The National Inventory of School District Interventions in Support of LGBTQ Student Wellbeing

FINAL REPORT

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Stigma and Resilience
Among Vulnerable
Youth Centre

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Alberta Teachers' Association

Association of Administrators of English Schools of Quebec

Association of Nova Scotia Educational Administrators

Association of Yukon School Administrators

British Columbia Principals & Vice Principals Associations

British Columbia School Superintendents Association

British Columbia School Trustees' Association

British Columbia Teachers' Federation

Canadian Association of School System Administrators

Canadian Association of Principals

Canadian Home and School Federation

Canadian School Boards Association

Canadian Teachers' Federation

College of Alberta School Superintendents

Edmonton Public School Board

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario

Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services (iSMSS, UAlberta)

Manitoba Association of Parent Councils

Manitoba Association of School Superintendents

Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning

Manitoba School Boards' Association

Manitoba Teachers' Society

New Brunswick Teachers' Association

Newfoundland & Labrador Federation of School Council

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Northwest Territories Teachers' Association

Nova Scotia School Boards Association

Nova Scotia Federation of Home and School Association

Nova Scotia Teachers Union

Nunavut Teachers' Association

Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers' Association

Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association

Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations

Ontario Secondary Schools Teachers' Federation

Ontario Teachers' Federation

PFLAG Canada

Prince Edward Island Teachers' Federation

Public School Boards Association of Alberta

Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations

Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers

Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation

Tables nationales de lutte à l'homophobie en éducation (Québec)

The Faculty of Education, University of Alberta

The Faculty of Education, University of Calgary

The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities

Yukon Teachers' Association

Suggested citation

Taylor C., Peter T., Edkins T., Campbell C., Émond G., & Saewyc E. (2016). *The National Inventory of School District Interventions in Support of LGBTQ Student Wellbeing: Final Report*. Vancouver, BC: Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre, University of British Columbia.

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Executive summary

The National Inventory of School District Interventions in Support of LGBTQ Student Wellbeing was one of five research areas in a large project funded by a $2 million grant from the Canadian Institutes for Health Research and headed by Dr. Elizabeth Saewyc at University of British Columbia, "Reducing stigma, promoting resilience: Population health interventions for LGBTQ youth". All CEOs of school districts in both French and English publicly-funded school systems of Canada were invited to complete a survey which asked them about a range of possible interventions in support of LGBTQ students: LGBTQ-inclusive policy, generic and LGBTQ-specific harassment procedures, course content, Gay-Straight Alliances, generic and LGBTQ-themed events, professional development, and teaching resources. Response was strong at 36% (200 superintendents/directors from 141 school districts), and was representative of Canada's 394 school districts in terms of rural/urban, regional, French/English, and secular/Catholic, enabling us to develop a detailed inventory of system interventions and to identify patterns. We were especially interested in the general question of which interventions CEOs associated with which outcomes, in order to develop a sense of alignments and disparities between the two as we work in the larger project to identify the outcomes actually achieved, or even achievable, by particular interventions. (For example, GSAs have been widely adopted as a simple, low-cost method of pursuing LGBTQ student wellbeing; we are interested to know what specific outcomes CEOs associated with GSAs, and whether GSAs could actually be expected to have the expected results.) To this end, we asked about a range of outcomes such as reduced high-risk behavior, increased support among staff and students, and lower harassment.

Highlights of the findings include:

- *Outcomes.* Overall, respondents were somewhat less likely to hope for or perceive outcomes that were more difficult to gauge; e.g., mental health, self-esteem, school attachment, but also school performance.

- *High-risk behaviour.* Respondents were consistently much less likely to associate interventions with reduced high-risk behaviour than with any other outcome.

- *LGBTQ-specific versus generic policy.* Overall, superintendents were much less likely to associate generic policies than LGBTQ-inclusive policies with positive outcomes for LGBTQ students. They were much more likely to report that generic policies had been thoroughly implemented in early and middle years.

- *Multiple-component versus single-component policies.* A limited number of districts had addressed LGBTQ student wellbeing at the policy level through multiple components, but many districts reported policies that addressed only one component, most commonly harassment.

- *Gender expression and transgender identity.* Districts were much less likely to report having trans-specific policy than they were to report having LGBTQ-specific policy.

- *GSAs.* It is notable, given the emphasis in provincial legislation (Ontario and Manitoba) placed on establishing GSAs, that superintendents were somewhat less likely to associate GSAs with reduced harassment for LGBTQ students than they were to associate LGBTQ-inclusive policy with such outcomes.

- *Urban/rural.* In general, urban school districts were more likely than rural ones to have LGBTQ-specific interventions.

- *Regional.* In general, Alberta and Québec were less likely to have LGBTQ-specific interventions than other parts of Canada, with BC, Ontario, and the Atlantic provinces being most likely to have LGBTQ provisions.

- *Grade level.* Many districts had implemented LGBTQ-specific interventions for early and middle years, but at somewhat lower rates than for senior years.

- *Catholic clubs.* Nine districts indicated having "Respecting Differences Clubs" (the name required by the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association) rather than GSAs. We do not know the extent to which these clubs follow Catholic doctrine.

- *Religious objections.* It is notable that very few districts (n=<5) reported personal or community opposition on religious grounds as reasons for not implementing an intervention.

- *No harassment / no problem.* Small numbers of respondents asserted that there was no homophobic harassment in their district or that generic policy adequately addresses the problem. We do not know whether their confidence is actually reflected either in lower rates of homophobic harassment in their districts or in effective response to homophobic harassment.

- *Curriculum.* A third of respondents indicated that they have LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, and, of those, 93% indicated they have it in K–8 schools.

- *Employment policies.* Most districts had LGBTQ job protections, but fewer indicated teachers could be open with students about being LGBTQ. Respondents were much less likely to associate job protections for LGBTQ staff with positive outcomes for students than they were to associate other interventions with such outcomes. This is notable given that the importance of role models for marginalized students is well established in the school system.

This report addresses the quantitative findings of the National Inventory and offers recommendations for system interventions and future research. Further analyses in combination with qualitative data provided by superintendents will inform studies on topics of interest such as those identified above as we work together to identify the school system interventions that best support the safety and wellbeing of LGBTQ students.

Purpose and background

The National Inventory of School District Interventions in Support of LGBTQ Student Wellbeing study is one of five research areas in the larger Canadian Institutes of Health Research-funded project, "Reducing stigma, promoting resilience: Population health interventions for LGBTQ youth."

The National Inventory was undertaken in order to develop a detailed picture of the forms and extent of school system interventions made in support of the wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Two Spirit, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) students in school districts across the country. The study was also designed to contribute to our knowledge of the particular outcomes that district officials associate with particular interventions so that we could select the intervention/outcome relationships that would be important to test in other phases of the larger project. These phases involve systematic assessment of intervention outcomes through analyzing available population health data for districts or regions where given implications have been widely implemented, and through on-site intervention evaluations and case studies.

By comparing school district beliefs about intervention outcomes (say, reduced harassment from implementing Gay-Straight Alliances [GSAs]) with evidence of actual intervention outcomes (say, reduced suicidality) identified through population health data analysis and on-site program evaluations, our hope is that the larger study will contribute to evidence-based school system decision-making about which interventions to implement to achieve what results to support the wellbeing of LGBTQ students.

Terms

Early Years, Middle Years, Senior Years: Grade ranges and nomenclature for different levels of schooling varies across the country and even within school districts. For purposes of this study, we use the terms "Early" for Kindergarten through Grade 4, "Middle" for Grades 5 through 8, and "Senior" for Grades 9 through 12 (grades 9 through 11 in Québec, where students go to CÉGEP after Grade 11). One question used "Elementary" for combined Early and Middle Years as distinct from High School.

Gay-Straight Alliance / Gender and Sexuality Alliance: A student club set up to provide a safe space for LGBTQ students and their allies to meet, normally with one or two staff facilitators. Legislation in Alberta, Ontario and Manitoba requires principals of publicly funded schools to permit students to organize such a club. They are sometimes known by other names such as Rainbow Club or Diversity Club. It is becoming more common to refer to a Gay-Straight Alliance as a Gender and Sexuality Alliance to ensure that gender non-conforming and trans individuals are explicitly included within the mandate of GSAs.

LGBTQ: An umbrella term for the sexual and gender minority identities, including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Two Spirit and Queer. Other identities such as intersex and asexual are often read into the acronym.

LGBTQ-Inclusive Education: Pedagogical, curricular and programmatic efforts to include LGBTQ students in school life.

Superintendent: Terms for the head or CEO of a school district vary across the country; e.g., "Superintendent" or "Chief Superintendent" in some districts, "Directeur"/ "Directrice"/"Director" or "CEO" in others. The term used in this report is Superintendent.

Transitioning: The term used to describe going through a process of self-presenting as the "other" gender; i.e., presenting as a boy when one has been known as a girl, or vice versa. Transitioning may or may not involve sex alignment procedures such as hormone therapy and surgery.

Literature review

School system efforts to prevent or curtail homophobia through various interventions have been well established in the research literature. While researchers have focused their claims in different ways, it is clear that research on sexual minority youth needs to move beyond a cataloguing of risk factors and focus on protective factors that increase resilience (Russell, 2005). In other words, research aimed at assessing the impacts and outcomes of the various interventions to improve the resiliency of LGBTQ youth, transform school climates, and ultimately increase the safety and wellbeing of sexual and gender minority youth in schools is essential in facilitating the creation of LGBTQ-supportive school climates. In our research, we focus on four main components that the research suggests contribute to a robustly supportive school climate for LGBTQ students: policy addressing homophobic harassment and LGBTQ inclusion; the presence of Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs; professional development for educators on the topic of LGBTQ education; and LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum to support inclusive teaching practices.

Anti-harassment policies are one of the most commonly recognized interventions at the level of administration. Hansen (2007) points out that establishing formal policies within schools that clearly and explicitly forbid homophobic harassment is a key component of nearly all resources about creating LGBTQ-supportive school climates (see also Russell et al., 2010; Szalacha, 2003). However, Hansen notes that policy alone is not sufficient to produce change and create supportive environments for LGBTQ students; policy must also have administrative support and be publicized (i.e., well-known) within school communities in order to create a clear institutional mandate. Russell (2011) argues further that inclusive, LGBTQ-specific nondiscrimination and anti-harassment policies provide the basis for other forms of safe school policy, practice, and programs; they are the foundational intervention upon which other components can be built. These policies provide the institutional context offering clear support for LGBTQ inclusion in schools, which provides administrators, staff, and teachers with institutional backing to engage in LGBTQ-inclusive practices (Russell, 2011). The actual content of policies may differ, ranging from straightforward focus on antidiscrimination or anti-harassment measures to more proactive components, such as programming, curriculum, student clubs (like GSAs), and staff training or professional development (see Walton, 2004), though the positive effects of policy on the perceived climate for LGBTQ youth are well-documented (e.g., Taylor & Peter et al., 2011; Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008).

