

Facts: Gay and Lesbian youth *in schools*

- ▶ Five to six percent of American students are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (LGBT)¹ — a conservative estimate means there are 2.25 to 2.7 million school-age LGBT youth.²
- ▶ Recent studies show the average age for a gay or lesbian youth to come out is now 16-years-old — down from earlier studies showing the average age at 19 to 23 years old.³

FACING VERBAL AND PHYSICAL HARASSMENT:

A national survey of LGBT students conducted in 2003⁴ found that, within the past year:

- ▶ 77.9% heard remarks such as “faggot” or “dyke” frequently or often at school (similar studies have shown that the average high school student hears such epithets 25 times a day);
 - 18.8% heard similar remarks from faculty or school staff at least some of the time;
 - 82.9% reported that faculty or staff never or only sometimes intervened when they were present when such remarks were made.
- ▶ 84% personally had been verbally harassed at school (that is, called names or threatened) because of their sexual orientation;
- ▶ 65.3% had been sexually harassed (e.g., inappropriately touched or subjected to sexual comments);
- ▶ 39.1% had been physically harassed (by being shoved or pushed) and 17% had been assaulted (by

being punched, kicked or injured with a weapon) at school because of their sexual orientation;

- ▶ 27.1% had been physically harassed because of their gender expression; 11.5% had been assaulted on that basis;
- ▶ 64.3% felt unsafe in their school because of their sexual orientation;
- ▶ LGBT youth of color and female students face abuse often compounded by racism and sexism:
 - 44.7% of LGBT students of color reported being verbally harassed because of both their sexual orientation and their race or ethnicity;
 - 50% of lesbian and bisexual young women reported being verbally harassed.

Other state-focused studies found that:

- ▶ LGBT youth are 7 times more likely than other students to be threatened or injured with a weapon at school.⁵

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EFFECTS OF HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE:

- ▶ Gay youth are 4^{1/2} times more likely than non-gay peers to skip school because they feel unsafe;
 - 31% of gay students had missed at least an entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe based on their sexual orientation;
- ▶ Nearly one-third of LGBT students drop out of high school to escape the violence, harassment, and isolation they face there — a dropout rate nearly three times the national average;
- ▶ LGBT students are far more likely than their non-gay peers to run away from home, to experience academic problems, and to struggle with substance abuse, low self-esteem, and depression;
- ▶ Gay youth are 4 times as likely than their non-gay counterparts to have attempted suicide.

1. See National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (2001), available at <<http://www.cpc.unc.edu/addhealth>>.

2. Human Rights Watch, Hatred in the Hallways, *supra* note 6 at 24-25.

3. Catlin Ryan and Donna Futterman, "Lesbian & Gay Youth: Care and Counseling" *Adolescent Medicine: State of the Art Reviews*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1997, p. 207-374

4. Office of Public Policy of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network ("GLSEN"), *National School Climate Survey* (2003), available at <http://www.glsen.org>. This study surveyed a sample of 887 LGBT students from 48 states and the District of Columbia.

5. Studies released between 1995-97 by the Massachusetts Department of Education and the Vermont Department of Health



Lambda Legal is a national organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgendered people, and people with HIV or AIDS through impact litigation, education, and public policy work.

Lambda Legal Defense & Education Fund

www.lambdalegal.org

National Headquarters

120 Wall Street
Suite 1500
New York, NY 10005-3904
tel 212 809-8585
fax 212 809-0055

Western Regional Office

6030 Wilshire Boulevard
Suite 200
Los Angeles, CA 90036-3617
tel 323 937-2728
fax 323 937-0601

Southern Regional Office

1447 Peachtree Street, NE
Suite 1004
Atlanta, GA 30309-3027
tel 404 897-1880
fax 404 897-1884

Midwest Regional Office

11 East Adams
Suite 1008
Chicago, IL 60603-6303
tel 312 663-4413
fax 312 663-4307

South Central Regional Office

3500 Oak Lawn Avenue
Suite 500
Dallas, TX 75219-6722
tel 214 219-8585
fax 214 219-4455