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An Exploration Of The Prevalence Of Advocacy Efforts And The Role Of The School Counselor In Lgbt Student Advocacy

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**AN EXPLORATION OF THE PREVALENCE OF ADVOCACY EFFORTS AND
THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR IN LGBT STUDENT ADVOCACY**

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science, Counseling

By

Lacey Berry

May 2016

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**AN EXPLORATION OF THE PREVALENCE OF ADVOCACY EFFORTS AND
THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR IN LGBT STUDENT ADVOCACY**

Counseling, Leadership, and Special Education

Missouri State University, May 2016

Master of Science

Lacey Berry

ABSTRACT

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students are at a higher risk than their heterosexual and cisgender peers for harassment, depression, suicidal ideation and attempts, and engagement in risky behaviors. In an attempt to combat the marginalization of LGBT students in schools, advocacy organizations and research have provided evidence of the value of an LGBT-inclusive organization or club, LGBT-inclusive harassment and discrimination policies, and LGBT-inclusive curricula, access to resources, and staff trainings. A gap in the literature indicates the need for examining the school counselor's role in advocating for LGBT students, as well as the barriers that may be preventing advocacy. Researchers surveyed 364 school counselors across 14 US states to determine which advocacy strategies were present in their schools, their level of involvement in advocating for those strategies, and the beliefs or barriers present that prevent advocating for those strategies. Analysis of the results revealed inclusive policies to be the most commonly reported advocacy strategy in place, while assisting to establish an LGBT-inclusive student organization was the highest reported level of involvement in advocating for any of the above strategies. Finally, more school counselors reported a lack of education and lack of support than any other barriers to advocating for LGBT students. Based on the findings and current literature, recommendations for practicing school counselors and counselor educators will be discussed.

KEYWORDS: LGBT students, school counseling, advocacy, educational environment, school safety, school policy, school curriculum, social bias, bullying

This abstract is approved as to form and content

Dr. A. Leslie Anderson
Chairperson, Advisory Committee
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INTRODUCTION

All students face challenges in adolescence as they begin to grow and mature while attempting to navigate increasing academic expectations and identify with a peer group. During this time, some students need targeted intervention for their social and emotional needs to ensure their academic success. A unique set of challenges are present for students who identify or express as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT), as they are more likely than their heterosexual peers to be victims of property damage, assault, and harassment by their peers than heterosexual and cisgender students (Kosciw et al., 2014). Rather than finding a peer group with whom they can relate in high school, some of these students are skipping school from fear of harassment or assault, engaging in risky sexual behaviors, abusing substances, and report feelings of depression and suicidal thoughts (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2014, Kosciw et al., 2014; SAMHSA, 2012).

Intervention is necessary for LGBT students in schools and recommendations for advocacy strategies typically fall into three broad categories. The first is advocating for student-led inclusive organizations, such as gay-straight alliances (GSAs), which work toward creating a safe and accepting school environment for LGBT students. The presence and participation in a GSA is positively correlated with less harassment and assault, higher levels of academic achievement, and fewer reports of depression and suicidal thoughts (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2014; Kosciw et al., 2014; Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, & Russell, 2011). Another advocacy category is inclusive policies, which specifically enumerate protection for sexual orientation and gender identity/expression from harassment and discrimination. LGBT students in schools with inclusive policies reported

feeling safer, having higher self-esteem, and fewer suicidal thoughts, while skipping school less and achieving a higher GPA than students in schools without inclusive policies (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2014; Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013, Kosciw et al., 2014). The last category of advocacy strategies is an inclusive education, which includes an LGBT-affirming curriculum, LGBT-relevant resources, and LGBT-specific training for staff. Students in schools with curricula that positively represents LGBT people report feeling safer and more supported in school (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the proposed research project is to become more aware of advocacy strategies targeted for LGBT students in schools, the school counselor's role in developing those strategies, and the barriers present that prevent school counselors advocating on behalf of LGBT students. The objective of this project is to contribute to a body of knowledge that will provide information to school counselors and school counselor educators regarding school counselor beliefs and attitudes regarding LGBT students and the need for advocacy on their behalf.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the evidence that inclusive student organizations, inclusive student policies, and inclusive curricula and training are beneficial to LGBT students by creating a safe and supportive school environment, little research is available regarding the specific school professionals whose responsibility it is to implement these strategies. LGBT students report that teachers and mental health professionals are the most

supportive staff in school (Kosciw et al., 2014). However, schools may have many mental health professionals, such as a school counselor, social worker, and psychologist. Because the role of the school counselor is to serve all students in the school, compared to the case load of a school social worker or students with IEPs or behavior plans of a school psychologist, they may be in the best position to lead advocacy efforts that target LGBT students. School counselors are also bound by high ethical standards which specifically address advocating for LGBT students in schools.

However, the literature does not provide insight to which advocacy strategies are used in schools, especially in regards to the extent the school counselor led those efforts. In order for school counselors to be better prepared for LGBT-related issues in schools, they and counselor educators must be aware of the reported barriers to advocacy, so they can be addressed during a counselor's pre-service training.

Research Questions

1. What advocacy strategies targeted for LGBT students are present in schools?
2. To what extent did the school counselor lead efforts to implement those strategies or develop/maintain them?
3. If a school counselor is not advocating for a more supportive and safe school environment for LGBT students, what barriers exist and/or beliefs are held to prevent school counselors from doing so?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The discussion surrounding lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) student rights is growing increasingly popular as the socio-political climate affecting this group evolves for the better and worse. Although this movement is gaining recent popularity, advocates have been fighting for rights of LGBT youth and adults for at least one hundred years in the United States. LGBT rights are those privileges that heterosexual and cisgender individuals are born with, but are not available to those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender. Examples include the right to marry, adopt children, donate blood and tissue, hospital visitation, make medical decisions for family members, conjugal visits, equal access to housing and employment, serve in the military, and engage in sexual activities, all of which are still not granted to LGBT individuals or just recently became rights for LGBT individuals, despite over one hundred years of advocacy.

A History of Injustice

The Beginnings of LGBT Advocacy. Little is known about the beginning of the LGBT social movement in United States history, which stemmed from semi-secret groups in the early 1900s working toward the advancement of homosexual rights. One of the first documented groups was Henry Gerber's Society for Human Rights, which began in Chicago in 1923 and quickly disbanded because of many members' arrests (Grevatt, 2001). The Mattachine Society was founded in the 1950s to promote tolerance of homosexuality, and its magazine, *One*, was the first openly gay and lesbian national

publication (PBS, 2011). In the 1960s, many organizations had been formed, such as the Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activists Alliance, and the first public picketing was held in Philadelphia to protest government discrimination against gay and lesbian people. The 60s marked a social movement for many groups, but LGBT people in the Civil Rights Movement, such as African American Bayard Rustin, were removed as leaders out of fear of their LGBT identity and its stigma hindering the progress made (Hendrix, 2011). In 1969, LGBT patrons, primarily transgender people of color, resisted a police raid of the Stonewall Inn, known as the Stonewall Riots, marking the beginning of a stronger movement. In the few years after, more national organizations were formed and the first Pride March, Pride Day, and week-long celebrations took place, which are still recognized today (Abelove, 2015). The American Psychological Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders in its third edition in the 1970s (PBS, 2011). Because of the AIDS emergence in the 1980s, more LGBT organizations, such as the Human Rights Campaign, The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, and The Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation were formed (“45 Years,” 2012; PBS, 2011). The 1990s sparked a movement for LGBT youth, such as increasing numbers of gay youth centers and GSAs in schools.

Early Evidence of Heterosexism. For every step forward that LGBT individuals and allies have worked to promote equal rights, challengers have been working toward just the opposite. Reasons for opposition come in the form of personal, religious, or political beliefs. Heterosexism, or the oppression of LGBT individuals, has perpetuated misinformed stereotypes that still affect this country today. Stereotypes include: all gay men are effeminate, while all lesbians are masculine, and LGBT people are child

molesters, unsuitable for professional positions, incapable of having meaningful relationships, and are mentally ill (SAMHSA, 2012).