As a staple of recent Canadian legislation (Ontario, Manitoba, and most recently Alberta) and one of the simplest interventions to implement, student-level Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) serve as effective protections for LGBTQ youth, offering psychological, social, and physical protective factors (for example, see Black, Fedewa, & Gonzalez, 2012). However, it is worth noting that not all GSAs are the same (Asakura, 2010; Fetner et al., 2012; Poteat et al., 2015a), and it is not always clear which characteristics are most connected to the achievement of positive outcomes. As Fetner et al. (2012) argue, while GSAs generally serve as protective factors for LGBTQ students, each GSA develops its own character based on its school and community context, the openness around membership, and the group's commitment to activity or activism within their school or wider community. This non-homogeneity when it comes to the safety offered by the "safe space" of a GSA has given rise to a wide range of literature cataloguing the out-comes of GSA spaces: increased sense of safety (Asakura, 2010; Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Fetner et al., 2012; Lee, 2002; Szalacha, 2003), better school attachment (Birkett, Russell, & Corliss, 2014; Lee, 2002; St. John et al., 2014), better academic performance and outcomes (Birkett, Russell, & Corliss, 2014; Gretak et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2013; Lee, 2002), less problematic substance use (Konishi et al., 2013), less suicidal ideation and fewer attempts (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Hatzenbuehler, 2011; Saewyc et al., 2014), more positive identity development (Asakura, 2010; Lee, 2002), and more meaningful, supportive relationships with others (Asakura, 2010; Lee, 2002; Poteat et al., 2015b; St. John et al., 2014). The wide range of positive outcomes associated with GSAs impact heterosexual students as well as sexual minority ones, effectively changing the overall climate of the school to a more positive and accepting one (see Konishi et al., 2013; Saewyc et al., 2014).

While the various outcomes of GSAs are well documented in the research, researchers have also emphasized the importance of maintaining integrated intervention strategies for greater efficacy. Szalacha (2003) explains that different interventions affect differ-ent populations within the school system, with, for instance, policy raising awareness among administrators and providing an institutional mandate for educators to pursue sexual diversity within their school; professional development developing capacity among staff and teachers; and student support groups such as GSAs affecting the level of the student body. Further, each intervention reinforces the others, producing what

she describes as an "additive effect" (Szalacha, 2003, pp. 69–72; see also, Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; St. John et al., 2014). In this context, Szalacha (2003) recommends that interventions with the greatest efficacy are those that provide clear leadership and mutually supportive policy to encourage capacity-building and ongoing programming (i.e., interdependent programming and policies are most effective, and school leaders should provide training on sexual diversity and sexual minority issues for all staff and teachers). Further to this, research suggests that prolonged interventions are most effective when they are ongoing (see Konishi et al. 2013; MacIntosh 2007; Saewyc & Marshall 2011; Saewyc, Konishi, Rose, & Homma, 2014), though additional longitudinal research is needed. It is clear, however, that the "one and done" approach to LGBTQ inclusion will not effectively change school climate for the long-term.

Another protective factor, connecting much of this, is staff training and professional development. As noted above in the discussion of research on policy, it is more effective when policy is well-known and provides teachers with the institutional backing to act (Russell, 2011; Szalacha, 2003). While teachers are increasingly expected to take on the work of LGBTQ inclusion in schools, through personal conviction and policy mandates, professional development is needed to increase the efficacy of these interventions. For instance, in their analysis of the implementation of a district-wide anti-homophobia school policy, Goldstein, Collins, and Halder (2008) found that professional development and teacher training was one of the primary needs for effective policy implementation in the classroom. In the Canada-wide study on educators' perceptions and experiences of LGBTQ-inclusive education, educators reported that it was not due to a lack of sup-port or any personal conviction that LGBTQ issues should not be included in their class-rooms that held them back from engaging in this work; rather, educators most often reported that it was a lack of resources and training that prevented them from engaging in LGBTQ-inclusive education (Taylor et al., 2015). In fact, supportive school personnel are a very important protective factor for LGBTQ youth resiliency (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Marshall et al., 2015; Murphy, 2012; Poteat et al., 2015b; Russell et al., 2010; Valenti & Campbell, 2009). These relationships can be extremely important for LGBTQ youth, even providing opportunities to establish mentoring relationships with teachers and supportive school personnel, where otherwise mentoring opportunities may not exist (Johnson & Gastic, 2015).

While fewer studies have addressed the outcomes of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, as curriculum is not usually implemented systematically at the institutional level, it is a mainstay of inclusive education that marginalized students benefit from seeing their identity group represented in the curriculum. There is evidence to suggest that curricular inclusion does have important benefits for LGBTQ youth (Russell, 2011), particularly in the context of the historic official or unofficial prohibition of LGBTQ content. For instance, students who had learned about LGBTQ issues in the classroom reported feeling safer at school (Kosciw et al., 2008; Russell et al., 2006), experiencing less harassment (Greytak et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2008; Russell et al., 2006), and better academic outcomes (Greytak et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2010). In a longitudinal study of the effect of one unit incorporating "The Laramie Project" play and integrated curriculum, Saewyc and Marshall (2011) report that homophobic attitudes in school diminished over time, suggesting not only that integrated programming and curriculum can have benefits for school climate for LGBTQ youth but that ongoing intervention and prevention strategies are most effective. Further, while widespread implementation of curriculum is rare, the majority of Canadian educators (78%) report having included LGBTQ content in some way in their classrooms, ranging from one-off references to repeated occasions and multiple methods (Taylor et al., 2015); most commonly, educators reported challenging homophobia, using inclusive language and examples, addressing LGBTQ topics in health and family units, and including LGBTQ rights when discussing human rights (Taylor et al., 2015, p. 92). However, while these attempts at LGBTQ inclusion are increasingly common, the need for greater resources and professional development is still evident, as roughly one in five educators reported not knowing of any LGBTQ education resources, including inclusive curriculum guides (Taylor et al., 2015).

Study methods

Recruitment of participants

The research team secured the endorsement of over 40 national, provincial and territorial school system organizations to encourage school districts to participate (see page 3 for full list). The heads of all 394 School Districts in the publicly funded school systems of Canada were invited by email in French or English as appropriate to participate in an online survey. Participants had the option of entering a draw for an iPad mini (which virtually all did).

Instrument

The survey was hosted online by *FluidSurveys* and made available in French and English.

Respondents were first asked for their province, school district name, and the number of schools in their district. They were then asked whether their districts had implemented particular interventions and at what level (e.g., senior only, all schools). Interventions included the following: LGBTQ-inclusive policy, components of inclusive policy, generic policy, GSAs, curriculum, anti-bullying events, staff resources, student resources, transgender harassment, transgender-specific PD, transition support, and support for LGBTQ staff.

Respondents who answered "yes" to an intervention question were asked to "check all that apply" in a list of possible hoped for and perceived results in implementing the intervention (see "Limitations" below). Results included harassment-related benefits (reduced use of that's so gay/*t'es gai*, reduced harassment, reduced cyberbullying, increased reporting when harassed), psychological benefits (improved self-esteem, mental health, reduced suicidality), behavioural benefits (less high-risk behaviour, improved performance/attendance at school), and social benefits (more attached, more inclusion, peer support, staff support); respondents could also check "Other" and specify additional benefits. For some interventions we asked additional questions (e.g., for the question on GSAs, "What are these clubs called?"; for the question on curriculum, "Is LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum mandated? At what level?")

Respondents who answered "no" to an intervention question were asked to "check all that apply" in a list of possible reasons for not implementing the intervention, including projected opposition (from parents, staff, community or religious groups), personal disapproval on religious grounds, not wanting to imply approval of homosexuality, believing that homophobic harassment does not warrant special attention, believing there are no or few such incidents in their districts, and believing generic policy is adequate. Respondents could again check "Other" and specify additional reasons for not implementing specific interventions.

The survey ended with several open-ended questions that invited comments on discontinued interventions, especially effective interventions and innovative approaches. Respondents who indicated willingness to be contacted for possible follow-up were asked to provide their name, position and contact details.

Sample

Data collection occurred during the period from February through June 2014 with 141 school districts (36%) participating. These districts comprise approximately 48% of Canadian schools (n=6476), and approximately 50% of Canadian teachers (n=128,131) and 2,403,372 students from pre-kindergarten through Grade 12. (Statistics Canada, nd). The sample is representative of Canadian school districts regionally, by location (e.g., urban/rural/remote/ etc.) and by religious affiliation (i.e., secular/Catholic):

Catholic School Districts = 9% (n=12)
Secular School Districts = 91% (n=129)

Rural = 70% (n=99)
Urban = 30% (n=42)

BC = 13% (n=19)
AB = 13% (n=19)
SK = 4% (n=6)
MB = 16% (n=22)
ON = 21% (n=29)
QC = 23% (n=32)
Atlantic = 7% (n=10)
North = 3% (n=4)

Note: There were multiple responses from some of the larger districts to cover various areas of responsibility addressed by the survey, so the actual respondent n was 200, representing 141 districts. We manually merged the multiples where possible (because respondents answered different sections corresponding to their own portfolios) and weighted districts with multiple responses to 1 where not possible (because respondents answered overlapping sections with different answers).

FIGURE 1: National Inventory—Response rates by region

National Inventory of School Interventions to Promote Well-Being and School Connectedness Among LGBTQ Youth

SCHOOL DISTRICT COVERAGE BY PROVINCE/TERRITORY

The North 25%

British Columbia 32%

Saskatchewan 21%

Alberta 31%

Manitoba 56%

Quebec 44%

Ontario 38%

Atlantic Provinces 42%

Out of **394** school districts in Canada, **141**—or **36%** of all Canadian school districts—participated in the survey.

Analyses

After the data collection process was complete, univariate and bivariate analyses were prepared. Notably, cross-tabulations with chi-square (x^2) estimations and frequency distributions were programmed using IBM SPSS. Unfortunately, the presence of relatively small sample sizes (n<10) diminished the ability to use all bivariate analyses. Finally, effect sizes were calculated for chi-square using phi.

Throughout this report the denominators (e.g., x of denominator y) vary depending on the number of districts responding to a given question. Decimal values of .5 or above are rounded up to integer values (e.g., 4.5 becomes 5); in some cases this means that totals will not add up to 100%.

Decimal values and results of significance testing will be reported in peer-reviewed publications.

Limitations

We had to combine "hoped for" and "perceived" outcomes into a single category because a large number of respondents evidently misunderstood the question matrix instructions and chose one or another but rarely both. The survey was fairly long and had a correspondingly high attrition rate for latter sections.

Results

LGBTQ-inclusive education policies

Over a third (38%, or 48 of 128) of respondents reported that their district has a policy that specifically addresses LGBTQ-inclusive education.

Not surprisingly, given the uneven levels of attention to LGBTQ-inclusive education at the provincial level across the country, there was substantial regional variation, with nearly two-thirds (65%, 11 of 17) of BC and 56% (5 of 9) of Atlantic superintendents reporting having a specific LGBTQ-inclusive policy, but only 17% (3 of 18) of participants from the neighbouring province of Alberta and 19% (5 of 27) from Québec indicating having one. (Note: This survey was conducted in the early months of Bill 13 in Ontario, Bill 18 in Manitoba, and Bill 56 in Québec, each of which mandates districts to support LGBTQ inclusion and safety, which suggests that numbers would be higher in those provinces now. Bills 13 and 18 also mandate that districts implement GSAs on student request.)

