, was initially passed in the state of California, and a large majority of voters in favor were black. Egan and Sherril (2009) found that black support of Proposition 8 was due to higher levels of religiosity in the black population which strongly opposes same-sex marriage. Since most urban environments have a large black population, maybe they are against LGBT rights and would not agree with schools incorporating LGBT issues into their practices, policies, and curriculum. Furthermore, since this study sampled schools in New York State, we might find an even stronger opposition to same-sex marriage compared to California.

The current study found that wealthier districts had more LGBT-friendly curriculum, practices, and policies. This could be attributed to the fact that schools with a higher per pupil expenditure have the financial capacity to fund LGBT curriculum materials, train staff members, or have extra school personnel available to address the needs of LGBT families. Wealthier districts tend to have students with less academic difficulties so they may have more time to incorporate other topics outside of the core curriculum. Still, the topic of LGBT families can be addressed without funding by having classroom discussions and protection policies in place. Perhaps it is a challenge for teachers to broach the topic of LGBT parenting without resources in the classroom or a guide to follow. In conclusion, financial resources strongly impact the way schools are including and welcoming LGBT families.

### **Level of Integration of LGBT-headed Families and Policy Index**

Analyses were run to explore the association between the level of integration of LGBT families into schools and school policy. Interestingly, the more welcoming the policy environment, the less likely the respondents were to describe LGBT families as “visible and fully integrated” in the school. Maybe in schools that are less welcoming, school personnel do not see difficulties and feel that even though the school is not acknowledging LGBT families, these families are still integrated and accepted in the school community. LGBT families have diverse needs and each family is different. Due to stereotypical views of school personnel, they may believe that they are meeting the needs of LGBT families. It could be likely that participants described their policy as very welcoming but do not think that the policy is driving a supportive and tolerate climate. Another possibility could be that school personnel choose to ignore the problem due to personal beliefs or lack of administrative support. Issues with a sensitive topic such as sexual orientation may overwhelm school personnel, so they choose to ignore it all together. People in schools with more welcoming policies may be more aware of the issue and notice that there are still limits to the overall acceptance of LGBT families or maybe if a district knows there is a low level of integration, they believe they need a more comprehensive policy.

### **Implications**

The current study yielded several important findings. To our knowledge, this is one of the only studies to investigate what school districts are doing to educate their students about LGBT-headed families. It was found that even though the majority of schools have several LGBT parents and staff members, most districts do not have a formal curriculum, specific policies, or practices to address their needs. Schools that are addressing the needs of LGBT families have a comprehensive diversity curricula, policies that curb bullying and harassment, and practices that acknowledge all types of families. According to this study, schools are educating students about

alternative families, have non-discrimination policies, and discuss alternative families in the classroom but few schools incorporate the topic of LGBT-headed families. The current study also demonstrated that when schools spend more money per student, they have a more welcoming LGBT environment.

The findings from this study provide evidence that schools are not creating an inclusive climate for LGBT families. This puts children from LGBT-headed families at risk for social and emotional difficulties at school. Societal acceptance towards LGBT people is a slow process and involves all members of society, including social institutions like schools. Schools have the ability to generate change in society and create positive experiences regarding LGBT individuals. For social change to happen in schools, curriculum, policies, and practices need to reflect society at large and fully include all types of people and families. This study makes it clear that there is a need for a more comprehensive school programs which can be created by increasing access to information regarding LGBT individuals, offering educational programs, developing students clubs that address LGBT issues, and changing policies and practices. All families and individuals deserve to be valued regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. In order to insure a safe and welcoming school environment for all, school personnel, students, and parents need to work together to reflect the needs of our society.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

It is important to recognize that there were limitations with this study. First, the sample size was small ( $N = 116$ ) due to a 14.3% response rate, making the analyses underpowered. The small response rate could have been due to the fact that the study was voluntary as well as school psychologists tend to be busy and may not have had time to take the study or complete it entirely. Another possibility was that school psychologists felt uncomfortable with the topic and

chose not to participate. To increase response rate, future studies could try to reach out to more school psychologists or offer a larger incentive for completing the survey. Furthermore, participants had the option of leaving some of the items blank, decreasing the sample size even more. The reason the researcher decided to allow participants to skip survey items was to prevent participants from dropping out. A larger sample size would have allowed for more comparisons between different types of schools and similar research is needed on a larger scale to examine this issue in greater detail.