Evidence of heterosexism is apparent throughout this country's history, such as the assassination of Harvey Milk, Jr., the first openly gay person elected into public office, in 1978 ("45 Years," 2012). Also in the 1970s, Anita Bryant began the "Save Our Children" campaign, which provoked legislation supporting the firing of teachers who were suspected to be homosexual. During this time, a teacher in Washington was fired after being outed by a previous student, and the Washington Supreme Court upheld the decision because homosexuality was immoral. During the AIDS outbreak in the 1980s, several articles were published in popular magazines explaining that only homosexual acts can spread HIV.

In the 1990s, the Don't Ask, Don't Tell law allowed homosexual individuals to serve in the military, but only if they did not share their sexual orientation ("45 Years," 2012). This decade was also marked with anguish when Brandon Teena, a young transgender man, was murdered in Nebraska ("45 Years," 2012). Only five years later, two young men severely beat and murdered 21-year-old Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming, because of his sexual orientation ("45 Years," 2012). Also in the 1990s, President Bill Clinton signs executive orders to end the practice of denying federal security clearances to LGBT people because of their sexual orientation and to prohibit antigay discrimination in the federal civilian workforce, yet he also signs the Defense of Marriage Act into law, which prohibits federal recognition of same-sex marriages ("45 Years," 2012).

In 2000, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Boy Scouts of America had a first amendment right to exclude LGBT individuals from their organization. In 2010, this law was repealed so that gay, lesbian, and bisexual men and women can serve openly, but transgender people are still restricted from serving because of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual's endorsement that transgender people are mentally ill. Even more recently, several states have attempted, some successfully, to pass legislation allowing for discrimination of LGBT people to protect others' religious freedoms.

The Current Climate for LGBT People. Despite social movements over such a long period of time, significant political changes in favor of LGBT individuals did not begin until the early 2000s, and those changes have still not provided an equitable society for LGBT people in terms of marriage, adoption, employment and housing discrimination, health care, and other issues specific to transgender individuals. It was not until 2003 that the remaining states with sodomy laws were violating the Fourteenth Amendment ("45 Years Later," 2012). In June of 2015, the Supreme Court ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that same-sex couples have the right to marry and have the right to recognition of their marriages. However, fourteen states and three territories prohibited same-sex marriages at the time of the Supreme Court's ruling and may not start permitting couples to marry until they have been issued orders from the federal courts prohibiting their states' marriage bans (HRC, 2015). In those states where same-sex marriages were previously prohibited, the Social Security Administration has not yet addressed whether Social Security spousal benefits will be awarded to surviving spouses if the wage earner passed away before the Supreme Court ruling this year (HRC, 2015).

Thirty-six states and the District of Columbia allow second-parent or stepparent adoption for same-sex couples (Gill, 2015).

As of 2014, only 21 states and the District of Columbia prohibit employment and housing discrimination based on sexual orientation, and 18 of those and D.C. also prohibit employment and housing discrimination based on gender identity or expression (Gill, 2015). Fortunately, the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is now allowing complaints of employment discrimination based gender identity because of Title VII's prohibition against sex discrimination. In 29 states, it is still legal for government and private businesses to refuse services to people based on their sexual orientation, and in 33 states, businesses can do the same based on a person's gender identity (Gill, 2015).

In regards to healthcare, the Food and Drug Administration still discourages blood and tissue donation from any male who has had sex with another male (Gill, 2015). In 2010, President Obama issued an Executive Order to the DHHS to grant visitation and medical decision-making rights to gay and lesbian partners in facilities that accept Medicare and Medicaid, which became effective in 2011 (Gill, 2015). Another aspect of healthcare applies specifically to transgender people, as only 9 states and the District of Columbia prohibit exclusion for transgender healthcare, while 19 states specifically exclude transgender coverage in Medicaid benefits (Gill, 2015). Some states are also advocating for transgender rights with laws and policies that facilitate gender marker changes on government-issued documents. For example, 29 states and the District of Columbia facilitate gender marker changes on driver's licenses and 12 states facilitate

gender marker changes on birth certificates, but three states prevent transgender people from changing gender identification on any documents (Gill, 2015).

The Current Climate for LGBT Students. These sociopolitical factors set the backdrop for the many LGBT students in America's schools, who are more likely to be harassed, bullied, and unaccepted in a place that expects them to academically, socially, and emotionally grow. The school environment is an especially important topic when discussing LGBT youth because of the development that occurs for adolescents during their years at schools. All adolescents are faced with challenges during this developmental period as they develop social skills, consider career and academic choices, and search for a peer group while individuating from their parents (Just the Facts Coalition, 2008). However, adolescents who identify as LGBT or are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity face unique challenges as they may navigate adolescent development without support or acceptance from family, peers, and school staff. The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) published a vast amount of research regarding the current school climate for over 8,000 LGBT students in the 2013 National School Climate Survey. Although many factors had positively changed in the past ten years, the report provides evidence that school is still a harsh reality for LGBT youth.

A hostile school climate consists of reported instances of biased remarks and harassment in schools. The GSLEN report stated that 71% of students heard negative remarks regarding sexual orientation in school and 65% heard negative remarks regarding gender expression (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). Even more disturbing, over half of students reported hearing homophobic and negative remarks

regarding gender expression from their teachers or other school staff (Kosciw et al., 2014). Harassment in schools may consist of verbal harassment, physical harassment (i.e. pushed), physical assault (i.e. punched, kicked, used weapon), sexual harassment (i.e. unwanted touching and sexual remarks), relational aggression (i.e. rumors and exclusion), property theft or damage, and cyberbullying (i.e. harassment via text or social media). In general, 56% of students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation and 38% of students felt unsafe because of their gender expression. In the past year, 74% of students were verbally harassed, 36% were physically harassed, and 17% were physically assaulted because of sexual orientation. Likewise, 55% of students were verbally harassed, 23% were physically harassed, and 11% were physically assaulted because of gender expression. 59% of LGBT students reported experiencing sexual harassment, while 43% reported stolen or damaged property. A large majority of LGBT students (88%) reported experiencing relational aggression and 49% of LGBT students reported experiencing cyberbullying. Once again, bullying students are not the only issue present in schools for LGBT students, as the most common reason for not reporting harassment or assault was the assumption that little or no intervention would occur, and 62% of those who did report stated that the school did nothing in response to the complaint, while only 19% of complaints resulted in discipline of the perpetrator (Kosciw et al., 2014). Other students who did not report harassment stated reasons of fear of making the situation worse or unease about school professionals' reactions, such as feeling embarrassed, judged, ashamed, or misunderstood. Similar results were found in a meta-analysis of nearly 400 studies of the rates of victimization among lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals, as 55% have experienced verbal harassment, 45% sexual harassment, and

44% relational aggression (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012). The CDC also reported unsafe school environments for LGB youth, as they are more likely to be threatened or injured on school property than their heterosexual peers (Kann et al., 2011).

Just as the socio-political climate of this country has negatively affected the lives of LGBT adults, the hostile climate of this country's school has negatively affected the mental health of LGBT students. Regular biased remarks from fellow peers and teachers and harassment with little intervention impacts LGBT students in regards to feeling unsafe and unaccepted at school, diminishing self-esteem. Low levels of self-esteem and related depression may result in psychological concerns transforming into behavioral concerns, such as suicide ideation and attempts, risky sexual behaviors, and substance abuse, all of which have a higher presence in LGBT students.

As mentioned above, a majority of LGBT students do not feel safe in school, and further results from the National School Climate Survey reports that acceptance is also absent for these students. Less than half of students reported that their schools were somewhat or very accepting of LGBT students (Kosciw et al., 2014). The same report also asserts that LGBT students who experience more severe victimization reported lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of depression than those who reported less severe victimization. Research by Gruber and Fineran also found a relationship between victimization and likelihood of depression (2008). Furthermore, LGBT youth make up an alarmingly disproportional rate of attempted and completed suicides, as they are 6-7 times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers (Bagley & Tremblay, 1997). More recent research suggests that transgender youth are at an even higher risk, in that more than 25% reported a previous suicide attempt (Grossman, 2007). Also, Almeida et al.

found that LGBT youth had significantly higher depressive symptomatology, suicidal ideation, and self-harm than peers (2009). The CDC report also stated that LGB youth were more likely than heterosexual peers to feel sad or hopeless, consider suicide, make a suicide plan, and attempt suicide (Kann et al., 2011).