FIGURE 2: **LGBTQ-inclusive policy by region**
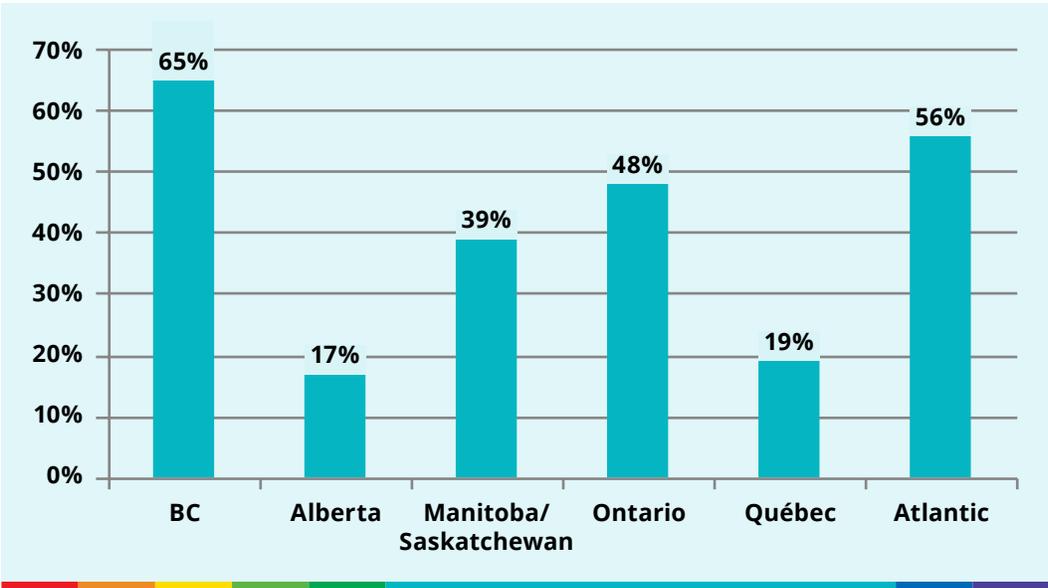
Almost all (98%) of the LGBTQ-inclusive policies covered issues pertaining to harassment, which reflects the common origins of such policies in a context of needing to respond to bullying of LGBTQ students and deaths of bullied LGBTQ students by suicide.

The majority of policies also emphasized inclusion in the curriculum (79%), professional development for staff (67%), and GSA clubs or some other club that focuses on LGBTQ inclusion (63%). There was little regional variation, with the exception of GSAs. For example, all superintendents from Manitoba districts that had LGBTQ-inclusive policies reported that GSAs were a part of their policy, compared to only 46% of BC participants.[1] These differences may be accounted for by the relative emphasis placed on the importance of GSAs at the Ministry level: i.e., very strong government emphasis in Manitoba, no government emphasis in BC.

A quarter (26%) of superintendents reported that their LGBTQ-inclusive policy was not yet thoroughly implemented in the schools in their district. Of those who indicated that their LGBTQ policy was implemented, nearly all (94%) reported that it was thoroughly implemented in the senior grades within their district, while 60% reported it being implemented in the middle grades, and 57% in early grades. LGBTQ inclusion is sometimes viewed as irrelevant before senior years. While the extent of implementation is lower in middle and early years, it is notable in this context that the majority of superintendents with LGBTQ-inclusive policies report having implemented them at all grade levels.

[1] Data from the Northern region could not be published due to low sample size distributions.

FIGURE 3: Results hoped for and/or achieved by implementing LGBTQ-inclusive education policy
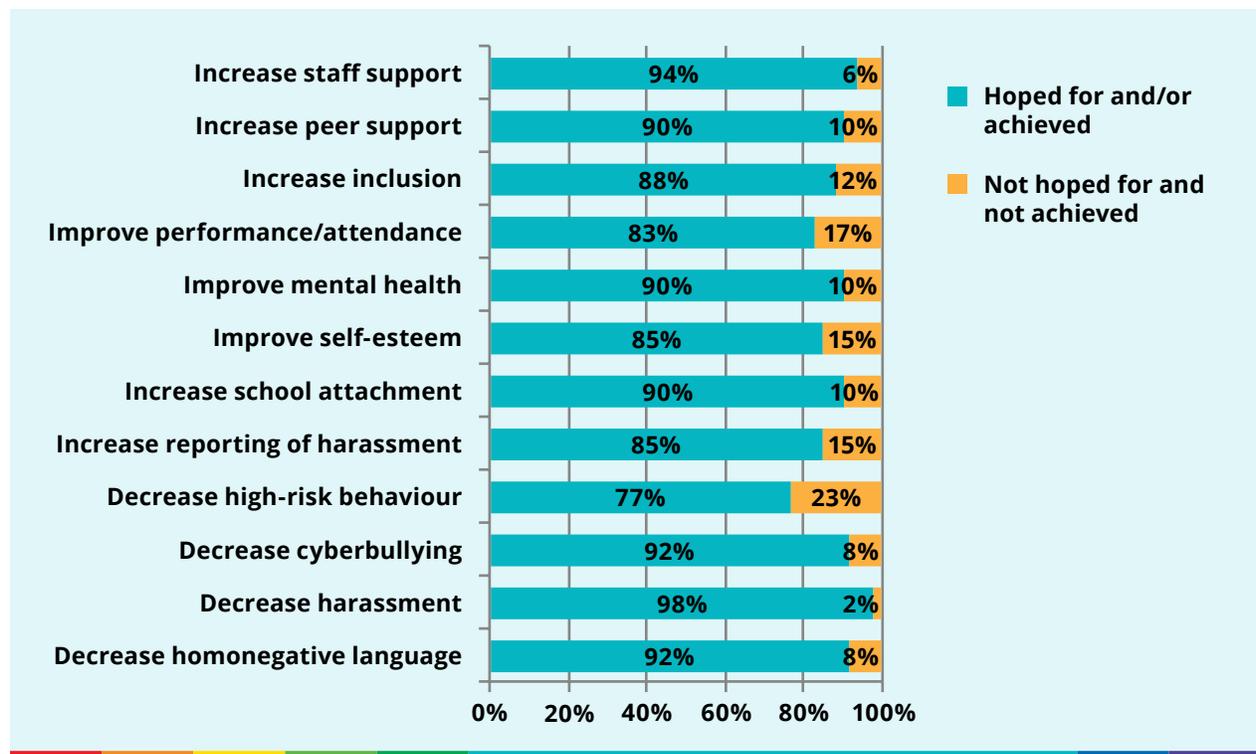
Outcome	Hoped for and/or achieved	Not hoped for and not achieved
Increase staff support	94%	6%
Increase peer support	90%	10%
Increase inclusion	88%	12%
Improve performance/attendance	83%	17%
Improve mental health	90%	10%
Improve self-esteem	85%	15%
Increase school attachment	90%	10%
Increase reporting of harassment	85%	15%
Decrease high-risk behaviour	77%	23%
Decrease cyberbullying	92%	8%
Decrease harassment	98%	2%
Decrease homonegative language	92%	8%

Superintendents were given a list of outcomes, and were asked which results they hoped for and which they felt had been at least somewhat achieved from implementing an LGBTQ-inclusive education policy. As noted in Figure 3, respondents with LGBTQ-inclusive education policy were most likely to associate such policy with less harassment (98%), followed by increased staff support (94%), less homonegative language (92%), less cyberbullying (92%), increased peer support (90%), increased school attachment (90%), improved mental health (90%), increased LGBTQ inclusion (88%), increased reporting of harassment (85%), and improved self-esteem (85%), improved performance/attendance (83%), and less high-risk behaviour among LGBTQ youth (77%).

Superintendents who reported that their school district did not have an LGBTQ-inclusive education policy were asked why they had not implemented such a policy. Over half (56%) felt that a generic policy adequately addressed homophobic harassment, while 13% reported that an LGBTQ-inclusive policy was not necessary because there was no or very little homophobic harassment in their school district. A further 24% indicated that they were in the process of developing, or looking towards developing, an LGBTQ-inclusive education policy in the future.

Multiple policy components

We analyzed differences between districts in terms of the inclusion of their four most common components of LGBTQ-specific policies: harassment, curricular inclusion, professional development for staff (PD), and GSAs. Much smaller numbers (<5 in each case) reported other policy components such as school community partnerships, safe space or safe contact, or gender neutral washrooms.

Almost a third of districts (30%, or 41 of 139 districts) reported none of the four key policy components, with 25% (34 districts) reporting one of the four; 19% (26) reporting two; 20% (28 districts), three; and 7% (10 districts) reporting all four components.

Of the 48 districts reporting policy with at least one of the four policy components, harassment was the most common (98%, or 47 districts), followed by curriculum (79%, 38 of 48), PD (67%, 32 districts) and GSAs (63%, or 30 districts).

Ten districts (7%, 10 of 139) reported having LGBTQ-specific policy that covered all four components. It would be interesting to compare the situation of LGBTQ students in these districts to those in districts with no policy or only one component.

Districts with at least one of the LGBTQ-specific policy components were much more likely to report that it had been implemented thoroughly in all schools at the senior years level (94%, or 33 of 35) than in early years (57%, or 20 districts) or in middle years (60%, 21 districts). Districts with more policy components were more likely to have implemented it than districts with fewer policy components. For example, all districts (100%) with three (12 districts) or four (9 districts) of the key policy components had implemented the policy thoroughly in all senior years schools, compared to 88% (7 districts) of those in one-component districts.

Regionally, we found that school districts in Alberta (42%, or 8 of 19) and Québec (42%, or 13 of 31) were most likely to have none of the four policy components and Manitoba/ Saskatchewan (26%, 7 of 27) least likely to have none. There was less variation in the percentage of districts reporting all four components, ranging from none in Alberta and Québec to 17% in Ontario (5 of 29 districts).

In terms of district size, we found that districts with 10 or fewer schools were most likely to have none of the key policy components (46%, or 11 of 24), compared to 31% (11 of 35) districts with 11 to 20 schools, 28% (5 of 18) districts with 21 to 30 schools, 32% (8 of 25) districts with 31 to 50 schools, 26% (5 of 19) districts with 51 to 100 schools, and too few too report in districts with 100 or more schools. Districts with 10 or fewer schools were also most likely to have only one of the key policy components (33%, 8 of 24 districts), and no districts with 10 or fewer schools had all four key policy components. The largest 18 districts were most likely to have either three (50%, 9 of 18) or four (28%, 5 of 18) of the key policy components.

Catholic school districts were only slightly less likely than secular ones to have none of the key components (Catholic 27%, or <5 of 15 districts vs. secular 30%, or 37 of 124 districts) but were far more likely to have only one component (47%, or 7 of Catholic vs. 22%, or 27 of secular districts). Catholic districts were somewhat less likely to have two (13%, or 2) or three (13%, or 2) of the components than secular districts (two=19% or 24 districts, or three=21% or 26 districts). No Catholic districts reported having all four policy components, compared to 8% (or 10), of the secular districts.

Québec/Rest of Canada

There are interesting differences in the regulatory contexts of Québec compared to other parts of Canada, which may account for some of the differences found with respect to policy. In addition, legislation requiring the establishment of an anti-homophobia policy in every school was just being implemented at the time of our study. Only 19% (5) of Québec districts reported having a policy on LGBTQ-inclusive education, compared to 57% (55) of districts outside Québec. Similarly, Québec districts were much less likely to report having a harassment policy component (50%, or 5 vs. 82%, or 41 districts outside Québec), a curriculum component (40%, or 4 districts vs. 67%, or 33 districts outside Québec), a professional development component (20%, or 2 vs. 58%, or 29 outside Québec), or a GSA component (none vs. 58%, or 29 districts outside Québec).

