



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, and Charter School Leaders; and Elementary, Middle, and High School Principals  
**From:** Russell D. Johnston, Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education  
**Date:** October 3, 2024  
**Subject:** 2024 –2025 Commissioner Letter to District and School Leaders about the Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students

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Thank you for your dedication to creating safe and supportive spaces for all students, including those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ). Massachusetts continues to lead the way in fostering inclusive school communities that support LGBTQ students. As educators, your role is crucial in nurturing resilience, joy, safety, and positive relationships, even in the face of ongoing disparities.

The 2021 [Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) (YRBS) shows that LGBTQ students still experience significant challenges, including higher rates of bullying, feeling unsafe, and mental health concerns like anxiety and depression. These issues contribute to increased absenteeism, as students may feel unwelcome or unsafe at school. To address this, we must not only ensure students attend school regularly but also create an environment where they feel they belong, can thrive, and are supported academically and emotionally.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE / Department) [Educational Vision](#) for public education is rooted in high-quality teaching and learning, with a focus on antiracist, inclusive, multilingual, and multicultural education. This vision aims to create equitable opportunities for all students, especially those who have been historically underserved. By fostering safe, inclusive, and supportive environments for LGBTQ students, together we will create the conditions necessary for them to thrive and achieve their full potential in all aspects of their education, thus reducing absenteeism and promoting full engagement in school life.

To assist you in creating safe and supportive school environments for LGBTQ students, the Department and the [Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth](#) offer the following:

### **Information on Federal and State Laws and Policies regarding LGBTQ Students:**

The [Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students webpage](#) includes details about relevant federal and state laws, including the [Massachusetts Anti-Bullying Law](#), [Regulations for the Student Anti-Discrimination Law](#), [Guidance on Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity](#), and more.

### **Training and Implementation Support:**

The Safe Schools Program offers schools and districts free training and implementation support or technical assistance on topics related to the meaningful inclusion and support of LGBTQ students and staff. These services include meeting the needs of transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals, fostering inclusive policies, enhancing family engagement, inclusive physical education and sports, and reducing disparities. The program also helps schools respond to community questions regarding LGBTQ content in curricula, ensuring clear communication and fostering understanding. Training or technical assistance requests can be submitted through the online forms provided on the [website](#).

### **Massachusetts Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) Student Leadership Council:**

The Massachusetts GSA Student Leadership Council empowers LGBTQ middle and high school students and their allies to influence policy, foster inclusive school environments, and develop leadership skills. It includes one state-level and five regional councils, meeting bi-monthly to discuss leadership, share resources, and collaborate on projects. Advisors are encouraged to attend to support student participation and leadership growth. We encourage you to make appropriate arrangements for excused absences to ensure students can participate. For more details and meeting dates, visit the [Massachusetts GSA Student Leadership Council webpage](#).

### **Resources for Younger Students:**

The Safe Schools Program provides resources for schools working with younger students, focusing on topics such as self-expression, understanding diverse family structures, and fostering self-acceptance.

### **Family Engagement:**

Parent/Caregiver engagement is a critical aspect of supporting LGBTQ students, as strong partnerships between schools and families provide essential emotional and social support. Schools play a key role by fostering open, culturally competent communication with families, offering strategies to affirm their children's identities, and providing resources on LGBTQ inclusion. By collaborating with families, schools ensure students feel supported both at home and in school, helping them thrive. For additional resources on family engagement as it relates to LGBTQ identities, we encourage you to reach out to the Safe Schools Program.

**Inclusive Curriculum:**

DESE understands the importance of implementing inclusive curriculum to ensure that all students feel represented and supported, and can be seen in the Guiding Principles of the [MA Curriculum Frameworks](#). DESE’s review of high-quality instructional materials across core content areas through the [CURATE](#) process review if “materials include questions and tasks that affirm and value diverse identities, backgrounds, and perspectives” and publishes reports on the CURATE website. Resources to support the implementation of the recently adopted MA Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Curriculum Framework can be found on the [DESE website](#), including the [CHPE Curriculum Guide](#), to inform the design and evaluation of curricular materials that are inclusive, medically accurate, and developmentally- and age-appropriate. Schools and districts striving to make their instructional materials more inclusive can access a range of resources on the Safe Schools Program [website](#). These resources are designed to help educators provide equitable, high-quality, and standards-aligned materials, alongside professional development opportunities. By integrating these tools, schools can better meet the needs of all students, especially those from historically underserved communities.

**Pronouns:**

The Department encourages the practice of sharing pronouns as one way to foster an inclusive learning environment. By normalizing the use of pronouns, we signal respect for all gender identities and help create a safe, affirming space for students, staff, and families. The Department models this by including pronouns in email signatures, and schools are encouraged to adopt similar practices. Engaging in open conversations about pronouns within school communities further promotes inclusivity and respect for gender diversity. For more information, [GLSEN](#) provides helpful resources on pronouns.

For further assistance or information, feel free to contact the [Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students](#) at [safeschoolsprogram@mass.gov](mailto:safeschoolsprogram@mass.gov). Thank you for all that you do to support your students and colleagues.