Second, the survey format did not allow the researcher to ask participants for further explanations. However, it was important to allow participants to remain anonymous when answering questions about such a controversial topic. It may be beneficial for future studies to conduct anonymous follow-up phone calls to obtain a better understanding of why the participants chose what they did.

Third, the present study only surveyed school psychologists and it would be interesting to collect data from multiple informants such as other school staff members, LGBT parents, and their children. School psychologists who work in schools may know less about what is being taught in the classroom setting than a teacher or curriculum coordinator. Also, school psychologists work with a diverse population and are trained to be non-biased and accepting, which could impact how they answered the survey questions. In a past study, LGBT parents believed school officials, such as principals and other administrators, felt that no problems existed in their schools regarding LGBT families (Kozik-Rosabal, 2000). Perhaps school staff members, such as teachers, may be more inclined to indicate a positive LGBT climate in their schools. Future research should use multiple informants to collect data on this subject or have an outside observer make visits to the schools to collect less biased data.



Fourth, this study only surveyed participants in New York State. Since each state has different laws, this limits the ability to generalize these findings to the rest of the country. To understand a broader perspective on this topic, future research should gather national information in order to provide a more valuable understanding of what is being done in schools across the country.

Finally, the current study looked at what is currently happening in schools but future studies can try to address the reasons that are preventing schools from acknowledging LGBT families. For example, this study found that schools are not providing training about LGBT issues or families. An idea for future studies would be to look at why schools are not providing trainings or if teachers are even interesting in attending such trainings.

In summary, this study presented an overview of what schools in New York State are currently doing to recognize LGBT-headed families in terms of their curriculum, practices, and policies according to the school psychologists as spokesman. Most schools were found to have several LGBT families and staff members, yet most school were described as not creating a welcoming environment which make this a complicated situation. Some schools are educating students about alternative families and have non-discrimination policies, however, little is being done to specifically address LGBT families. It was also found that wealthier districts had a more welcoming LGBT environment.

Schools need to be safe and supportive places for all students and families. The fact that schools are not addressing all members of the school community could have a negative impact on the overall school climate. Furthermore, schools have the legal responsibility to protect the civil rights of the students including anti-gay violence. In order to accomplish this, schools need to have an inclusive curriculum, a comprehensive safe school policy, and practices that recognize

LGBT-headed families. Although change is difficult, schools have a responsibility to include everyone in society and make it a safe place for all. By making a change, schools can reshape the social world by starting with our children and creating a benevolent spiral towards equality.

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### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Not all of the members of NYASP are currently working in a school which may have decreased the number of individuals eligible to take the survey.

Table 1

*Demographics of School Districts*

Total Sample Characteristics	n	percentage
Setting		
Rural	45	38.8
Urban	32	27.6
Suburban	39	33.6
Approximate number of students in the district		
Less than 250	3	2.6
Between 250 and 500	12	10.3
Between 501 and 1,000	25	21.6
Between 1,001 and 5,000	44	37.9
Between 5,001 and 10,000	15	12.9
More than 10,000	17	14.7
Percentage of white students per district		
0-10%	11	
11-20%	6	
21-30%	3	
31-40%	4	
41-50%	5	
51-60%	2	
61-70%	8	
71-80%	8	



Table 1 cont.