In answer to the question, *Has your policy been thoroughly implemented in all schools?*, 30% (<5) of Québec districts answering the question reported "yes, in senior years" compared to 60% (30 of 50) of districts outside Québec. As well, 20% (<5) reported "yes, in middle years" compared to 38% (19 of 50) in the rest of Canada, and only 10% (<5) reported "yes, in early years" compared to 38% (19 districts) in the rest of Canada.

Generic inclusive education policies with no special attention to LGBTQ inclusion

Overall, 42% of districts (59 of 141) indicated they endeavoured to protect LGBTQ students' wellbeing through generic inclusive education policies with no special attention to LGBTQ students. There was relatively little provincial variation.

Seventeen percent (or 10 of 59) superintendents reported that their generic inclusive education policies were not yet thoroughly implemented in the schools in their district. Of those who indicated that their generic inclusive education policy had been implemented (46 superintendents, 3 choose not to answer), there was little variation among grade levels. The vast majority reported that the policy was thoroughly implemented in the senior grades (91%, 42 districts), middle grades (94%, 43 districts), and in early years (87%, 40 districts).

FIGURE 4: Results hoped for and/or achieved by implementing generic inclusive education policies with no special attention to LGBTQ inclusion
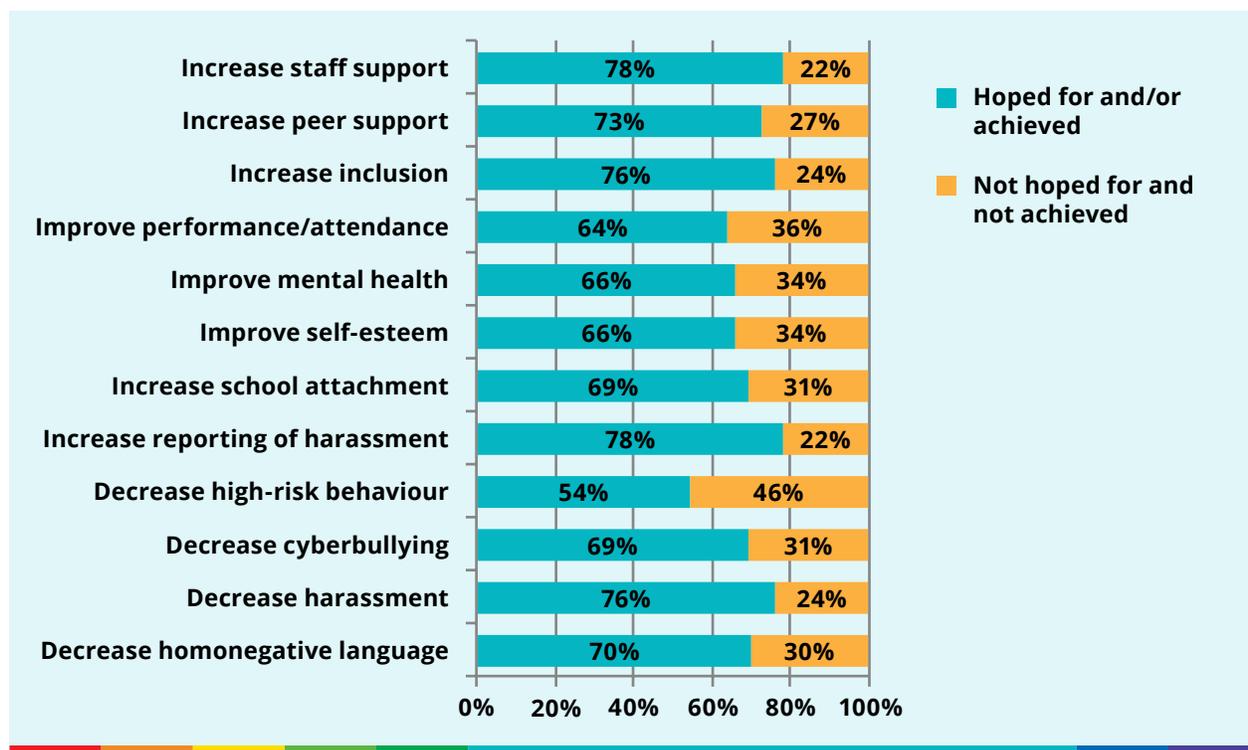
Superintendents were given a list of outcomes benefitting LGBTQ students and were asked which results they hoped for and which they felt had been at least somewhat achieved from the implementation of a generic inclusive education policy with no special attention to LGBTQ inclusion. As noted in Figure 4, superintendents with generic policies were most likely to have associated them with outcomes that can often be more readily seen: increased staff support for LGBTQ students (78%), increased reporting by LGBTQ students who were harassed (78%), less harassment (76%), increased LGBTQ inclusion (76%), and increased peer support for LGBTQ students (73%). Fewer super-intendents associated generic policies with outcomes that are harder to see from the outside: increased school attachment (69%), less cyber-bullying (69%), improved mental health (66%), improved self-esteem (66%), and improved performance/attendance among LGBTQ students (64%). In addition, however, it is notable that one of the most easily detected outcomes – less homonegative language (70%) – was not in the top rank of outcomes associated with generic policy. Superintendents were least likely to associate generic policies with less high-risk behaviour among LGBTQ students, with only 54% either hoping for or perceiving such a reduction, compared to 77% of superintendents with LGBTQ-specific policies associating them with a reduction in high-risk behaviour.

Comparison of findings for generic and LGBTQ-specific policies

Overall, superintendents from districts with generic policies were much less likely to associate their policies with positive outcomes for LGBTQ students than were super-intendents from districts with LGBTQ-specific policies. For example, 70% of those with generic policies associated their policy with reduced usage of homonegative language, compared to 92% of those from districts with LGBTQ-specific policies. A comparison of the data in Figures 3 and 4 shows a gap of 12 to 24 points between districts with generic policies and districts with LGBTQ-specific policies on most of the other indicators as well (e.g., 66% mental health in generic districts, 90% in specific districts). In fact, the only outcome which superintendents with generic policies were almost as likely to associate with benefits to LGBTQ students was increased reporting of harassment (78% generic vs. 85% specific), perhaps because some districts conceptualize the wellbeing of LGBTQ students mostly in terms of protection from harassment.

There is a similar gap evident in the comparison of implementation patterns for generic and LGBTQ-specific policies, which may reflect a perception that the latter are more difficult to implement and are not relevant in early or middle years. Seventeen percent of superintendents with generic policies reported that they were not yet thoroughly implemented in the schools in their district, compared to 26% of superintendents with LGBTQ-specific policies. Although those with generic and those with LGBTQ-specific policies were similarly likely to report that their policy had been thoroughly implemented in senior years (91% vs. 94%), those with generic policies were much more likely to report that their policy had been thoroughly implemented at early and middle grade levels: 94% in middle years, versus 60% for those with LGBTQ-specific policies, and 87% in early years, versus 57% for those with specific policies.

Freedom of gender expression and transgender identity policies

Superintendents were asked if their districts had any policies that protect freedom of gender expression or transgender identity. Far fewer superintendents responded to this series of questions, which may suggest that their districts did not have policies on gender expression or transgender identity (note: these lower numbers may reflect participant attrition as this series of questions was asked toward the end of the survey).

Of those who did respond, one-third of respondents (34%, or 35 of 102) indicated that they have a policy that addressed harassment on the grounds of gender expression, 24% (24 of 102 districts) indicated they have a policy that addressed harassment on the grounds of transgender or transsexual identity, and 13% (13 of 102) indicated they have a policy covering support for transsexual students transitioning from male to female or vice versa. Additionally, 35% (36 of 102) indicated "other"; many who selected the "other" category indicated that these policies were in progress, they had a generic policy, or they were following provincial human rights codes or Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Eighty-four percent of participants who reported that they have a policy addressing harassment based on gender expression (26 of 31) indicated that all or some of their schools have this policy implemented (10% in all secondary schools, in only 3 of 31 districts; 74% in all schools, 23 of 31 districts).

Only 9 districts reported that they had resources available for elementary teachers on gender expression. Of those who did, only a few reported the policies had been implemented in some or all of their schools (29% in some elementary schools, 36% in all elementary schools).

Harassment based on transgender or transsexual identity

Seventeen districts (81% of the 21 who answered the question) indicated that they have a policy addressing harassment based on transgender or transsexual identity. Of those, only one indicated that the policy had been implemented in all secondary schools only, and 76% that it had been implemented in all schools. Only 9 districts reported that they had related resources available for elementary school teachers. However, somewhat more districts (16%, or 15 of 93) reported that they offered workshops on harassment on the grounds of transgender or transsexual identity.

Support for transitioning transsexual students

Thirteen percent (13 of 102) indicated that they have a policy that supports transitioning students. Further, of participants who noted that they have specific resources available for elementary teachers on supporting transitioning students, 70% (or 7) indicated that all or some of their schools have this policy implemented (20% in some elementary schools, 50% in all elementary schools). More districts (12%, or 11 of 93) reported that they offered workshops on supporting transitioning students.

Gay-Straight Alliance/Gender and Sexuality Alliance

Over half (51%, or 62 of 122) of respondents reported that their district has a Gay-Straight Alliance/Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) or LGBTQ-specific club, followed by 41% (50 of 122) who indicated they had diversity or social justice clubs that included a focus on LGBTQ among other issues, 59% (72 of 122) who indicated they had generic anti-bullying/respectful school clubs, and 12% (15 of 122) who indicated they had no clubs that address bullying or respectful schools. Further, 38% (46 of 122) of participants indicated that their district had GSAs or equivalent social justice clubs at the early or middle years (K–8) levels.

The majority of participants (53%, or 57 of 107) with clubs indicated their club was called "Gay-Straight Alliance," followed by "Social Justice Club" (25%, or 27 districts), "Diversity Club" (13%, or 14), "Rainbow Club" (10%, or 11), and "Respecting Difference Club" (8%, or 9). (Note: "Respecting Differences Club" is the term advocated for by the Ontario Catholic Schools Trustees' Association for use in Ontario's publicly funded Catholic School Districts.)

It is noteworthy that, as with the regional variation found in GSAs being included as a component of LGBTQ-inclusive policy (as discussed under Q2 above), there were interesting variations found between provinces on the presence of GSAs or LGBTQ-specific clubs. In particular, districts in BC (94%, or 16 of 17), Ontario (89%, or 23 of 26), and in the Atlantic provinces (88%, 7 of 8 districts) were more likely to have such clubs than districts in Manitoba/Saskatchewan (56%, 14 of 25), Alberta (47%, 8 of 17), or Québec (31%, 8 of 26). Superintendents from Alberta (53%, 9 of 17) and Québec (69%, 18 of 26) were much more likely to report having generic clubs or no clubs at all. Further, urban school districts (84%, 32 of 38 districts) were much more likely than rural districts (54%, 45 of 84) to have a GSA or other LGBTQ-specific club.