Other ways these students are coping with low self-esteem and depression include engaging in risky behaviors, such as frequent unprotected sex and substance abuse to feel a sense of belonging or because of shame associated with internalized homophobia (Hays & Erford, 2010). LGBT individuals may blame themselves for the victimization they have experienced, develop a negative self-concept because of society's negative representation of homosexuality, and direct anger from victimization internally upon themselves, resulting in self-destructive behaviors, such as substance abuse (SAMHSA, 2012). As of 2011, LGB youth were more likely to have regularly smoked cigarettes in the past, currently smoke at least 10 cigarettes a day, engage in binge drinking, and use cocaine, inhalants (glue, aerosol spray cans, etc.), heroin, steroids without a prescription, and methamphetamines (Kann et al., 2011). The Department of Health and Human Services reports that gay and lesbian individuals across all ages are more likely to heavily drink and regularly smoke cigarettes, indicating that feelings of internalized homophobia at a young age have health consequences well beyond adolescent years (SAMHSA, 2012). Also, LGB youth were more likely to inject an illegal drug and sell, give, or offer an illegal drug to another person on school property (Kann et al., 2011). The same report also states that LGB youth are more likely to be sexually active and engage in sexual activities after consuming alcohol, but less likely to use condoms or birth control or have been exposed to HIV/AIDS education. The CDC also mentions unhealthy eating habits

among LGB youth, as these individuals are more likely to have not ate for 24 hours, took diet pills without a doctor's advice, or took laxatives or vomited to lose weight (Kann et al., 2011).

The LGBT population still represents a disproportional amount of the entire population suffering from HIV/AIDS. Gay men are still the largest group of people infected with HIV/AIDS, and the rates of HIV-positive LGBT youth are nearly double compared to HIV/AIDS found in heterosexual and cisgender peers (SAMHSA, 2012). Higher rates of HIV/AIDS in LGBT youth can be attributed to the concerns mentioned above: more casual sex partners with less protection and a higher use of injected drugs, but also the growing number of LGBT homeless youth who engage in sex for money to survive. Homelessness is of great concern for LGBT youth, as they may choose to leave home due to rejection and harassment from family members, or their families are completely unaccepting and forced out on the street (SAMHSA, 2012). It has been estimated that LGBT youth comprise 40% of the entire teen homeless population in some geographical areas (Ray, 2006). Approximately 33% of LGB street youth are HIV-positive, while only 1% of heterosexual street youth are HIV-positive (Moon, 2000). The transgender population are also heavily impacted by HIV, as 35% of male-to-female transgender individuals are HIV-positive (Clements-Nolle, Marx, & Guzman, 2001).

Psychological and health risks among LGBT youth are affecting their academic performance. Feeling unsafe and unaccepted at school has proved detrimental to student learning by increasing absenteeism and decreasing academic aspiration. LGBT students are more likely to skip school because they are afraid, and less likely to reach their academic potential because of a negative self-concept. According to the 2011 GLSEN

report, approximately 30% of students had skipped a class or a whole school day in the past 30 days because they felt unsafe at school, and about 6% of students had skipped a class or whole school day at least six times in the past 30 days (Kosciw et al., 2012). More recent research only accounting for LGB students shows a lower percentage of this group skipping school because of feelings of unsafety, but the percentage is much higher than their heterosexual peers (Birkett 2014). The CDC Report also states that LGBT students are more likely to skip class because they felt unsafe at school, or going to or from school (Kann et al., 2011). Specific classes and spaces in school seem to be the most dangerous, as the most common spaces to avoid are locker rooms and bathrooms and the most common class to skip is physical education (Kosciw et al., 2012). Students who were severely victimized because of their sexual orientation or gender expression were three times more likely to skip school than those who experienced lower levels of victimization (Kosciw et al., 2014). Victimization at school also correlates with academic performance, as LGBT students who experienced higher levels of victimization had lower GPAs than those who experienced lower levels of victimization (Kosciw et al., 2014). A larger difference between GPAs in comparing levels of victimization was found for transgender students (Kosciw et al., 2014). Based on a study of self-reported grades, LGB students were more likely to have grades consisting of mostly Ds and Fs than heterosexual students (Birkett, 2014). Nearly 60% of LGBT students reported that they do not plan on graduating or are unsure if they will graduate because of the hostile or unsupportive environment of their schools. Also, levels of academic aspiration were measured in the GLSEN report, which negatively correlated higher levels of

victimization of LGBT students with plans to attend a four-year college or vocational school (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Advocacy Strategies

As our nation's educators begin to notice the damaging effects of heterosexism in society and its implementation in schools on LGBT students' mental health and academic performance, advocates have employed various strategies to create safe and accepting school environments for these individuals. As these strategies have become more popular, research is continuing to grow regarding their effectiveness. A majority of the research for LGBT student advocacy can be grouped into three categories, which are the establishment of inclusive student-led organizations (Gay-Straight Alliances or similar organizations), LGBT-inclusive school policies, and LGBT-inclusive education for all students and school staff. These three categories of advocacy are endorsed by the Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network (GLSEN), the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and many other LGBT organizations, because they attempt to create a safe school environment and feelings of acceptance and belonging for LGBT students.

Inclusive Student-led Organizations. A large amount of research of LGBT advocacy revolves around the formation of Gay-Straight Alliances in middle and high schools. According to the GLSEN, a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) is a student club that works to improve school climate for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. GSAs, or similar organizations with different names, are found in all 50 states and the District of Columbia and may register with the GLSEN to receive resources and network with other GSAs. These student clubs hold regular

meetings, host events, have advisors, and welcome anyone from their school. Members of GSAs advocate for change in their schools, such as permitting same-sex dates to prom and educating students and teachers to end offensive, heterosexist language. GSAs serve as a social group, support group, and advocacy group for LGBTQA students (Fetner, Elafros, Bortolin, & Drechsler, 2012). Half of LGBT students reported that their school has a GSA or similar club (Kosciw et al., 2014). The 2011 National School Climate Survey found that students in the South and rural areas are least likely to have access to a GSA (Kosciw et al., 2012).

The many benefits that LGBT students receive today from membership in a GSA and the presence of a GSA in their schools did not arise immediately nor without controversy, as the formation of GSAs in schools is yet another example of the restrictions of LGBT student rights in schools. Kevin Jennings, founder of the GLSEN, started one of the first GSAs in the country in a Massachusetts private school in 1988, but the first student-led extracurricular gay group was founded much earlier by students at George Washington High School in 1972 (Johnson, 2007). Despite the Equal Access Act of 1984, which requires public secondary schools to provide equal access to all extracurricular clubs, it was not until 1999 that the Federal Court ruled that denying access to a GSA was in violation of this act. The Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, wrote a Dear Colleague letter explaining the legal rights of students to establish a GSA and the importance of doing so. Opposition toward GSAs still exists and some schools have attempted to limit access to GSAs or similar clubs by requiring that students get written permission from parents to participate. Although only 6% of students report that

their schools with GSAs use this tactic, almost half of students in those schools cannot participate because they do not have permission from parents (Kosciw et al., 2012).

The benefits of GSAs have been studied for many years and include improving school climate, empowering members, and increasing self-esteem and academic achievement. However, a successful GSA is not represented by simply the existence of the group, but also the implementation with support from the school, inclusion of all students, and high levels of activity of members.

One of the goals of GSAs is to work to improve the school climate, so that LGBT students feel safe and accepted in school (Kosciw et al., 2014). As mentioned above, LGBT students are more likely to be victimized than their heterosexual and cisgender peers because of a hostile school climate and skip school more often because of fear of victimization. LGBT students that attend a high school with a GSA report a more safe school climate than LGBT students who attend a school without a GSA. A more safe school climate has been reported with the presence of a GSA in terms of fewer homophobic remarks, less victimization due to sexual orientation or gender identity, fewer reports of missing school due to safety reasons, and higher levels of teacher intervention (Kosciw et al., 2014). Another study also suggested that the presence of a GSA positively impacts the school climate for LGBTQ students, and a better school climate was negatively correlated with suicidal thoughts, suicide plans, and suicide attempts of LGBTQ students (Hatzenbuehler, Birkett, Van Wagenen, & Meyer, 2014).