*Demographics of School Districts*

Total Sample Characteristics	n	percentage
81-90%	27	
91-100%	37	
Percentage of minority students per district		
0-10%	54	
11-20%	14	
21-30%	10	
31-40%	3	
41-50%	4	
51-60%	6	
61-70%	1	
71-80%	5	
81-90%	6	
91-100%	9	
Average percent of free and reduced lunch		
Mean (SD)		31-40% (2.72)
Range		9
Average total per pupil expenditures		
Mean (SD)		\$10,000 (4.38)
Range		14

Table 2

*Survey Responses Regarding Curriculum*

	Yes		No	
	<i>n</i>	<i>percent</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>percent</i>
Does the elementary school curriculum in your district educate its students on the variety of alternative family structures that exist in our society such as: <sup>a</sup>				
Single-parents	80	69.6	35	30.4
Blended and stepfamilies	78	67.8	37	32.2
Extended families	76	65.5	38	33.3
Bi-racial marriages	47	41.6	66	58.4
Gay/lesbian families	26	23.0	87	77.0
Does your school use an LGBT-inclusive curriculum (either informal or formal) that gives attention to LGBT students, individuals, and issues?	27	23.3	89	76.7
Is it an informal curriculum (unofficial lessons that are taught to students)?	24	88.9	3	11.1
Is it a formal curriculum (planned program of objectives, content, and resources offered by the school)?	6	22.2	21	77.8

Table 2 cont.

*Survey Responses Regarding Curriculum*

	Yes		No	
	<i>n</i>	<i>percent</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>percent</i>
Does your school use a LGBT-inclusive curriculum regarding LGBT-headed families? <sup>b</sup>	3	2.6	113	97.4
Is it an informal curriculum (unofficial lessons that are taught to students)?	3	100	0	0
Is it a formal curriculum (planned program of objectives, content, and resources offered by the school)?	1	33.3	2	66.7
Are there books available in the school library that represent alternative family structures? <sup>b</sup>	83	71.6	33	28.4
Are there books that include LGBT-headed families?	35	30.7	79	69.3

Note. <sup>a</sup> Participants were allowed to select all options that apply. <sup>b</sup> If participants answered “yes” to the first question, they were led to answer the following questions.

Table 3

*Survey Responses Regarding Policies*

	Yes		No	
	<i>n</i>	<i>percent</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>percent</i>
Does the elementary school in your district have a non-discrimination policy? <sup>a</sup>	101	87.1	15	12.9
Does the school enforce the general school policy?	96	95.0	5	5.0
Are disciplinary procedures in place?	67	94.4	4	5.6
Are reporting procedures in place?	64	94.1	4	5.9
Do school staff/faculty members know how to gain access to the school policy?	91	90.1	10	9.9
Is the policy located in the school handbook?	70	87.5	10	12.5
Is the policy on the school website?	53	76.8	16	23.2
Is the school policy widely disseminated within the community so that all are aware they exist?	26	49.1	27	50.9
Does the school's non-discrimination policy include sexual orientation?	61	60.4	40	39.6
Does the school's non-discrimination policy include gender identity/expression?	25	24.8	76	75.2

<sup>a</sup> Note. If participants answered “yes” to the first question, they were led to answer the following questions.

Table 4

*Survey Responses Regarding Practices*

	Yes		No	
	<i>n</i>	<i>percent</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>percent</i>
Do all school forms ask for "parent/guardian" rather than "mother/father?"	98	97.0	3	3.0
Does your district have an LGBT student organization? (i.e. Gay/Straight Alliance, Pride Club)?	35	30.2	81	69.8
Currently, what types of practices is your school using to provide support to students who are growing up in families with a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender parent(s)?				
Support groups	19	17.4	90	82.6
Classroom discussions on family diversity	36	32.7	74	67.3
Library books and videos	30	27.0	81	73.0
Parent groups	1	1.0	103	99.0

Table 5

*Informal Practices*

Question	n	percentage
In practice to what extent is the topic of LGBT-headed families available for discussion? (n = 118)		
Very Available	0	0
Available	20	17.2
Neutral	53	45.7
Unavailable	35	30.2
Very Unavailable	8	6.0
There are indicators that LGBT people are welcome in the school or classroom, such as LGBT-inclusive posters, signs, or stickers.		
Strongly Agree	0	0
Agree	5	4.3
Neither agree nor Disagree	37	31.9
Disagree	49	42.2
Strongly Disagree	25	21.6