FIGURE 5: **Results hoped for and/or achieved by implementing GSAs or LGBTQ-specific clubs**

	Hoped for and/or achieved	Not hoped for and not achieved
Increase staff support	88%	12%
Increase peer support	91%	9%
Increase inclusion	91%	9%
Improve performance/attendance	82%	18%
Improve mental health	86%	14%
Improve self-esteem	84%	16%
Increase school attachment	87%	13%
Increase reporting of harassment	88%	12%
Decrease high-risk behaviour	73%	27%
Decrease cyberbullying	86%	14%
Decrease harassment	87%	13%
Decrease homonegative language	90%	10%

Superintendents who reported that they had GSAs or LGBTQ-themed clubs were given a list of outcomes and were asked which results they hoped for or perceived as at least somewhat achieved from the implementation of their GSA or other LGBTQ-specific club. As noted in Figure 5, superintendents were most likely to associate such clubs with increased peer support (91%) upon implementing a GSA or LGBTQ-specific club, followed by increased inclusion (91%), less homonegative language (90%), increased staff support (88%), increased reporting of harassment (88%), less harassment (87%), increased school attachment (87%), less cyberbullying (86%), improved mental health/reduced suicidal behaviour (86%), improved self-esteem (84%), improved performance/attendance (82%), and less high-risk behaviour among LGBTQ youth (73%). It is notable, given the emphasis in provincial legislation (Ontario, Manitoba, and more recently Alberta) placed on establishing GSAs that superintendents were somewhat less likely to associate GSAs with reduced harassment for LGBTQ students than they were to associate LGBTQ-inclusive policy with such outcomes (98% for policy vs. 87% for GSAs/clubs).

Superintendents who reported that their school district did not have a GSA (or other LGBTQ-specific clubs such as Rainbow Clubs) were asked why they had not implemented such a policy. Forty percent (12 of 30 superintendents) felt that a generic policy adequately addressed homophobic harassment, while another 17% (5 of 30) reported that an LGBTQ-inclusive policy was not necessary because there was no or very little homophobic harassment in their school district. (We do not know whether their confidence is actually reflected either in lower rates of homophobic harassment in their districts or in effective response to homophobic harassment.) No one reported that they had not developed a GSA club for reasons of parental, community, or religious opposition or on the grounds of their own personal religious convictions.

LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum

Almost one-third of superintendents (32%, 31 of 96) who answered the question about curriculum indicated that schools in their district do have LGBTQ-inclusive curricula. Almost as many (45) chose not to answer the question, which may indicate uncertainty; in any case, only 22% (31 of 141) of all superintendents said their districts have LGBTQ-inclusive curricula. Of those who did indicate LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, 93% (28 of 30) indicated that there are LGBTQ-inclusive curricula in elementary schools in their district. Superintentents in BC (40%, 6 of 15), Ontario (52%, 11 of 21), and the Atlantic provinces (67%, 2 of 3) were more likely to report having LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum than Alberta (29%, 4 of 14), Manitoba/Saskatchewan (22%, 4 of 18), or Québec (18%, 4 of 22). Urban districts (46%, or 13 of 28) were much more likely than rural districts (27%, 18 of 68) to have LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum.

Forty-two percent (13 of 31) of participants who indicated that they have LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum indicated that it is mandated by provincial/territorial policy, followed by mandatory by division (32%, or 10 of 31) and mandatory by legislation (16%, or 5 of 31). Notably, 32% (10 of 31) indicated that their LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum was not mandatory.

Of those with curriculum, 87% (27 of 31) reported that LGBTQ content appears in the subject area of Health/Healthy Relationships in their school district, followed by Language Arts (48%, 15 of 31) and History/Social Studies (42%, or 13 of 31). Some participants also indicated that many other subject areas in their district included LGBTQ content (55%, or 17 of 31).

Superintendents who reported that their school district did not have an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum were asked why they have not implemented such a policy. One-third (34%, or 22 of 65) of those without curriculum reported that a generic policy adequately addressed homophobic harassment, while another 22% (14 of 65) reported that LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum was not necessary because there was no or very little homophobic harassment in their school district. Eleven percent (7 of 65) reported that they wanted to implement LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum but that they had insufficient resources. It is notable that very few districts (<5) reported personal or community opposition on religious grounds.

Policy supporting LGBTQ content in the classroom

Sixteen percent of participants (15 of 97) indicate that they do have a policy support-
ing teachers who include LGBTQ-related content in their curriculum, if the content is
specific to a Ministry-approved or district-approved curriculum, and a further 18% of
participants (17 of 97) indicate they have such a policy which applies as long as the
content is age-appropriate and relevant to the curriculum. Regionally, participants in
Ontario were most likely to agree that they had a policy supporting LGBTQ content in
the classroom (57%, or 12 of 21), while participants in Québec were least likely (15%, or
3 of 20). Urban participants (46%, or 16 of 35) were much more likely to report they had
such a policy supporting LGBTQ content in the classroom than were rural participants
(26%, or 16 of 62).

However, the majority of participants indicated they do not have a policy supporting
teachers who include LGBTQ-related content (67%, 65 of 97). There was great regional
variation on this question, from 43% (9 of 21) in Ontario saying they had no such policy
to 75% (9 of 12) in Alberta and 75% (12 of 16) in BC, and 85% (17 of 20) in Québec. Rural
districts (74%, 46 of 62) were more likely than urban districts (54%, 19 of 35) to report
they had no such policy.

Superintendents who reported that their school district did not have a policy support-
ing teachers who include LGBTQ-related content were asked why they have not imple-
mented such a policy. Almost half (49%, or 32 of 65) felt that a generic policy adequately
addressed homophobic harassment, while another 26% (17 of 65) reported that an
LGBTQ-inclusive policy was not necessary because there were no or very few incidents
of homophobic harassment in their school district.

Generic anti-bullying programs and/or events

Almost all participants (99%, or 113 of 114) indicated their school district had generic anti-bullying programs and/or events. There was close to no regional variation between the provinces.

FIGURE 6: Results hoped for and/or achieved from implementing generic anti-bullying programs and/or events
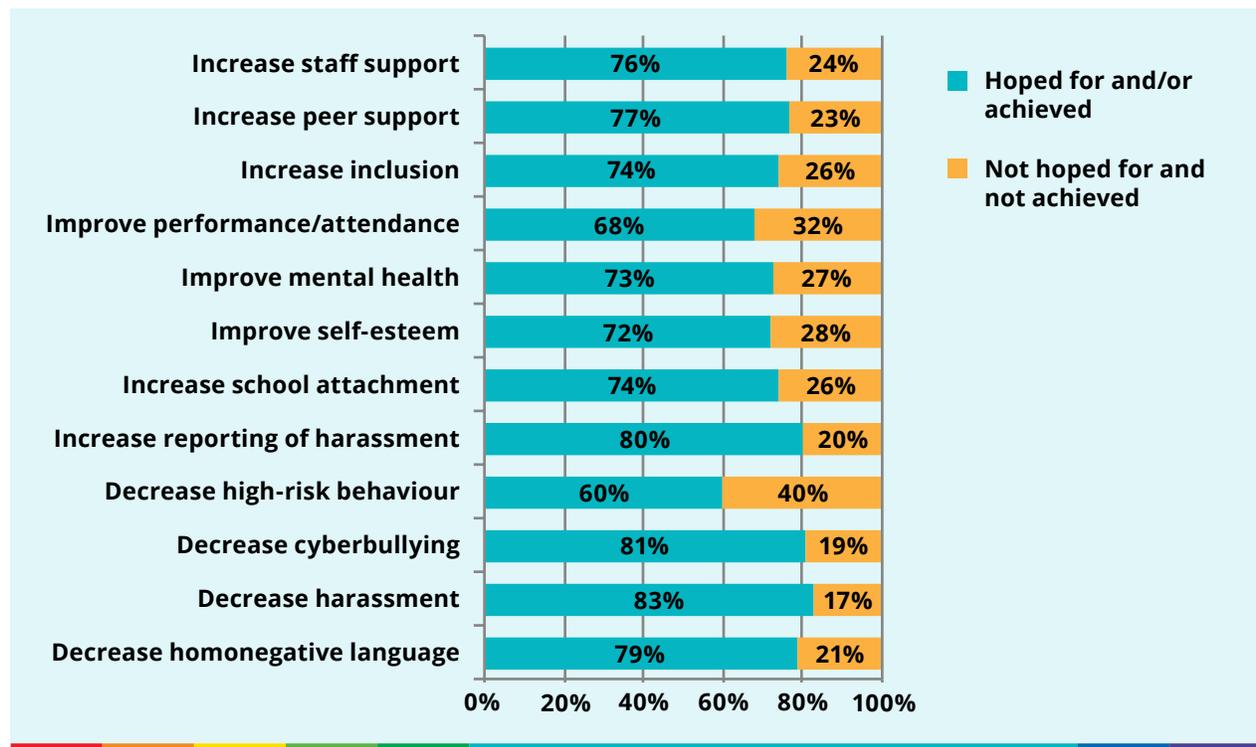
| Outcome	Hoped for and/or achieved	Not hoped for and not achieved
Increase staff support	76%	24%
Increase peer support	77%	23%
Increase inclusion	74%	26%
Improve performance/attendance	68%	32%
Improve mental health	73%	27%
Improve self-esteem	72%	28%
Increase school attachment	74%	26%
Increase reporting of harassment	80%	20%
Decrease high-risk behaviour	60%	40%
Decrease cyberbullying	81%	19%
Decrease harassment	83%	17%
Decrease homonegative language	79%	21%

Superintendents were given a list of outcomes and were asked which results they hoped for and which they felt had been at least somewhat achieved from the implementation of generic anti-bullying programs and/or events. As indicated in Figure 6, participants were most likely to associate such programs and events with less harassment of LGBTQ youth (83%), less cyberbullying (81%), increased reporting of harassment (80%), less homonegative language (79%), increased peer support (77%), and increased staff support (76%). Fewer respondents hoped for and/or achieved increased school attachment (74%), increased inclusion (74%), improved mental health/reduced suicidal behaviour (73%), improved self-esteem (72%), improved performance/attendance (68%), and less high-risk behaviour among LGBTQ youth (60%) from implementing a generic anti-bullying policy.

Anti-homophobia/LGBTQ-inclusion events

Seventy-four percent of participants (79 of 107) indicated schools in their district had anti-homophobia/LGBTQ-inclusion events (such as Pride month events, Day of Pink, or Ally week).

There was some regional variation among the provinces. All seven of the superintendents from the Atlantic provinces indicated they had anti-homophobia/LGBTQ-inclusion events (such as Pride month events, Day of Pink, or Ally week) compared to 80% (12 of 15) of participants in BC and only 50% (8 of 16) in Alberta. Catholic school districts (57%, 4 of 7) were less likely than secular school districts (75%, 75 of 100) to report having such events. Urban districts (84%, 31 of 37) were more likely than rural districts (69%, 48 of 70) to report having such events.