GSA membership also has a positive impact on personal development in LGBT students, as shown in self-esteem and academic achievement. The presence of a GSA correlates with greater feelings of school connectedness and reduced risk of suicide for

LGBT students (Goodenow, 2006; Kosciw et al., 2014). Toomey et al. report that GSA presence is positively correlated with self-esteem and negatively correlated with depression, while GSA participation decreases problems associated with substance abuse and decreases risk of lifetime suicide attempts and depression, but only for members who experience low levels of victimization (2011). For LGBT students experiencing high levels of victimization, GSA membership did not improve the risk of lifetime suicide attempts or depression (Toomey et al., 2011). The same study proposed that the presence of GSAs in high schools decrease drop-out rates and increase the likelihood of college attainment (Toomey et al., 2011). Students who are members of GSAs, but do not necessarily attend a high school with a GSA, still receive personal benefits. Members of GSAs, even those members without a GSA in their school, reported higher academic achievement, better interpersonal relationships, and more comfort with one's own sexual orientation than nonmembers (Lee, 2002; Mayberry, 2006). It is important to note that membership itself is valuable, but school safety and victimization issues are not significantly different for members from nonmembers unless a GSA is present in the school (Toomey et al., 2011).

While GSAs create a place for social support, sense of community, and social identity, they also have shown to empower members as agents of social change within the school (Mayberry, 2006). Membership in GSAs psychologically empowers students to speak out and resist antigay school practices that cause marginalization and feelings of isolation in LGBT students. However, GSAs are not requested for consultation by administrators for professional development activities relating to LGBT needs, and GSAs are struggling to develop alliances with community organizations (Mayberry, 2006).

Another study found that students felt empowered by participating in GSAs through the knowledge they gained regarding their rights and organizing change, through personal feelings of empowerment from having a voice and/or control over change in their schools, and through empowering others (Russell et al., 2009).

To implement and develop an effective GSA, adequate support is required from teachers, administration, and other school staff. Mayberry suggests teachers asking GSA members to create content substitutions that do not reinforce stereotypes and discourage heteronormativity and administrators asking members to brainstorm successful strategies to change the school climate (2006). Another suggestion is the assistance of an adult school professional in the planning phase as an advisor, who can help the students navigate through administrative processes of starting a school organization and understand their legal rights to do so (Murphy, 2012).

Also, ensuring that GSAs are an organization for all students is an important factor, as Fetner et al. found in an open-ended survey of Canadian and US students that transgender students and students of color are often not as involved as cisgender and white LGB students (2012). “All students” does not just apply to all LGBT students, as student allies, or heterosexual and cisgender students, are just as important. The benefits of encouraging participation of allies is two-fold. First, heterosexual and cisgender inclusion does not immediately out students who are involved in the organization but are questioning or not ready to come out to peers. Second, educating straight and cisgender students is a goal of GSAs, as education is an important route to creating acceptance in the school (Fetner et al., 2012). Therefore, participation of allies in this group creates

awareness of the struggles that LGBT students face and a sense of collaboration, rather than opposition.

Even with support from the school and inclusion of a diverse group of students, the benefits of GSAs may not be realized if the leaders and members of the organization are inactive. One study showed that the most positive experience from participating in a GSA came from organization, regular meetings, and events (Heck, Lindquist, Stewart, Brennan, & Cochran, 2013). Although the presence of a GSA in a school may indicate a more safe school climate than schools without a GSA, simply because administration has not successfully contested its existence, members of GSAs have the opportunity to improve the school climate and experiences of members even further. As with all student clubs, members most likely have a more positive experience depending on their level of involvement. Therefore, members, and especially leaders, of GSAs should hold and attend regular meetings that are organized and productive. If members' feelings that surround meetings are negative because their time is being wasted or destructive to the cause, growth of membership may stagnate or even decrease. Participants in Heck et al.'s study also mentioned the importance of holding events outside of meetings. These events are significant to members whether they are social and supportive in nature or working toward social justice within the school and community (Heck et al., 2013).

Inclusive Policies. Another advocacy strategy used to protect and promote LGBT student rights is creating and enforcing LGBT-inclusive student school policies. The most common approach to include and protect LGBT students in school policies is in student discrimination and harassment policies by specifically including protection for sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. Research in this area is typically focused

on anti-bullying and harassment policies that specify LGBT students as a protected class. Unfortunately, the harassment policies may not be enforced, and the discrimination section of the policy is left so generalized that it does not translate to any significance for LGBT students, unless those students file suit against their school districts for equal rights. Other inclusive policies that may provide a more safe and accepting school environment, but are associated with very limited research, target the prevention of specific discriminatory practices. Inclusive policies used to prevent discrimination of LGBT students are protective of student rights to express themselves as LGBT or supportive of LGBT issues, participate in extracurricular activities, and reject adherence to traditional gender norms.

Legality of Harassment and Discrimination School Policies. Before introducing the details and consequences of LGBT-inclusive policies, it is important to understand the legal rationale for their existence in schools. Perhaps the most obvious argument for LGBT-inclusive harassment and discrimination policies is legislation that requires the public school district to provide a safe and equal education to all students, as evidenced by many statutes. The first statute that applies to requiring a safe education to all students is Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, a federal statute applying to all schools that receive federal financial assistance, which prohibits sexual harassment and sexual discrimination. Title IX further requires schools to intervene and remedy any harassment or discrimination of a sexual nature faced by students. Therefore, sexual harassment targeted at any student, whether LGBT, heterosexual, or cisgender, is prohibited under Title IX. Title IX has successfully been used against school districts who have failed to provide protection for LGBT students, such as *Montgomery v.*

Independent School District, in which Jesse Montgomery successfully filed suit against his school because of its lack of intervention during his years of verbal, physical, and sexual harassment based on his perceived sexual orientation (2000). Although verbal harassment and bullying against students based on sexual orientation is not specifically covered under Title IX, the Revised Sexual Harassment Guidance report states that “sufficiently serious sexual harassment is covered by Title IX, even if the hostile environment also includes taunts based on sexual orientation” (OCR, 2001). The second important statute that requires the school’s protection of LGBT students is the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees equal protection of all citizens and applies to public schools. Therefore, LGBT students should be equally protected from harassment as all other students are. The earliest case in which the courts applied the Equal Protection Clause to gay students was *Nabozny v. Podlesny*. Jamie Nabozny endured years of extensive verbal, physical, and sexual harassment and received no intervention or protection after repeatedly informing school officials of the harassment. After attempting suicide twice, Nabozny filed a lawsuit against the school district and officials, and the court determined that he was denied equal protection from harm (1996).

In regards to providing an equal education to all students, two more statutes apply that argue the need for LGBT-inclusive discrimination policies. The first is the First Amendment, which prohibits the making of any law that abridges the freedom of speech or expression, which was extended to symbolic speech of students in school by the ruling of *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969), so long as the symbolic speech did not “materially and substantially” interrupt school activities.

Therefore, the First Amendment permits LGBT students to express themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, as well as express their support of LGBT issues. The case of *Henkle v. Gregory* (2001) provided precedence of the right of students to express their homosexuality, and the case of *Doe v. Yunits*, (2000) did the same for the right of transgender students to express their gender identity, rather than just their legal sex. The second statute that upholds the argument for school discrimination policies protecting LGBT students is the Equal Access Act of 1984, a federal law requiring federally funded secondary schools to provide equal treatment and access to all extracurricular clubs. This law compels secondary schools to permit the formation of student clubs that are LGBT-focused, such as GSAs, as well as provide the club with the same access that other student clubs may have, such as meeting spaces, the school's PA system, school periodicals, and bulletin board space. The school may limit the access of one group only if the school equally limits the access of all other student groups, and the school may deny the formation of a student group if all other student groups are also denied formation and current student groups are disbanded. *Colin v. Orange Unified School District* provides an example of the court's support for the application of the Equal Access Act to LGBT student clubs, as the Orange Unified School District was ordered to allow a Gay-Straight Alliance Club to meet with equal access and treatment as all other school clubs after previously denying Anthony Colin and other students permission to form the group (2000).

The other common argument for LGBT-inclusive policies is quite simple, in that harassment and discrimination policies that do not include LGBT students is a civil rights issue that must be resolved. For example, Savage and Harley explain the need for

protection and equal access for LGBT students as a parallel argument for the need of the protection for students of color and students with disabilities (2009). Because we live in a society filled with institutionalized racism and ableism, we have taken measures to make school a more equitable place for students of color and students with disabilities. The many examples provided in this literature review provides exceptional evidence that our society, and therefore schools, is also heterosexist, yet not all of our schools are taking steps to overcome the systemic exclusion of LGBT topics and protection in our school policies. A learning environment filled with discrimination and harassment based on a person's identity cannot be considered an equitable place to be educated (Savage & Harley, 2009). Similarly, Roffman argues that equal protection and access must be granted to LGBT people because their sexual identity is just that, a part of their identity (2000).