Table 6

*Staff Training Responses by Survey Item*

	Yes		No	
	<i>n</i>	<i>percent</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>percent</i>
Are school personnel provided with anti-bias training?	46	40.0	69	60.0
Are issues about LGBT <u>individuals</u> incorporated in staff development training?	19	41.3	27	58.7
Are issues about LGBT <u>families</u> incorporated in staff development training?	12	26.1	34	73.9
Are other issues about diversity incorporated in staff development training?	40	87.0	6	13.0
	<i>Frequency</i>		<i>Percent</i>	
Rank your level of diversity training in graduate school.				
Very Good	29		25.2	
Good	44		38.3	
Fair	32		27.8	
Poor	8		7.0	
Very Poor	2		1.7	

Table 7

*Survey Responses Regarding LGBT Climate*

Question	n	percentage
LGBT-headed families in my district are: (check one)		
Visible and fully integrated into school life	55	47.4
Moderately visible, feel safe being open	53	45.7
Virtually invisible and exist within a “don’t ask, don’t tell” environment	8	6.9
Rate the level of acceptance of LGBT <u>couples</u> in your community.		
Very accepting	13	11.2
Somewhat accepting	68	58.6
Somewhat unaccepting	31	26.7
Unaccepting	4	3.4
Rate the level of acceptance of LGBT-headed <u>families</u> in your community.		
Very accepting	12	10.3
Somewhat accepting	62	53.4
Somewhat unaccepting	37	31.9
Unaccepting	5	4.3
LGBT-headed <u>families</u> are received well by school faculty/staff members.		
Strongly Agree	13	11.2
Agree	40	34.5



Table 7 cont.

*Survey Responses Regarding LGBT Climate*

Question	n	percentage
Neither agree nor Disagree	58	50
Disagree	5	4.3
Strongly Disagree	0	0
LGBT-inclusive programs (books/curriculum/training) are received well by the community.		
Strongly Agree	1	.9
Agree	7	6.0
Neither agree nor Disagree	64	55.2
Disagree	36	31.0
Strongly Disagree	8	6.9
LGBT-inclusive programs (books/curriculum/training) are received well by school faculty/staff?		
Strongly Agree	3	2.6
Agree	20	17.2
Neither agree nor Disagree	69	59.5
Disagree	22	19.0
Strongly Disagree	2	1.7

Table 8

*Exposure to LGBT individuals in school*

Total Sample Characteristics	n	percentage
Are you aware of students in your school who have gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender parent(s)?		
Yes	76	65.5
No	40	34.5
If YES, how many students (families) do you know?		
	Mean (SD)	2.81 (1.86)
	Range	1-10
What is your source of knowledge?		
Via parental disclosure	39	33.6
Comments by other staff/word of mouth	34	29.3
Via school social worker, psychologist, counselor	28	24.1
Via personal association with student's family	26	22.4
Student self-disclosure	25	21.6
"Eye witness" account	15	12.9
"The rumor mill"	10	8.6
Via speaking with other LGBT individuals	4	3.4
Are you aware of any LGBT staff members in your school?		
Yes	76	65.5
No	40	34.5
If YES, how many staff members do you know?		
	Mean (SD)	2.25 (2.96)
	Range	1-25

Table 8 cont.

*Exposure to LGBT individuals in school*

Total Sample Characteristics	n	percentage
What is your source of knowledge?		
Staff self-disclosure	45	38.8
Comments by other staff/word of mouth	38	32.8
Via personal association with staff member	30	25.9
“the rumor mill”	19	11.9
“eye witness” account	9	5.7
Via speaking with other LGBT individuals	2	1.7

Note. The participants were asked to select all that apply for the source of knowledge question, therefore the percentages do not add up to 100% but rather are based on the N = 76 people who answered YES to the first question.