FIGURE 7: Percentage of respondents that indicate the presence of anti-homophobia/ LGBTQ-inclusive events (such as Pride month events, Day of Pink, or Ally Week) by region
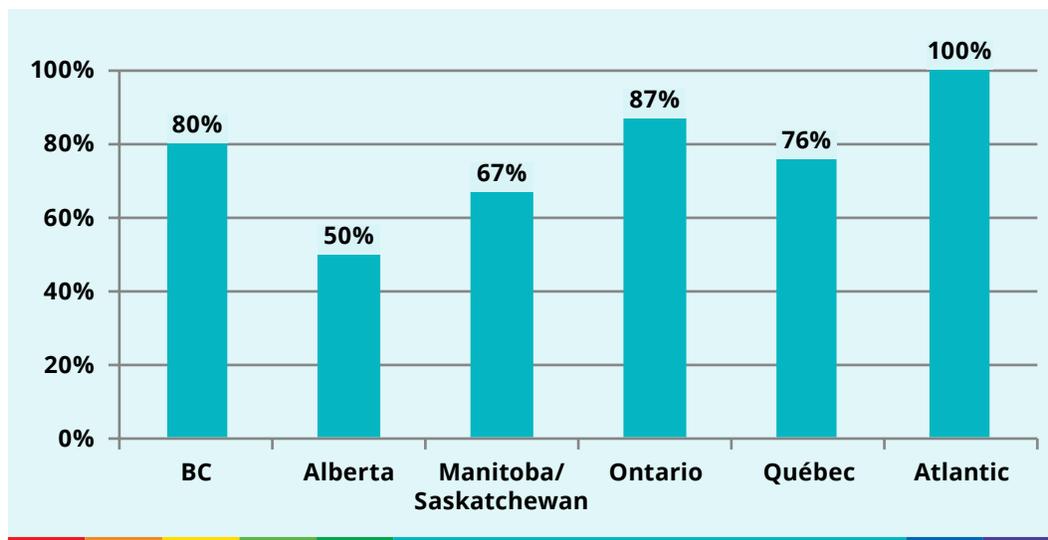
Superintendents were given a list of outcomes and were asked which results they hoped for and which they felt had been at least somewhat achieved from the implementation of anti-homophobia/LGBTQ-inclusion events (such as Pride month events, Day of Pink, or Ally Week). As noted in Figure 8, the greatest number of respondents associated implementing such events with less harassment of LGBTQ youth (80%), less homonegative language (80%), less cyberbullying (78%), increased peer support (78%), increased staff support (76%), and increased inclusion of LGBTQ youth (76%). Fewer respondents associated such events with improved self-esteem in LGBTQ youth (73%), increased school attachment (73%), increased reporting of harassment (73%), improved mental health (72%), improved performance/attendance (68%), and less high-risk behaviour of LGBTQ youth (59%) from the implementation of anti-homophobia or LGBTQ-inclusion events. It is notable that there are no dramatic differences between generic anti-bullying events and LGBTQ-specific events in terms of superintendents' likelihood of associating them with positive outcomes for LGBTQ students.

FIGURE 8: Results hoped for and/or achieved from implementing anti-homophobia/LGBTQ-inclusive events (such as Pride month events, Day of Pink, or Ally Week)

The National Inventory of School District Interventions in Support of LGBTQ Student Wellbeing
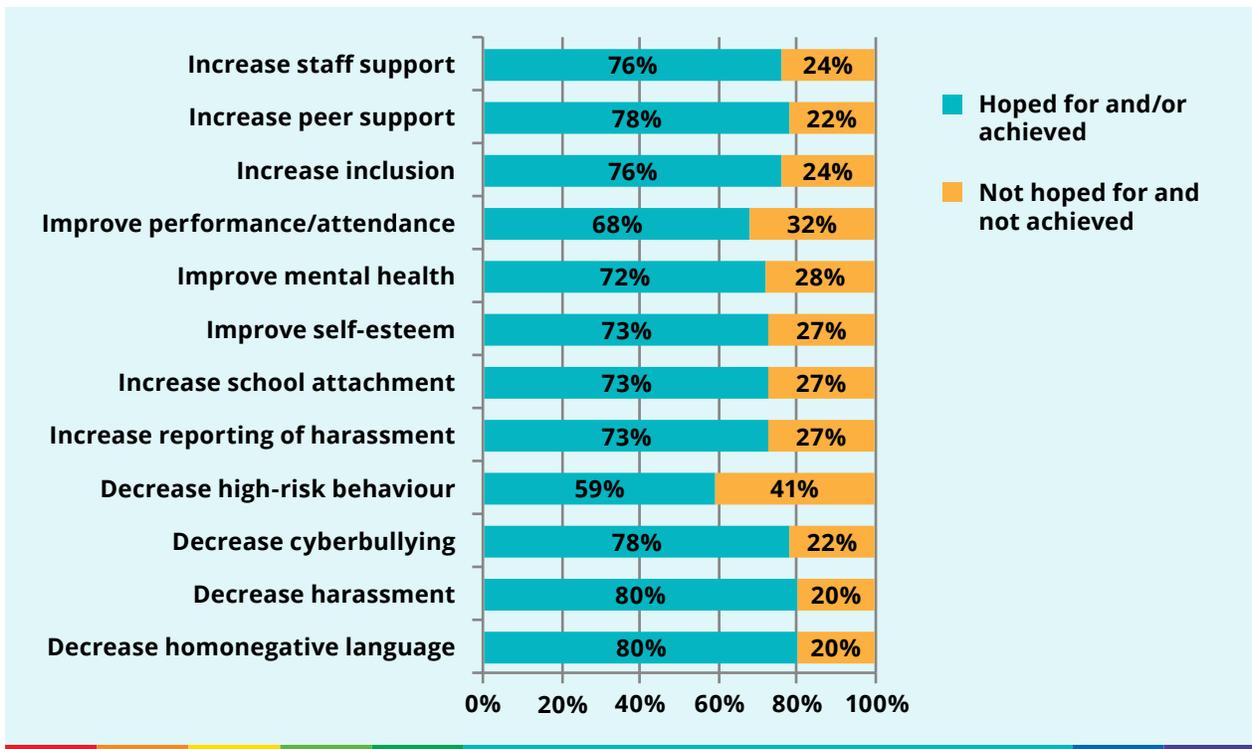
Superintendents who reported that their school district did not have anti-homophobia/ LGBTQ-inclusion events (such as Pride month events, Day of Pink, or Ally Week) were asked why they had not implemented such events. Almost half (43%, or 12 of 28) indicated that they felt the generic policy adequately addressed homophobic harassment, followed by another 25% (or 7 of 28) who reported that an LGBTQ-inclusive policy was not necessary because there were no or very few incidents of discrimination against LGBTQ students in their school district.

Employment policies

Very few participants indicated that their school district employment policies do not protect LGBTQ teachers and school staff (7%, 6 of 92). Regional results ranged from 17% in Alberta to none in Ontario and the Atlantic provinces, with there being no significant difference between urban and rural districts.

Eighty-six percent of participants (79 of 92) indicated that sexual orientation was protected in their employee discrimination policies, followed by 31% (44 of 92) with policies that protected transgender identity. Regionally, sexual orientation employment protections ranged from 67% in Alberta to 100% in Ontario and the Atlantic provinces. There was no significant difference between rural and urban districts. Transgender identity employment protections ranged from 38% in Québec to 80% in the Atlantic provinces. Further, participants from urban districts (70%, or 21 of 30) were much more likely to report that transgender identity was protected than their rural counterparts (37%, or 23 of 62).

However, much lower numbers reported that teachers could be open with students about their sexual orientation status (57%, or 52 of 92) or transgender status (41%, 38 of 92). On the question of whether teachers could be open with students about their sexual orientation, results ranged regionally from 33% (4 of 12) in Alberta to 80% (4 of 5) in the Atlantic provinces. There was only a slight difference between urban districts (60%, or 18 of 30) and rural districts (55%, or 34 of 62). Regionally, Alberta participants were least likely to report that teachers could be open about being transgender (33%, 4 of 12), while Ontario participants were most likely to report teachers could be open (50%, 9 of 18). Urban participants (47%, 14 of 30) were more likely than rural participants (39%, 24 of 62) to agree.

Only 20% (18 of 92) indicated they had tried to hire LGBTQ teachers and other staff members. Urban districts (30%, or 9 of 30) were much more likely than rural ones (15%, or 9 of 62) to have tried to hire LGBTQ staff members.
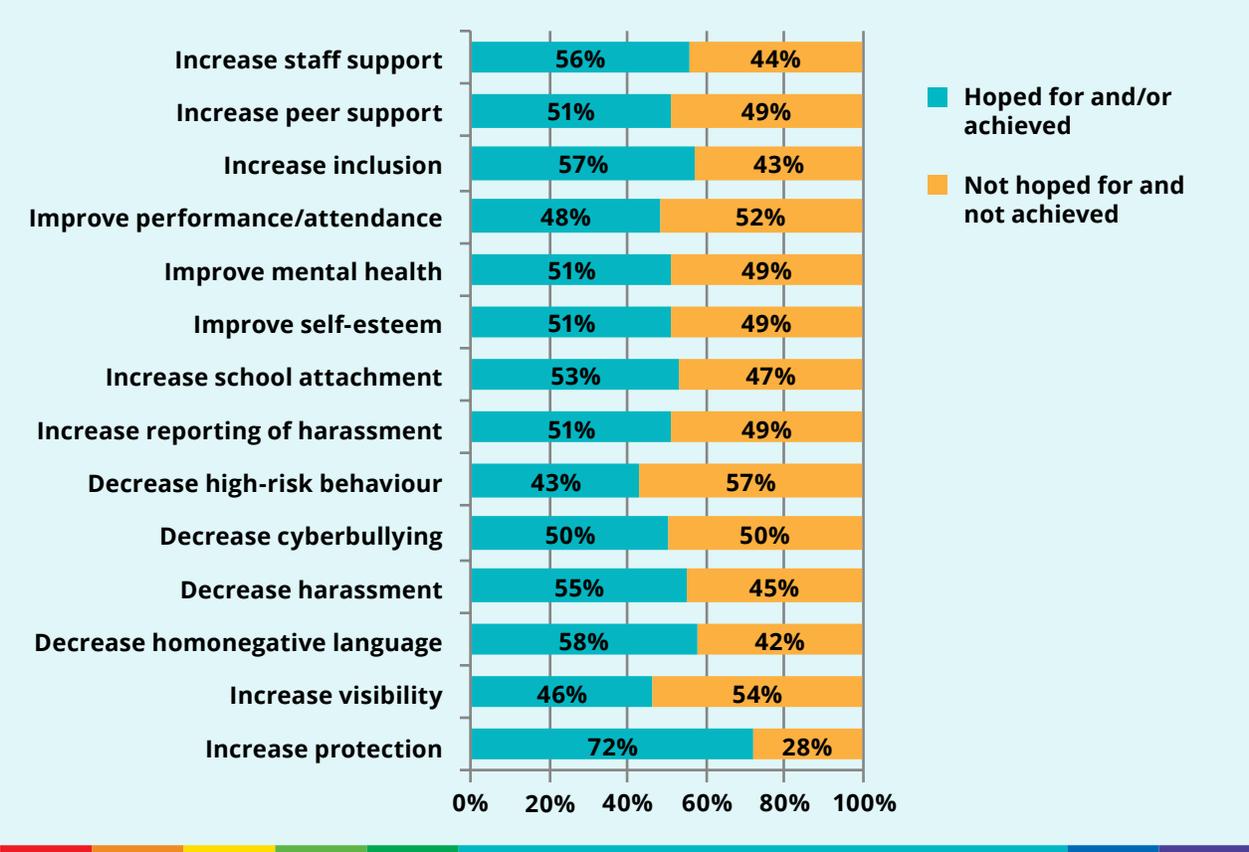
As shown in Figure 9, around half of superintendents associated employment protections for LGBTQ teachers and school staff with positive outcomes for LGBTQ students, which is a substantially lower portion than for the interventions discussed previously. Most respondents saw a connection between such employee policies and an outcome of increased protection of LGBTQ employees (72%); fewest saw a connection between such policies and reduced high-risk behaviour in LGBTQ youth (43%). They were more likely to associate such policies with (in ascending order) increased visibility of LGBTQ employees (46%), improved performance/attendance among LGBTQ students (48%), less cyber-bullying (50%), increased peer support (51%), improved mental health (51%), improved self-esteem (51%), increased reporting of harassment (51%), increased school attachment (53%), less harassment (55%), increased staff support (56%), increased LGBTQ inclusion (57%), and less homonegative language (58%).