Many arguments against the protection for LGBT people resides in the belief that sexual preferences and identity are simply choices that are made, suggesting no moral reasoning to provide legal protection to this group of people. However, the publishing of *Just the Facts about Sexual Orientation and Youth* by Just the Facts Coalition in 2000, its substantial endorsement by many medical, educational, mental health, and even religious organizations, and its distribution to all public schools in the US provided a professional rebuttal to unsubstantiated beliefs previously held, which described LGB people's sexual orientation to be out of choice or mental illness (Roffman, 2000). Instead, *Just the Facts* defined sexual orientation as an important piece of a person's identity and reminded school districts that all students "deserve an opportunity for learning and health development in a safe and supportive environment" (Just the Facts Coalition, 2000). Just

as students of color do not choose their race or ethnicity, yet are subjected to racism every day in society and schools based on a piece of their identity, students whose sexual orientation and gender identity that are different from the majority are exposed to a similar type of persecution, but do not receive equal protection from that harassment.

A slightly different argument against the specified protection of LGBT students is not that they are undeserving, but rather that every student deserves an education free of harassment and discrimination, which eliminates the need of harassment or discrimination policies to include any specific groups at all. However, GLSEN and the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund remind us that concretely enumerating groups who more often discriminated against than others is crucial in preventing discriminators and harassers from assuming that their biases are acceptable (Roffman, 2000).

As LGBT advocates continue to fight for LGBT student rights in schools based on a civil rights foundation, they are often met with opposition in the form of another civil rights issue in schools: religion. Therefore, proponents of LGBT-inclusive policies have laid a groundwork with which to debate this issue. For example, schools should respect the importance of religious tolerance, while maintaining the separation of church and state as it applies to public schools. Roffman points out that views of a particular religion may conflict with LGBT-inclusive policies in a school, but school decisions cannot be made based on the beliefs of a religion; therefore, those beliefs may be stated, as protected by one's freedom of religion and speech, but they are not to be used to influence school policies, either by directly forcing administrators to choose sides with the faith-based argument or by avoiding the issue altogether to avoid conflict with the

religious views held by the community (2000). Savage and Harley also support the rights of religious beliefs held by parents and students, but that those beliefs do not belong as part of the education of students, and do not override the rights of LGBT students to receive an equitable education (2009). Another important consideration when determining the rights of LGBT students within a religious argument is the school's responsibility to contest stereotypical beliefs about minorities throughout a student's school career. Although certain religions may condemn LGBT people, the school must identify and refute beliefs about groups of people that are based on cultural stereotypes and are inherently false, such as myths that LGBT people are inferior, dangerous, perverted, or unhealthy (Roffman, 2000).

An argument of logic and reasoning, in terms of inconsistency between state laws and school policies, also suggests that the need for LGBT-inclusive school policies is present, but those policies are not reflective of that need in all school districts. Kopels and Pacey (2012) make an excellent point that a vast majority of states have directed school districts to adopt anti-bullying policies, but very few states have adopted school anti-bullying policies that specifically protect sexual orientation and gender identity. The Humans Rights Campaign identifies 19 states and the District of Columbia that have adopted laws that address harassment and bullying of students based on gender identity and sexual orientation. However, Missouri and South Dakota's state laws prohibit school districts from specifically including LGBT students as protected in anti-bullying laws (Gill, 2015).

The Value of LGBT-inclusive Harassment Policies. Not only are schools required to provide equal protection for and prevent harassment against LGBT students because of

the law, as well as from a social justice perspective, but schools are encouraged to use policies to provide an equal education for these students based on research that suggests positive academic and personal results from those inclusive policies. Although limited, the primary research in this area focuses on anti-bullying and harassment policies that target protection of LGBT students. The value of LGBT-inclusive harassment policies is overwhelming positive in terms of levels of victimization, academic achievement, and the mental health of LGBT students. However, the existence of inclusive policies unaccompanied by education of staff and students and consistent enforcement may not be enough to move the school climate toward a more safe and accepting environment for LGBT students.

One of the supporters of inclusive harassment policies is the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), whose National School Climate Survey states that “comprehensive policies,” which are policies that specifically name sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, are the most effective policies in battling harassment and bullying of LGBT students, but only 10% of participants reported that their school had a comprehensive policy in place (Kosciw et al., 2014). The same survey provides evidence of the effectiveness of these policies in terms of differing levels of victimization of LGBT students in schools with and without inclusive policies. Students whose schools have a comprehensive policy were less likely to be experiencing severe levels of victimization than students whose schools have a generic harassment policy, which does not include sexual orientation or gender expression and identity (Kosciw et al., 2014). Students in schools with inclusive policies were also less likely to hear negative remarks regarding

sexual orientation or gender identity than students in schools with a generic harassment policy (Kosciw et al., 2014).

As previously referenced above, students who do not feel safe at school are more likely to suffer academically as well, especially in terms of absenteeism. Although the National School Climate Survey directly addressed LGBT students missing school because of fear and linked levels of victimization to frequency of absenteeism (Kosciw et al., 2014), another study examined which factors contributed to less frequent absenteeism for LGBT students, one of which was policies that prohibit harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013). This study is similar to other research that suggests the importance of creating a supportive school climate for LGBT students in providing an equitable education, because the school environment is also a place of personal and social growth of students. Hatzenbuehler et al. defined a supportive school climate for LGBT students based on factors from the School Health Profile (SHP) survey, compiled by the Center for Disease Control, that are particularly relevant for LGBT students and were correlated with positive outcomes for these students, which also included prohibition of harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity (2014). Also, the Massachusetts Safe Schools Program (SSP) for Gay and Lesbian Students is yet another example of a set of recommendations, which includes developing policies that protect LGB students from harassment and violence, with the purpose of improving the school climate for LGBT students (Szalacha, 2003).

The “supportive” environment enumerated in many studies and recommendations for schools is so often attempted to be defined because of the link between a student’s feelings of acceptance and support and his/her mental health. Inclusive harassment

policies in schools are a part of creating a supportive environment that increases safety and attendance, but also addresses the mental health concerns disproportionately present in LGBT students. Multitudes of evidence, including those described above in the National School Climate Survey, suggest the correlation between victimization at school and higher levels of anxiety, depression, and suicide. Therefore, implementing inclusive school policies are necessary to keep students safe and facilitate positive psychological well-being, but little research exists that directly seeks to understand the correlation between inclusive policies and decreased mental health concerns for LGBT students. However, Hatzenbuehler et al. (2014) did find that LGBT students in schools with supportive practices, such as inclusive harassment policies, were less likely to report suicidal thoughts than students in schools without those supportive practices.

While the enumeration of the protection for sexual orientation and gender identity in these policies is a step in the right direction to promote a safe and accepting environment for all students, experts argue the policy itself is not enough to make a change in the school environment. In conjunction with the inclusive policy must be enforcement, education, and support.

GLSEN's 2013 National School Climate Survey detailed the aftermath of harassment against LGBT students in terms of reporting and intervention. The report showed that a majority of LGBT students who were harassed or assaulted in the past year never reported the incident to school staff or family members (Kosciw et al., 2014). The primary reason LGBT students gave for not reporting these incidents was the belief that no effective intervention would occur, followed by the fear of making the situation worse. Unfortunately, the same report also indicated that students' reasons for not

reporting were often valid, as the most common result of those incidents that were reported to school staff was no intervention at all or telling the reporting student to ignore the harassment (Kosciw et al., 2014). Even more frustrating, the perpetrator was disciplined only about 20% of the time and the reporting victim was actually disciplined about 10% of the time. Only in about 15% of reported cases did the staff attempt to educate the perpetrator or class about bullying. While LGBT students reported that the second most common intervention after a report was the school staff talking to the perpetrator, almost 50% of LGBT students claim that staff interventions were not effective at all (Kosciw et al., 2014).