Table 9

*Level of Knowledge*

Total Sample Characteristics	n	percentage
What is your level of knowledge regarding the <u>elementary school's</u> policies, procedures, and practices in your district?		
Very good	15	13
Good	47	40.9
Fair	40	34.8
Poor	12	10.4
Very Poor	1	.9
What is your level of knowledge regarding the <u>elementary school's</u> curriculum regarding LGBT issues in your district?		
Very good	7	6.1
Good	29	25.2
Fair	46	40
Poor	26	22.6
Very Poor	7	6.1

Table 10

*Correlations between Survey Indexes and Demographic Variables*

Variable	Curriculum Index	Policy Index	Practices Index
Rural (N)	-.14 (112)	.02 (101)	-.17 (93)
Suburban (N)	.10 (80)	-.09 (74)	.23 (69)
Free or Reduced Lunch (N)	.07 (100)	.05 (93)	-.15 (85)
Percent White (N)	-.14 (107)	-.06 (96)	-.14 (88)
Percent Minority (N)	.14 (108)	.03 (97)	.11 (89)
Approximate Number of Students (N)	-.01 (112)	.11 (101)	.19 (93)
Per Pupil Expenditure (N)	.22* (102)	.25* (92)	.34** (85)
Curriculum Index (N)	--	.17 (97)	.29** (89)
Policy Index (N)	.17 (97)	--	.22* (93)
Practices Index (N)	.29** (89)	.22* (93)	--

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 11

*Level of Integration of LGBT-headed families and Policy Index*

<b>LGBT-headed families</b>		<b><u>Policy Index</u></b>			
<b>in my district are:</b>		1.0	1.5	2.0	Total
Visible and fully integrated into	n	20	18	8	46
school life.	%	51.3	47.4	33.3	45.5
Moderately visible, feel safe being	n	18	16	13	47
open.	%	46.2	42.1	54.2	46.5
Virtually invisible and exist within a	n	1	4	3	8
"don't ask, don't tell" environment.	%	2.6	10.5	12.5	7.9

*Note.* % = percentage within policy index

## Appendix A

### LGBT Survey

#### **1. Approximate Number of Students in your school district (select one)**

Less than 250 students  
Between 250 and 500 students  
Between 501 and 1,000 students  
Between 1,001 and 5,000 students  
Between 5,001 and 10,000 students  
More than 10,000 students

#### **2. Approximate Ethnicity percentage**

\_\_\_\_\_ White  
\_\_\_\_\_ Black or African American  
\_\_\_\_\_ Asian or Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander  
\_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic or Latino  
\_\_\_\_\_ Multiracial

#### **3. Approximate number of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch program (select one)**

0-10%	51-60%
11-20%	61-70%
21-30%	71-80%
31-40%	81-90%
41-50%	91-100%

#### **4. Approximate total per pupil expenditures (select one)**

\$5,000 or less	\$10,000	\$15,000
\$6,000	\$11,000	\$16,000
\$7,000	\$12,000	\$17,000
\$8,000	\$13,000	\$18,000
\$9,000	\$14,000	greater than \$18,000

#### **5. How would you classify the town/city in which the school is situated?**

\_\_\_\_\_ rural  
\_\_\_\_\_ suburban  
\_\_\_\_\_ urban

#### **6. Does the elementary school in your district have a non-discrimination policy? Yes / No**

If you answered No, go to item #9

- |  |          |
|--|----------|
| a. Do school staff/faculty members know how to gain access to the school policy?                   | Yes / No |
| b. Is the school policy widely disseminated within the community so that all are aware they exist? | Yes / No |
| c. Is the policy on the school website?  | Yes / No |
| d. Is the policy located in the school handbook?   | Yes / No |

- e. Are reporting procedures in place? Yes / No
- f. Are disciplinary procedures in place? Yes / No
- g. As far as you know, does the school enforce the general school policy? Yes / No