It may be that interventions that focus more directly on student life actually do provide more beneficial outcomes for LGBTQ students. However, the importance to marginalized students of having role models in the school staff has been well established in the literature, and the connection between employment protections for LGBTQ staff and benefits to LGBTQ students warrants further investigation given the low levels of confidence found in this study.

LGBTQ-inclusive education resources for staff development

Sixty-eight percent of superintendents (69 of 101) indicated that their school district offered LGBTQ-inclusive education resources for staff development (such as curriculum support, PD opportunities, workshops).

There is some regional variation between provinces. For instance, 87% (20 of 23) of participants in Ontario indicated the presence of LGBTQ-inclusive education resources for staff development, compared to 70% (14 of 20) of participants in Québec and 62% (8 of 13) of participants in BC.

FIGURE 10: Presence of LGBTQ-inclusive education resources for staff development (such as curriculum support, PD opportunities, workshops) by region
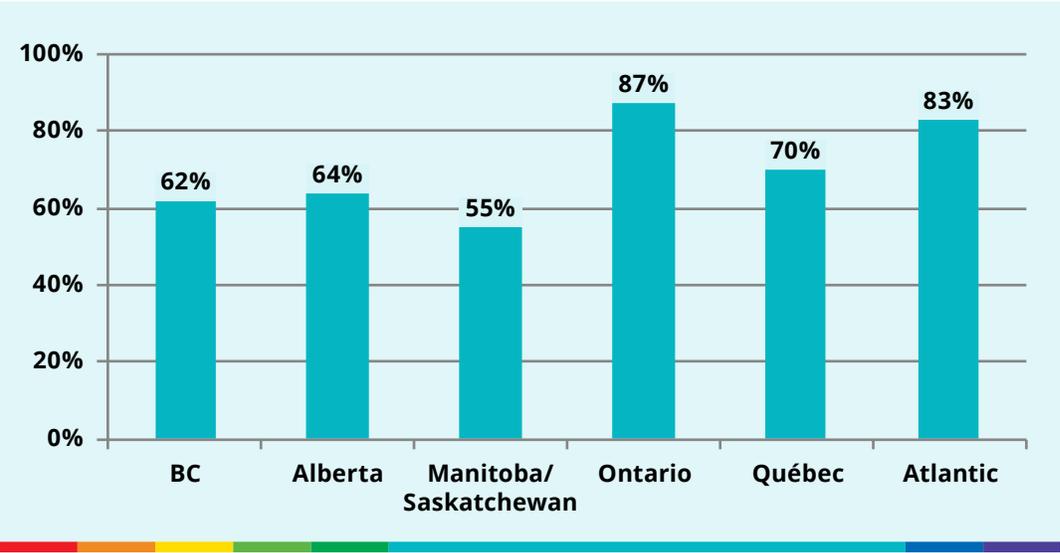
Eighty percent of participants (50 of 63) indicated that some or all of their elementary schools had LGBTQ-specific resources available for elementary teachers (40% some elementary schools, 40% all elementary schools). Twenty-one percent (13 of 63) indicated there were no specific resources for elementary teachers.

Catholic school districts (88%, or 7 of 8) were more likely than secular districts (67%, or 62 of 93) to have LGBTQ-inclusive education resources for staff development. (Note: the survey did not ask about the nature of the education resources—i.e., whether they were affirming of LGBTQ identity or not.) Urban districts (77%, or 26 of 34) were somewhat more likely than rural ones (64%, or 43 of 67).

Superintendents who indicated they had these resources (n=69) were asked what kinds of resources were available as LGBTQ-inclusive education resources for staff development. The most common resources available were: school counsellors with training in LGBTQ issues (68%), school division/district resource person on LGBTQ issues (57%), and LGBTQ web resources (e.g., egale.ca, myGSA.ca, glsen.org, pridnet.ca, pflagcanada. org) (55%). Other resources noted included other teachers with training in LGBTQ issues (46%), teacher organization committees or cohorts on LGBTQ issues (44%), teacher organization resource person/staff on LGBTQ issues (44%), LGBTQ library holdings (42%), LGBTQ community centres (e.g. 519 Church, Rainbow Resource Centre) (33%), LGBTQ curriculum guides (33%), and LGBTQ educators' networks (e.g., Global Respect in Education, Pride Education Network) (30%).

Superintendents were given a list of outcomes and were asked which results they hoped for and which they felt had been at least somewhat achieved from the implementation of LGBTQ-specific education resources for staff development. As indicated in Figure 11, respondents were most likely to report having hoped for and/or achieved increased LGBTQ inclusion (84%), less harassment of LGBTQ youth (83%), increased staff support (81%), increased peer support (81%), improved self-esteem of LGBTQ youth (80%), and less homonegative language (80%) by implementing LGBTQ-specific education resources for staff development (curriculum support, PD opportunities, workshops). Fewer respondents hoped for and/or achieved less cyberbullying (78%), increased school attachment (78%), improved mental health/reduced suicidal behaviour (77%), increased reporting of harassment (77%), improved performance/attendance (75%), and less high-risk behaviour from LGBTQ youth (61%) from the implementation of education resources for staff development.

FIGURE 11: Results hoped for and/or achieved from implementing LGBTQ-specific education resources for staff development (such as curriculum support, PD opportunities, workshops)

Category	Hoped for and/or achieved	Not hoped for and not achieved
Increase staff support	81%	19%
Increase peer support	81%	19%
Increase inclusion	84%	16%
Improve performance/attendance	75%	25%
Improve mental health	77%	23%
Improve self-esteem	80%	20%
Increase school attachment	78%	22%
Increase reporting of harassment	77%	23%
Decrease high-risk behaviour	61%	39%
Decrease cyberbullying	78%	22%
Decrease harassment	83%	17%
Decrease homonegative language	80%	20%
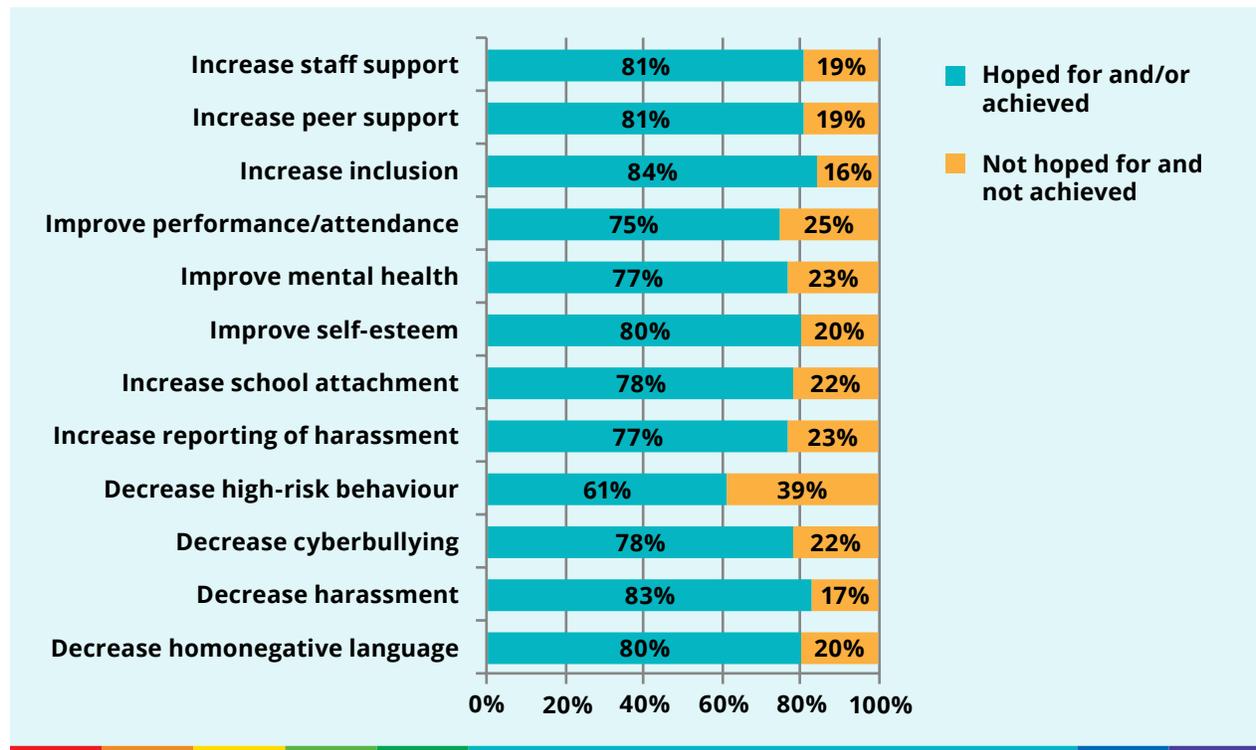
Superintendents who reported that their school district did not have LGBTQ-specific resources available for teachers (n=32) were asked why they have not implemented such resources. Some participants indicated that generic policy adequately address homophobic harassment (22%), and other participants reported that LGBTQ-inclusive education resources were not necessary because there were no or very few incidents of discrimination against LGBTQ students in their school district (25%). Nineteen percent reported that they had insufficient resources and 9% that homophobic harassment does not warrant special attention.

LGBTQ-inclusive education resources for students

Eighty-four percent of participants (82 of 98) indicated that their school district offered LGBTQ-inclusive education resources for students (such as library or guidance materials, posters, or pamphlets).

There is relatively low regional variation between the provinces in relation to the presence of LGBTQ-inclusive education resources for students. One hundred percent (5 of 5) of Atlantic participants indicated having these resources for students, compared, for instance, to 85% (11 of 13) in BC and 83% (19 of 23) in Québec.

FIGURE 12: Presence of LGBTQ-inclusive education resources for students (such as library or guidance materials, posters or pamphlets) by region
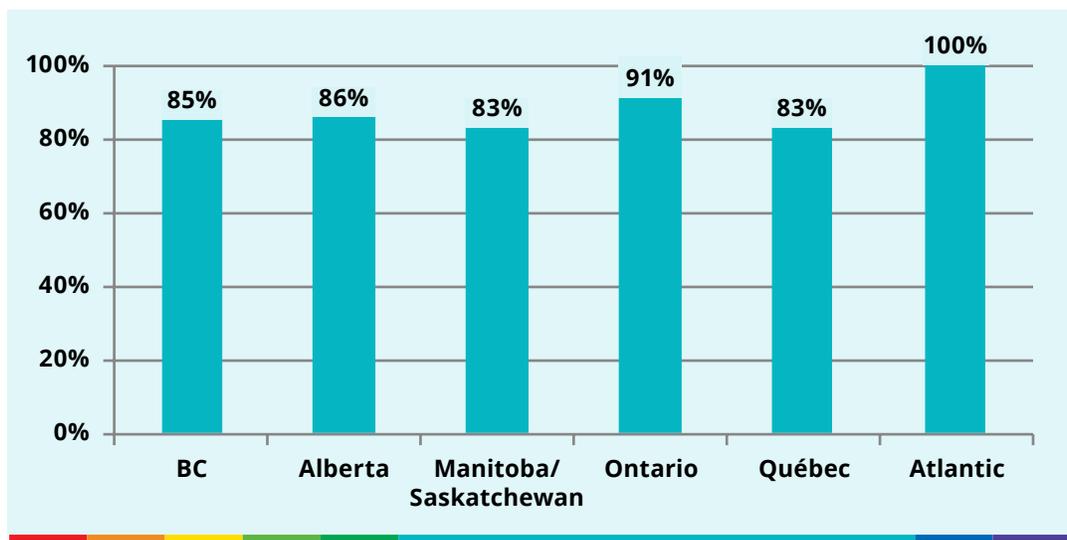
Catholic school districts (83%, or 5 of 6) and secular districts (84%, or 77 of 92) were virtually identical in offering LGBTQ-inclusive education resources for students. (Note: the survey did not ask about the nature of the resources for students—i.e., whether they were affirming of LGBTQ identity or not.)