The above statistics reveal a discouraging atmosphere for LGBT students who are regularly harassed and assaulted at school, as their perpetrators may not face any repercussions or the victims may not find it sensible to report the incidents at all. Inclusive policies provide a framework for protection for LGBT students and are also for teachers and staff who choose to intervene on a student's behalf without facing ramifications (Savage & Harley, 2009). However, it is clear that many teachers do not choose to intervene, which may be from lack of education regarding LGBT issues and policies. GLSEN suggests that general professional development regarding bullying and harassment may not be enough, but instead recommends LGBT-specific bullying and harassment trainings for staff which would include awareness of LGBT student experiences and how to effectively intervene (Kosciw et al., 2014). Kopels and Pacey (2012) also suggest similar trainings for teachers, administrators, and other staff that provide resources for responding to witnessed or reported instances of bullying against LGBT students. A Nebraska study found that teachers, administrators, and school

counselors ranked enforcing LGBT-inclusive policies and educating staff in the top three categories of nine best practices to provide an inclusive school environment (Lozier & Beckman, 2012). Just as teacher and staff training is crucial to a policy's effectiveness, the school's students' knowledge of the policy is also vital. Chesir-Teran and Hughes made an interesting distinction in their study by researching students' perceptions of harassment policies and victimization, in which perceived policies were predictive of lower levels of victimization (2009). These authors suggest that more important than the policy itself is the student body's awareness that the policy exists, which is reinforced by Szalacha's study that indicated only 65% of students in a school with an inclusive policy but without a GSA were aware of the policy (2003).

The Value of LGBT-inclusive Discrimination Policies. Another piece of a school's policy especially important to LGBT students is discrimination. Just as Kopels and Pacey expressed inconsistencies in anti-bullying state laws across the US, a discrepancy between state laws regarding LGBT discrimination and LGBT discrimination in schools also exists (2012). The Human Rights Campaign reports that while only 18 states and the District of Columbia prohibit the discrimination in employment and housing against people based on sexual orientation and gender identity, even fewer (14 and D.C.) states prohibit the discrimination of students based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Gill, 2015). Discrimination against LGBT students in schools presents itself differently than the discrimination that LGBT adults face after graduation, but is nonetheless detrimental to a student's success. The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network reasonably explains LGBT discrimination in schools as the inability to participate at all or as fully in school activities and requirements as other

students because of one's sexual orientation or gender identity/expression (Kosciw et al., 2014). The GLSEN's most recent National School Climate Survey reported that 55% of participants experienced LGBT-related discrimination at school, and 65% of students reported that other students had faced LGBT-related discrimination in their school (Kosciw et al., 2014). Since this research was published, LGBT-related discrimination has been specifically addressed as prohibited under the Title IX as sex discrimination, as the "prohibition extends to claims of discrimination based on gender identity" and "incidents of sexual violence may be accompanied by anti-gay comments or be partly based on a student's actual or perceived sexual orientation does not relieve a school of its obligation" (OCR, 2014). Discrimination in schools based on a part of one's identity has been linked to negative mental health and academic effects. For example, in Almeida et al.'s study, LGBT participants who reported having been discriminated against based on sexual orientation were much more likely to report suicidal ideation, self-harm, and higher scores on the depressive symptomology scale (2009). Similarly, GLSEN found that students who experienced LGBT-related discrimination were less likely to demonstrate positive self-esteem and more likely to demonstrate higher levels of depression than students who had not (Kosciw et al., 2014). Academically, students who experienced LGBT-related discrimination were more likely to report a lower GPA and missing school because of safety concerns than students who did not report such discrimination (Kosciw et al., 2014). The 2013 National School Climate Survey used the previous survey (2012) to sufficiently identify and categorize the many ways that LGBT students are discriminated against at school, which are in terms of restricting expression,

enforcing traditional gender norms, and limiting inclusion in extracurricular activities (Kosciw et al., 2014).

One example of discrimination that LGBT students may face in schools is in terms of expressing themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or gender non-conforming. Examples of discriminating against LGBT expression may include preventing students from wearing clothes of another gender than their legal sex, wearing clothes supporting LGBT issues, disciplining for public affection that is not equally disciplined in non-LGBT students, or disciplining simply for being out at LGBT (Kosciw et al., 2014). Various court cases have addressed these issues and have set a clear precedence protecting student expression as LGBT and/or supportive of LGBT issues. In regards to sexual orientation, the court agreed with Derek Henkle, a gay freshman student, that he had a constitutional right to express his homosexuality without retaliation and with protection from harassment, after he had been repeatedly told to keep his sexuality to himself (*Henkle v. Gregory 2001*). In regards to gender identity and expression, the court found that prohibiting Pat Doe, who was born male but identified as female, from wearing girl's clothing and accessories to school was in violation of her First Amendment to freely express herself (*Doe v. Yunits 2000*). Despite legal support for freedom of expression, LGBT students are still reporting discriminatory school practices that violate that freedom. Unfair discipline for LGBT students publically displaying affection compared to non-LGBT students was the most commonly reported discriminating practice, as nearly 40% of students reported that their schools did so (Kosciw et al., 2014). Also, about 34% of students reported their schools preventing students from wearing clothes typically associated with the opposite gender of a student's legal sex, and

about 24% of students stated that their schools prevented students from wearing clothing that supported LGBT issues (Kosciw et al., 2014). Nearly 10% of students said they were disciplined because they identified as LGBT or were disciplined more harshly than other students (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Another category of LGBT-related discrimination is enforcing traditional gender norms and typically targets transgender and gender-nonconforming students. Examples of this kind of discrimination includes school districts preventing students from using their preferred name and preventing students to use the bathroom of their identified gender rather than their legal sex (Kosciw et al., 2014). Although limited research or legal precedence addresses the issue of allowing transgender students to use their preferred name, which more aligns with their gender identity compared to their legal name which most likely identifies with their legal sex, the Gay Lesbian and Straight Educational Network recommends that school policy permit students to choose a preferred name that school staff use (Kosciw et al., 2014). The Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition further suggests that schools should not require students to obtain a court-ordered name or gender change, change their official records, or have a psychological diagnosis for the school to use their preferred name (2012). Also, diversity school professional Douglas Ray suggests also asking students what about their preferred gender pronouns as a best practice (2014). Unfortunately, 42% of transgender students reported being personally prevented from using their preferred name in school (Kosciw et al., 2014).

The argument for allowing LGBT students to use the restroom reflective of their gender identity is a growing topic in the media, as many states are addressing the issue after California passed Assembly Bill 1266 in 2013, allowing transgender students to use

facilities based on their self-perception of gender rather than their sex at birth. In 2013, six-year-old Coy Mathis was allowed to use the girls' restroom after the Colorado Civil Rights Division rules in her favor. The Maine Supreme Court sided with Nicole Maines in her argument that her civil rights were violated under Title IX when her school did not allow her to use the girls' restroom because her legal sex is male (*Maines v. Regional School Unit 26*, 2014). Federally, the Department of Justice filed a court brief in 2015 stating that denying transgender students access to restrooms consistent with their gender identity may violate Title IX (NCTE, 2015). However, other states have ruled unfavorably for transgender students, such as Virginia school board who voted against Gavin Grimm using his preferred restroom (2014). GLSEN recommends allowing students to use the appropriate restroom based on their gender identity, while another recommendation is creating a gender-neutral restroom available to all students (Kosciw et al., 2014). Consistent with the disagreement on this issue across the US, the majority (59%) of transgender students reported being required to use the bathroom or locker room of their legal sex (Kosciw et al., 2014). Despite the unsupportive policies for transgender students in many states, best practices and recommendations published by the Anti-Defamation League, GLAD, PFLAG, ACLU, NCTE, and TransActive Gender Center encourage schools to permit transgender students to use their preferred names and restrooms.

The third way in which LGBT students may be discriminated against in schools is by limiting participation in extracurricular activities. Examples of this kind of discrimination includes restricting the formation of a Gay-Straight Alliance or similar

LGBT-related club, limiting participation in school-sponsored sports, clubs, or competitions, prohibiting LGBT-related events, and unfairly regulating social events.

Despite the clear interpretation of the Equal Access Act, almost 18% of students reported in 2013 that they were hindered in forming or promoting a GSA or similar group in their schools (Kosciw et al., 2014). The same report showed that over 10% of students reported “other” discriminatory practices, such as schools restricting LGBT students from participating in sports activities. Also, over one quarter of students reported that their schools prevented students from attending a school dance with another student of the same gender (Kosciw et al., 2014), despite the 1980 ruling of *Fricke v. Lynch*, in which the court ruled that the school violated Aaron Fricke’s right to freedom of speech when the principal denied his request to bring his same-sex date to a school dance.