**7. Does the school's non-discrimination policy include sexual orientation?** Yes / No

**8. Does the school's non-discrimination policy include gender identity/expression?** Yes / No

**9. Does the elementary school curriculum in your district educate its students on the variety of alternative family structures that exists in our society such as:**

- a. single-parents Yes / No
- b. blended and stepfamilies Yes / No
- c. bi-racial marriages Yes / No
- d. extended families Yes / No
- e. gay/lesbian families Yes / No

**10. Do all school forms ask for "parent/guardian" rather than "mother/father"?** Yes / No

**11. Does your school use a LGBT-inclusive curriculum (either informal or formal) that gives attention to LGBT students, individuals, and issues.** Yes / No

If you answered No, go to the next item.

- a. Is it an informal curriculum (unofficial lessons that are taught to students)? Yes / No
- b. Is it a formal curriculum (planned program of objectives, content, and resources offered by the school)? Yes / No
- c. If YES, which curriculum is being utilized in your elementary school? \_\_\_\_\_

**12. Does your school use a LGBT-inclusive curriculum regarding LGBT-headed families.**

Yes/ No

If you answered No, go to the next item.

- a. Is it an informal curriculum (unofficial lessons that are taught to students)? Yes / No
- b. Is it a formal curriculum (planned program of objectives, content, and resources offered by the school)? Yes / No
- c. If YES, which curriculum is being utilized in your elementary school?  
\_\_\_\_\_



**13. In practice, to what extent is the topic of LGBT-headed families available for discussion?**

1	2	3	4	5
Very available	available	neutral	unavailable	very unavailable

**14. Are there books available in the school library that represent alternative family structures?** Yes / No

a. Are there books that include LGBT-headed families? Yes / No

**15. LGBT-headed families in my district are: (check one)**

visible and fully integrated into school life

moderately visible, feel safe being open

virtually invisible and exist within a “don’t ask, don’t tell” environment

**16. Are you aware of students in your school who have gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender parent(s)?** Yes / No

a. If Yes, how many students (families) do you know? \_\_\_\_\_

b. Source of knowledge? (check all that apply)

student’s self-disclosure

comments by other staff/word of mouth

via school social worker, psychologist, counselor

via personal association with student’s family

via parental disclosure

via speaking with other LGBT individuals

“eye witness” account

“the rumor mill”

**17. Are you aware of any LGBT staff members in your school?** Yes / No

a. If Yes, how many staff members do you know? \_\_\_\_\_

b. Source of knowledge? (check all that apply)

staff member's self-disclosure

comments by other staff/word of mouth

via personal association with staff member

via speaking with other LGBT individuals

"eye witness" account

"the rumor mill"

**18. Rate the level of acceptance of LGBT couples in your community.**

1	2	3	4	5
very accepting	somewhat accepting	neutral	somewhat un-accepting	un-accepting

**19. Rate the level of acceptance of LGBT-headed families in your community.**

1	2	3	4	5
very accepting	somewhat accepting	neutral	somewhat un-accepting	un-accepting

**20. LGBT-headed families are received well by school faculty/staff members. (choose one)**

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree

**21. There are indicators that LGBT people are welcome in the school or classroom, such as LGBT-inclusive posters, signs, or stickers. (choose one)**

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree

**22. LGBT-inclusive programs (books/curriculum/training) are received well by the community.**

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree

**23. LGBT-inclusive programs (books/curriculum/training) are received well by school faculty/staff?**

1	2	3	4	5
strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree

**24. Does your district have an LGBT student organization? (i.e. Gay/Straight Alliance, Pride Club)?**

Yes / No

**25. Currently, what types of practices is your school using to provide support to students who are growing up in families with a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender parent (s).**

a. support groups Yes / No

b. classroom discussions on family diversity Yes / No

c. library books and videos Yes / No

d. parent groups Yes / No

Other: Please list

**26. Are school personnel provided with anti-bias training?** Yes / No .

a. Are issues about LGBT individuals incorporated in staff development training? Yes / No

b. Are issues about LGBT families incorporated in staff development training? Yes / No

c. Are other issues about diversity incorporated in staff development training? Yes / No