Urban districts (86%, or 30 of 35) were slightly more likely than rural ones (83%, or 52 of 63) to offer LGBTQ-inclusive education resources for students.

Sixty-six percent of Superintendents (48 of 73) indicated that some or all elementary schools have LGBTQ-specific resources (such as library or guidance materials, posters or pamphlets) available for elementary students (36% some elementary schools, 30% all elementary schools).

Superintendents who indicated that resources were available for students (n=82) were asked what kinds of resources are available as LGBTQ-inclusive education resources for students. The most common resources available were: school library (74%), guidance counsellor who identifies as an ally (68%), and teachers who identify as an ally (59%). Other resources included GSAs (54%), curriculum (38%) and LGBT teachers (34%).

FIGURE 13: **Results hoped for and/or achieved from implementing LGBTQ-specific education resources for students (such as library or guidance materials, posters or pamphlets)**

Legend:
- Hoped for and/or achieved
- Not hoped for and not achieved

Category	Hoped for and/or achieved	Not hoped for and not achieved
Increase staff support	68%	32%
Increase peer support	69%	31%
Increase inclusion	67%	33%
Improve performance/attendance	60%	40%
Improve mental health	68%	32%
Improve self-esteem	69%	31%
Increase school attachment	67%	33%
Increase reporting of harassment	66%	34%
Decrease high-risk behaviour	56%	44%
Decrease cyberbullying	67%	33%
Decrease harassment	71%	29%
Decrease homonegative language	68%	32%
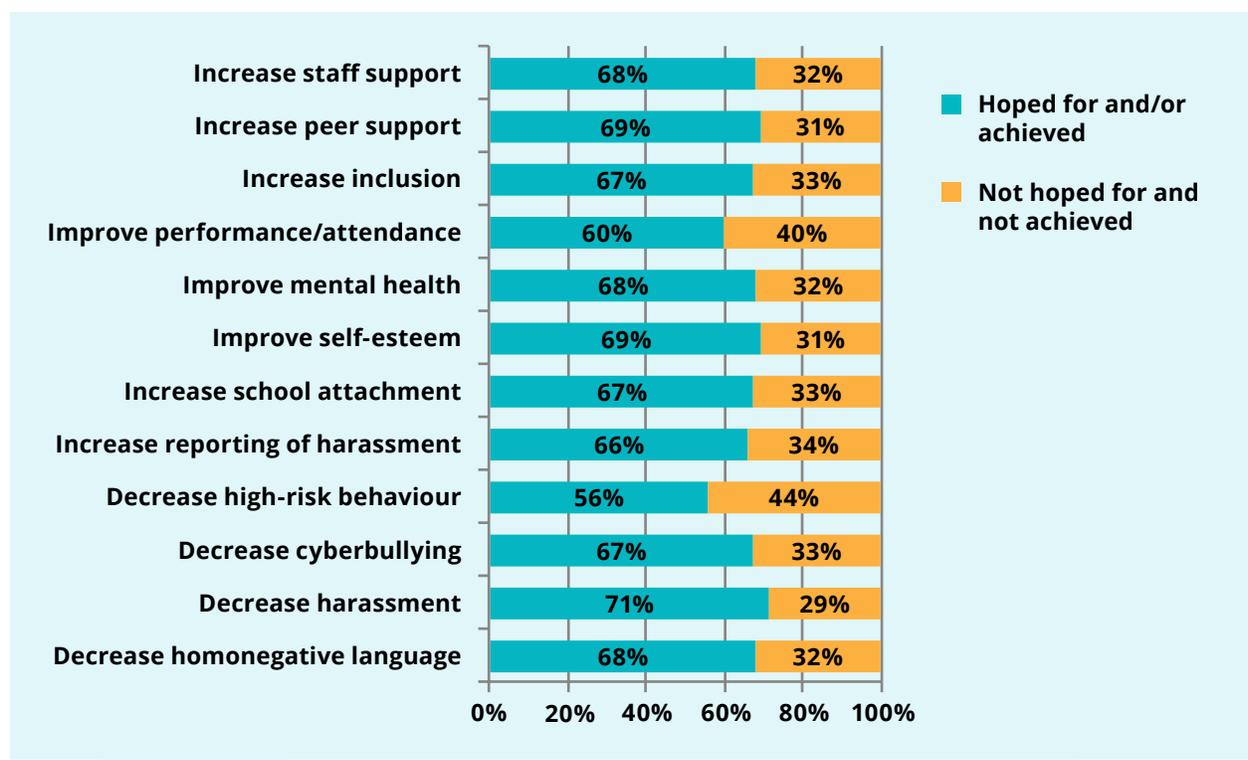
Superintendents were given a list of outcomes and were asked which results they hoped for and which they felt had been at least somewhat achieved with respect to LGBTQ students from the implementation of LGBTQ-specific education resources for student development. As noted in Figure 13, respondents were most likely to have hoped for and/or achieved less harassment (71%), improved self-esteem (69%), increased peer support (69%), increased staff support (68%), improved mental health (68%), and less homonegative language (68%) upon implementing LGBTQ-specific education resources for student development (such as library or guidance materials, poster or pamphlets). Fewer respondents hoped for and/or achieved increased inclusion (67%), increased school attachment (67%), less cyberbullying (67%), increased reporting of harassment (66%), improved performance and/or attendance (60%), and less high-risk behaviour of LGBTQ youth (56%) from implementing LGBTQ-specific education resources for student development.

Superintendents who reported that their school district did not have LGBTQ-specific resources (such as library or guidance materials, posters or pamphlets) available for students (n=16) were asked why they have not implemented such resources. Only a few individuals noted that they did not have such resources. Reasons for not implementing LGBTQ-inclusive education resources included that their generic policy adequately addressed homophobic harassment, and there were no or very few incidents of homophobic harassment in their school district to warrant such resources. (Too few participants (<5) indicated any reasons to allow us to report on them.)

Conclusions and recommendations

The strong participation of school district officials across the country in the National Inventory reflects a growing awareness of the harm done by school cultures that are not inclusive of LGBTQ students, and a growing determination to address the problem through district-wide interventions. Every one of the interventions that we questioned participants about had been implemented at the district level in at least some districts. A minority of districts had implemented many interventions, including the four mainstays of LGBTQ-inclusive education: LGBTQ-specific harassment policy, course content, professional development, and Gay-Straight Alliances or equivalent. On the other hand, some districts had not implemented any LGBTQ-specific interventions, and officials indicated that specific interventions were not needed because generic safe schools policies and programs were sufficient to protect LGBTQ students.

This study has shown us the particular outcomes that school district officials associated with particular interventions: their hopes for, and in some cases perceptions of having achieved, a range of improvements to school climate and LGBTQ student resilience. We learned that the vast majority did indeed hope for every one of the potential benefits we listed in implementing their policies and programming.

There were some significant patterns to these hopes, leading to a number of project recommendations and suggestions for future research:

- A small number of districts had implemented several interventions, consistent with the literature that suggests multi-pronged approaches to inclusive education as best practices. Further research is needed to compare the state of LGBTQ student well-being in districts with and without multiple LGBTQ-specific interventions.

- Superintendents were less likely to associate interventions with reductions in high-risk behaviour, or with outcomes that were more difficult to gauge, such as improved mental health or school attachment. This suggests the need for future research aimed at identifying which interventions do have benefits in these crucial areas of concern.

- Superintendents were much less likely to associate generic policies than LGBTQ-inclusive policies with positive outcomes for LGBTQ students. Some districts, in contrast, indicated that generic policies were adequate to protect LGBTQ students, or that harassment of LGBTQ students was not a problem in their district. Further research is needed to learn whether these beliefs are reflected in low incidence of harassment of LGBTQ students in those districts (along with other indicators of LGBTQ wellbeing).

- Districts were much more likely to report that generic policies had been thoroughly implemented in early and middle years. This suggests that LGBTQ-specific policies are not being implemented either because they are seen as inappropriate for elementary years or for some other reason not having to do with perceived benefit to LGBTQ students. One approach to addressing this issue would be district-wide professional development for school leaders on the benefits of LGBTQ-inclusive education at all levels of schooling.

- Districts were much less likely to report having trans-specific policy than they were to report having LGBTQ-specific policy. (However, since the time of the survey of spring 2014, many other districts have developed transgender accommodation policy, and in many cases it is far more detailed and comprehensive than their LGBTQ policies.)

- GSAs were quite widely implemented, but were not associated as strongly as some other interventions with reduced harassment of LGBTQ students. GSAs are a key feature of provincial legislation addressing LGBTQ safety and wellbeing, and they are sometimes the only means implemented of promoting safe and inclusive schools for LGBTQ students. Further research is needed to determine the optimal configuration of GSAs (e.g., mandate, activities, composition) to maximize their benefits.

- Curricular inclusion was indicated in approximately one-third of districts and, in most of those, at all levels of the school system. Representation in the curriculum is a key feature of inclusive education for marginalized students, and this finding should be encouraging to districts that might have hesitated in the past to support LGBTQ course content and teaching practices.

- There was significant regional, urban/rural, and Catholic/secular variation in implementation of the various interventions, all of which point to the need for further study to compare the states of LGBTQ student wellbeing in these differing contexts, and in particular to compare LGBTQ wellbeing in schools with and without particular interventions within a particular context (e.g., schools with / schools without GSAs in rural school districts).

- Very few superintendents identified their own religious objections or fear of religious community objections as reasons for not having implemented LGBTQ-specific interventions. In contrast, LGBTQ-inclusive education is typically presented in the media as perpetually in conflict with religious conscience. Our findings of low levels of religious opposition (along with those of public opinion polls [e.g., Howell, 2014] and the Every Teacher Project on LGBTQ-inclusive Education [Taylor, Peter, Campbell, Meyer, Ristock, & Short, 2015]) suggest religious opposition has been overestimated.

- Districts were much less likely to associate job protections for LGBTQ staff, including the right to be open about being LGBTQ with students, with positive outcomes for students than they were to associate other interventions with such outcomes. However, the importance of role models for marginalized students is well established in the school system and in the literature, which suggests that LGBTQ teachers should not be discouraged from being open with students.

School systems need to understand what kinds of interventions are effective in achieving particular outcomes in order to address the problem of un-inclusive school climates effectively. Other areas in the larger Reducing Stigma, Promoting Resilience project involve statistical analysis of population health data to identify connections between interventions and LGBTQ youth wellbeing, and in-depth case studies of particularly promising implementations. Future reports will present the results of those studies.

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