Inclusive Education. The final group of advocacy strategies for LGBT students is creating an inclusive education for all students, which is not present in most schools in the US, as education is exclusive of LGBT-affirming curriculum and LGBT-relevant resources. This model of education is harmful for the personal and social growth of LGBT students, as it ignores important LGBT issues or reinforces negative LGBT stereotypes. Furthermore, common definitions of supportive school climates consist of an LGBT-inclusive curriculum and access to LGBT resources (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2014). To move toward a more LGBT-inclusive education, schools need an inclusive curriculum, access to inclusive resources, and inclusive staff training. Inclusive practices lead to positive mental health results for LGBT students and decrease the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors.

The Value of an LGBT-Inclusive Curriculum. Perhaps the largest and most significant component of an inclusive education is an LGBT-inclusive and affirming curriculum. The purpose of an inclusive curriculum is to benefit both LGBT and non-LGBT students, as it serves to help self-esteem and academic success through validation and support of LGBT students, while also being reflective of the diverse world that awaits all students after graduation (Savage & Harley, 2009). The benefits of an inclusive curriculum are significant for LGBT students. LGBT participants in schools with positive representations of LGBT topics in their schools' curricula report hearing fewer negative remarks regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, skipping school less due to feeling unsafe, fewer experiences of higher levels of victimization, feeling more comfortable talking to a teacher about LGBT issues, more experiences of student intervention on behalf of LGBT students being victimized, and greater likelihood of pursuing a social science or STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) major in college (Kosciw et al., 2014). The same report also exhibited a difference in non-LGBT student acceptance of LGBT people, as 75% LGBT students in schools with inclusive curricula reported that their peers were somewhat or very accepting of LGBT people, compared to only 40% in schools without an inclusive curriculum. A current example of the implementation of an inclusive curriculum is California's FAIR Education Act (2011), which requires its K-12 schools to include a fair, accurate, inclusive, and respectful representation of LGBT people and people with disabilities in its social studies and history curricula. Therefore, California's Education Code must include the contributions of LGBT people throughout California and the United States' history, but prohibits any discriminatory representation of LGBT people in instruction, materials, and

textbooks (2011). While the FAIR Education Act is progress toward a more LGBT-inclusive education through addressing parts of the core curriculum, other parts of the core curriculum such as English and Language Arts are not addressed, nor are the sexuality education curriculum or the enrichment curriculum.

The advance made in favor of LGBT students in California and other attempts across the nation have not been without pushback. As of 2014, eight states restrict the inclusion of LGBT topics in schools (Gill, 2015). Common arguments against and LGBT-inclusive curriculum are that such curriculum promotes the LGBT lifestyle and is not relevant in school, as LGBT issues do not have a place in schools, which should be focused only on academics. Savage & Harley (2009) explain that an LGBT-inclusive curriculum is not meant to serve as a promotion of homosexuality as superior to heterosexuality, but as an equal presentation of all kinds of families and people that are present in today's diverse world. Despite a school's effort to demonstrate many kinds of people and families in its inclusive curriculum, a student's values and beliefs are still subject to parents' wishes at home (Walton, 2005). Another repeated argument is the irrelevance of LGBT issues in schools, because school's ultimate purpose is to teach the "Three R's," writing, reading, and arithmetic (Walton, 2005). This traditional view of the purpose of school is simply not the reality, as evidenced by the presence of mental health professionals in schools, such as school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, and school-based clinicians, as well as the piece of school curriculum, guidance, devoted to the personal and social growth of students.

The intentional or unintentional absence of LGBT people and issues in the school's core and enrichment curriculum is a factor that contributes to the isolation that

LGBT students may feel in school, as a piece of their identity is either ignored or negatively acknowledged in class (NASP, 2006). Walton (2005) describes a “hidden curriculum” in schools that is heterosexist in nature, as it regulates gender and sexual orientation in a way that presents heterosexual and cisgender students as normal, leaving LGBT people out of the curriculum altogether or pathologizing them. Many LGBT advocates and organizations have provided educators with examples of making a school’s core and enrichment curriculum more inclusive. LGBT people and topics can be discussed in all pieces of a core curriculum, such as in history by discussing the Nazis’ targeting of lesbian and gay people in addition to Jewish people and the history of LGBT rights advocacy, in social studies by noting the contributions of LGBT people on communities and the nation such as Harvey Milk and his assassination, in English and language arts by identifying writers and poets respectively as LGBT and how that identification may have affected their work, and in math and science by using graphs and statistics of LGBT issues when learning to analyze data (NASP, 2006; Savage, 2009; Walton, 2005). Enrichment courses, such as art and music should also include LGBT people and event by identifying artists and musicians respectively as LGBT (Savage, 2009; Walton, 2005). The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network encourages an inclusive curriculum to present LGBT students with positive role models throughout history and provide all students with an accurate representation of the LGBT community and historical events (Kosciw et al, 2014). However, 68% of students reported that their classes did not include lessons with LGBT people, history, or events (Kosciw et al., 2014). Of the remaining students who did report inclusion of LGBT issues in the curriculum, about half said the lessons represented LGBT people in a negative way.

Some schools are further preventing LGBT topics from entering the classroom, as nearly 25% of students reported that their schools prohibit students from choosing LGBT topics for class assignments and projects (Kosciw et al., 2014).

A more discussed piece of curriculum in regards to LGBT issues is sexuality education or a school's health curriculum. This topic is of growing concern, possibly because of the aforementioned risky sexual behaviors that LGBT students are more likely to engage in than their non-LGBT counterparts. It is also a more controversial topic, as many parents disagree on the appropriateness of what topics and detail should be included in a student's sexuality education, even without LGBT issues considered, as evidenced by some districts that still teach an abstinence-only sexuality education to their students. Just as the core curriculum can be exclusive or inclusive of LGBT topics, Gowen and Wings-Yanez (2014) have identified the various levels that school-based sexuality education can either exclude or include LGBT-sensitive issues. They found three themes of exclusive sexuality education, which are silencing, in which educators do not talk about LGBT issues at all or ignore LGBT-related questions; heterocentricity, in which the only sexually based topics are focused on non-LGBT relationships such as pregnancy prevention, abstinence until marriage (when gay marriage is not legal in that state), and vaginal intercourse; and pathologizing, in which the discussions negatively portray LGBT people such as only discussing LGBT issues when introducing HIV/AIDS, describing sexual activities other than vaginal intercourse as dangerous, or representing same-sex parents as unprepared or inappropriate to raise children (Gowen & Wings-Yanez, 2014). Conversely, they also found three themes of inclusive sexuality education, which are the token acknowledgement, in which educators briefly mention LGB people

via statistics or a definition which rarely includes gender identity; discussions outside classroom, in which teachers will answer questions and give more information outside of class; and full inclusiveness, in which educators encourage an open dialogue in class about LGBT topics (Gowen & Wings-Yanez, 2014).

Based on these findings, Gowen and Wings-Yanez recommended suggestions for making sexuality education more inclusive, which are consistent with other research and best practices (2014). One suggestion is discussing LGBT-specific issues and topics in sexuality education courses, which includes discussing sexual orientation, gender identity, and the stigma associated with LGBT (Gowen & Wings-Yanez). Walton describes the current climate of sexuality education as heterosexist because of its common name of “sex education,” implying courses are to be focused on heterosexual sexuality, while sexuality education is an “acknowledgment of the plurality of human sexuality” (2005). Another suggestion is providing information about STIs, rather than just pregnancy prevention, as well as the various ways to contract STIs other than vaginal intercourse to make the conversation and information relevant to all students (Gowen & Wings-Yanez, 2014). The same authors recommend including a focus on relationships in sexuality education by discussing healthy boundaries, communication, and the emotional complexity of relationships (2014). Another important section of the health or sexuality curriculum is openly discussing anatomy, so students are receiving information from a credible source and so students are less embarrassed about their bodies and feel more comfortable asking questions (Gowen & Wings-Yanez, 2014). The effects of an LGBT-sensitive sexuality education are positive for all students, as LGBT students are more likely to pay attention when the presented information is relevant, and non-LGBT

students are educated about sexual orientation and gender identity (Gowen & Wings-Yanez, 2014). Also, LGB students in schools with higher gay-sensitive HIV education reported fewer sex partners and were less likely to have used drugs or alcohol prior to most recent sexual intercourse, while students with little or no gay-sensitive HIV instruction were more likely to have more sex partners, become pregnant or get someone pregnant, make a plan to commit suicide, skip school for safety reasons, and have property damaged than their heterosexual counterparts and all students in a school with high gay-sensitive HIV instruction (Blake, Ledsky, Lehman, Goodenow, Sawyer, & Hack, 2001). In this study, “gay-sensitive” HIV instruction was defined in part by teachers reporting that they had access to appropriate materials and curricula to meet the needs of LGB students (Blake et al., 2001).