**27. What is your level of knowledge regarding the elementary school's policies, procedures, and practices in your district?**

1	2	3	4	5
very good	good	fair	poor	very poor

**28. What is your level of knowledge regarding the elementary school's curriculum regarding LGBT issues in your district?**

1	2	3	4	5
very good	good	fair	poor	very poor

**29. Rank your level of diversity training in graduate school.**

1	2	3	4	5
very good	good	fair	poor	very poor

**30. How many years have you been working at the school where you are currently employed? \_\_\_\_\_ years**

**31. What grade level(s) do you work with? (check all that apply)**

Elementary School (Kindergarten – 5<sup>th</sup> grade)

Middle School (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade)

High School (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade)

**32. Gender**    male/female/other

If you would like to receive the results of this study and/or would like information on how you can incorporate LGBT family issues in your school please send an email to Christa Bishop, M.A. at [cmb1@alfred.edu](mailto:cmb1@alfred.edu).

## Appendix B

### Items and Scoring Protocol

#### **Curriculum Scale**

Does the elementary school curriculum educate its students on the variety of alternative family structures such as gay/lesbian families? Yes = 1/No = 0

Does your school use a LGBT-inclusive curriculum (either informal or formal) that gives attention to LGBT students, individuals, and issues?

Informal yes = .5/no = 0

Formal yes = 1/no = 0

Does your school use a LGBT-inclusive curriculum regarding LGBT-headed families?

Informal yes = .5/no = 0

Formal Yes = 1/no = 0

Are there books available in the school library that represent alternative family structures?

Yes = 1/ no = 0

#### **Policies Scale**

Does the elementary school have a nondiscrimination policy? Yes = 1 /no = 0

Does the school's nondiscrimination policy include sexual orientation? yes = 1/no = 0

Does the school's nondiscrimination policy include gender identity/expression? yes = 1/no = 0

#### **Practices Scale**

Do all school forms ask for "parent/guardian" rather than "mother/father"? yes = 1/no = 0

In practice, to what extent is the topic of LGBT-headed families available for discussion?

Very available and available = 1/neutral, unavailable, and very unavailable = 0

There are indicators that LGBT people are welcome in the school, such as posters, signs or stickers.

Strongly agree and agree = 1/neither, disagree, strongly disagree = 0

Does your district have a LGBT student organization? Yes = 1/no = 0

Currently, what types of practices is your school using to provide support to students who are growing up in families with gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender parent(s)?

support groups? Yes = 1/no = 0

classroom discussion on diversity? Yes = 1/no = 0

library books and videos? Yes = 1/no = 0

parent groups? Yes = 1/no = 0

## Appendix C

### Cover Letter

Dear fellow school psychologist:

I am a graduate student in Alfred University's School Psychology Doctoral Program. Currently, I am doing research for my dissertation about elementary school policies, practices, and curriculum regarding Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) families and would appreciate your willingness to consider participating. I have chosen to survey school psychologists to be the spokesperson for their district because they tend to be very familiar with the school climate, practices, and curriculum. I realize that this is a sensitive topic and you may have strong feelings one way or the other; I hope you are willing to share them. Due to the sensitive subject matter, this survey was carefully developed in order to keep the anonymity of all subjects. Please be assured that any information you provide will be anonymous, as no names of individuals or schools are to be provided.

Eligibility for participation in this study includes being a school psychologist or school psychologist intern currently working in a school district with knowledge of your district's elementary school policies and curriculum. If there is another school psychologist in your district who would be more knowledgeable about the policies, practices, and curricula related to the elementary level, please forward this email to him/her. The survey should take you no longer than 15 minutes to complete. Your participation in this research is greatly appreciated. If you are interested in participating in this study, please go to <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/7SYHY7R> where you will be redirected and asked to begin the survey.

**At the conclusion of the study, if you choose to provide a mailing address or email address, you will be entered into a raffle to win one of four \$50 gift amazon.com gift cards. (Your e-mail will not be linked to the information you provide.)**

I hope that you will find this task to be meaningful and interesting. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Christa Bishop, M.A. at [cmb1@alfred.edu](mailto:cmb1@alfred.edu) or my advisor Jana Atlas, Ph.D. at [atlasj@alfred.edu](mailto:atlasj@alfred.edu) or 607-871-2212. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact Emrys Westacott, Ph.D., acting chairperson of Alfred University's Human Subjects Research Committee at [Westacott@alfred.edu](mailto:Westacott@alfred.edu).

Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Christa Bishop, M.A.  
School Psychology Doctoral Student  
Alfred University

## Appendix D

### Follow-up Letter

Dear fellow school psychologist:

I am a graduate student in Alfred University's School Psychology Doctoral Program. About two weeks ago I sent out an email inviting you to participate in a study for my dissertation about elementary school policies, practices, and curriculum regarding Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) families. I want to thank all of you who have taken the time to complete the survey. I want to ask those who have not taken the survey or were unable to finish it, to please follow the link <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/7SYHY7R> if you are eligible to participate. Eligibility for participation in this study includes being a school psychologist or school psychologist intern currently working in a school district with knowledge of your district's elementary school policies and curriculum.

Just a reminder, **at the conclusion of the study, if you choose to provide a mailing address or email address, you will be entered into a raffle to win one of four \$50 amazon.com gift cards. (Your e-mail will not be linked to the information you provide.) The winning participants will be notified by the end of March 2010.**

I hope that you are willing to participate, as I believe the findings may eventually be helpful in best serving our students. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Christa Bishop, M.A. at [cmb1@alfred.edu](mailto:cmb1@alfred.edu) or my advisor Jana Atlas, Ph.D. at [atlasj@alfred.edu](mailto:atlasj@alfred.edu) or 607-871-2212. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact Emrys Westacott, Ph.D., acting chairperson of Alfred University's Human Subjects Research Committee at [Westacott@alfred.edu](mailto:Westacott@alfred.edu).

Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Christa Bishop, M.A.  
School Psychology Doctoral Student  
Alfred University



## CHRISTA M. BISHOP, M.A., C.A.S.

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### **Education:**

Doctor of Psychology: Alfred University, December 2010

Certificate of Advanced Study: Alfred University, May 2010

Master of Arts: Alfred University, May 2008  
School Psychology

Bachelor of Arts: University at Buffalo, The State University of New York, May 2006  
Psychology/Social Science Interdisciplinary  
Concentration: Early Childhood Education

### **Clinical Experience:**

**School Psychologist:** Mendocino Unified School District, Mendocino, CA, August 2010-present

**School Psychologist Intern:** Wellsville Central School District, Wellsville, NY, June 2009-June 2010

Supervisor: Dr. Donna Ewing

Conducted evaluations and consulted with teachers; parents; and outside service providers. Counseled students in groups and individual sessions. Created Functional Behavior Assessments and implemented Behavior Intervention Plans.

**Clinician:** Powell Institute's Access to Children's Counseling and Early Support Services (ACCESS)

Letchworth, NY, Fall 2008-Spring 2009

Supervisor: Dr. Pamela Wilkie

Counseled children and adults using individual therapy, play therapy, and family therapy.

### **Research Experience:**

**Graduate Assistant:** Rural Justice Institute, Alfred, NY, December 2008-June 2010

**Supervisor:** Dr. Karen Porter

Applied school psychology expertise to assist community agencies serving youth to build capacity, strengthen resources, and foster sustainability. Researched best practices, designed program evaluations, and collected data.

### **Publications:**

Kakhnovets, R., Young, H. L., Lienau Purnell, A., Huebner, E., Bishop, C. M. (2010). Self-Reported Experience of Self-Injurious Behavior in College Students. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 32, 309-323.

Ostrov, J. M. & Bishop, C. M. (2008). Preschoolers' aggression and parent-child conflict: A multi-informant and multi-method study. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 99, 309-322.