The Value of LGBT-Inclusive Resources. A school model of respectfully and accurately including LGBT people, events, and topics in the curriculum is one approach to educate all students, LGBT and non-LGBT, about LGBT issues and increase the acceptance and safety of LGBT students, but it may not enough information for LGBT or questioning students. Because the general and sexual education curriculum addresses students at a classroom level, students may not be comfortable asking questions or seeking more information, which suggests the need for access to resources outside of the curriculum to also be a piece of an inclusive education. Inclusive resources include library books, online resources, and community resources for LGBT students.

One method that LGBT students may use to seek additional information regarding LGBT issues or topics is in the library, as it is easily accessible and more private than the classroom. The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network recommends that

librarians work to provide LGBT students with a collection of fiction and nonfiction books that are LGBT-themed for all age levels, as well as display these books and posters with diverse family configurations (Kosciw et al, 2014). Oltmann provided librarians with multiple resources, such as the Lambda Literary Foundation Awards, the Stonewall Book Awards, the Rainbow Awards, and Webber's book *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Teen Literature: A Guide to Reading Interests* (2010), to consult in choosing books that are current and relevant to LGBT students, from which she compiled a list of 110 books (Oltmann, 2014). Despite such a large number of relevant LGBT books and resources from which schools can consult to find such books, less than half of LGBT students report that their schools have LGBT-related books in their libraries (Kosciw et al., 2014).

The National School Climate Survey showed an increase from 2009 to 2013 in LGBT-related resources overall, but did not see an increase in the availability of LGBT-related library books, suggesting the significance of the availability of online resources (Kosciw et al., 2012; Kosciw et al., 2014). Students have reported specifically requesting accessibility to LGBT-related online information and resources as an approach to make a school more inclusive, as well as teaching students how to effectively search the internet to gain that information (Gowen & Winges-Yanez, 2014). GLSEN recommends ensuring that access is available to appropriate LGBT-related online content, but only 45% of students report being able to access relevant information on school computers (Kosciw et al., 2014).

A school's collection of resources should not be limited to those within the school, as some students may need additional services that the school cannot provide.

Therefore, it is important for the school to build relationships with community organizations that provide health and social services to LGBT youth, so they are able to refer students to outside resources. LGBT students in Gowen and Wings-Yanez's focus groups requested that teachers have readily available information for community resources that are available to students (2014). In Hatzenbuehler et al.'s definition of a supportive school climate, schools should facilitate access to LGBT-related health and social or psychological services provided off school property (2014).

The Value of LGBT-Sensitive School Staff Training. Finally, an inclusive education must include supportive educators to implement an inclusive curriculum and provide access to inclusive resources. Supportive educators include administrators, teachers, and school mental health professionals who are adequately trained to work with and advocate for LGBT students. All of the advocacy efforts outlined in this literature review, LGBT-inclusive student-led groups, LGBT-inclusive policies, and LGBT-inclusive curriculum and resources, are in need of one or more supportive educators to sufficiently implement.

For example, most schools require a school staff member to serve as an advisor of student extracurricular groups and organizations. Therefore, Gay-Straight Alliances or similar clubs are in need of a supportive teacher or other school staff member to advocate for the formation of their group, as well as to advocate for appropriate marketing of their meetings and events. As mentioned previously, LGBT-inclusive policies require the support of school personnel to ensure that harassment and discrimination policies are effectively enforced. Supportive educators provide students an outlet to which they can safely report instances of harassment or discrimination without fear of retaliation.

Students in schools with more supportive staff are less likely to skip school due to feeling unsafe, more likely to report intentions to attend postsecondary education after graduation, and more likely to report a higher GPA (Kosciw et al., 2014). An inclusive curriculum requires that school staff possess knowledge about LGBT issues in a variety of contexts, such as social sciences, literature, history, and sexual education, as well as appropriate and available resources to which they can refer LGBT students. Fortunately, 96% of students reported that their school had at least one school staff member who was supportive of LGBT students (Kosciw et al., 2014). The staff members that LGBT students are most comfortable discussing LGBT issues are teachers and school mental health professionals, while the athletics coach or P.E. teacher are reported as the staff member with whom LGBT students are the least comfortable (Kosciw et al., 2014). While teachers and mental health professionals are more likely to be supportive of LGBT students, one third of LGBT students reported that their administrators, those acting as leaders within the school, are not supportive (Kosciw et al., 2014).

In order for school staff to be supportive of and advocate for LGBT students, they need appropriate training, either from their educator programs or as professional development in practice. In determining if teachers felt that they could appropriately meet LGB needs in HIV instruction, Blake et al. asked teachers to rate their confidence as a method of determining how gay-sensitive their schools HIV instruction is (2001), suggesting the significance of teacher education of LGB-specific needs. Also, Hatzenbuehler et al. identified staff training on providing support to LGBT students as a component of qualifying a school as supportive to LGBT students (2014). Lozier & Beckman (2012) also identifies the school as responsible for providing LGBT-specific

training to staff that uses relevant research to inform staff of the risks LGBT youth face and how to properly intervene against harassment and discrimination of these students as a means of providing a safe school environment. Gowen & Wings-Yanez's (2014) suggestions from LGBT student participants encourage teachers and staff to research on their own about sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as be required to have had a course on LGBT issues in their education programs. Unfortunately, Luke, Goodrich, and Scarborough (2011) found that more than 90% of counselor educators only discussed LGBT topics in K-12 schools during one three-hour class.

School Counselor Advocacy

The literature reviewed thus far presents evidence that LGBT students face unique challenges in schools, leading to poor mental health and academic success. In attempt to prevent and ease these challenges, many advocacy strategies and best practices have been recommended based on the researched potential benefits to LGBT students. However, many schools are not implementing these strategies and current research still shows that the school environment is not safe and accepting for all students (Kosciw et al., 2014).

The School Counselor as a Leader in LGBT Student Advocacy. The question becomes: whose role is it to advocate and implement strategies that make school a safe and accepting environment for LGBT students? The school system is large and changes made within require support from many educators at different levels, but which educator is in the best position to lead the advocacy efforts? As found in the National School Climate Survey, school mental health professionals are among the educators that LGBT students are most comfortable with in seeking support (Kosciw et al., 2014). Because

school mental health professionals may be sought out by LGBT students for issues and support more than other educators, better understand the mental health needs of students, are more likely to have received LGBT training in their programs, they may be in the best position to lead changes in the school system on behalf of LGBT students. However, school systems have many mental health professionals, which may include the school social worker, school psychologist, and school counselor. The national organizations for all three of these school professions encourage LGBT student advocacy (NASP, SSWAA, ASCA), but the school counselor may be able to better serve LGBT students because of the counselor's prevalence in schools and because of the student population the counselor is expected to serve. The National Association of School Psychologists recommends a student-to-school psychologist ratio of 1000:1, compared to the recommended ratios of 250:1 for both school social workers and school counselors from the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). While school psychologists typically require specialist-level education, compared to a masters-level education for school counselors and school social workers, they may be responsible for too many students and more than one building to serve as an LGBT advocacy leader. The SSWAA recommends a ratio of 250:1 and one school social worker per building, but a California study discovered that the actual ratios are much higher and significantly greater than the ratios of students-to-school counselor (California Department of Education, 2003). The same extensive study found that school administrators report the lowest ratios are of student-to-school counselors, compared to school social workers and psychologists, but the greatest need is still more school counselors (CDE, 2003). Furthermore, a more recent study focusing on

school social workers found that they serve 3-4 buildings on average (Kelly, Berzin, Frey, Alvarez, Shaffer, & O'Brien, 2010). School counselors may be the best mental health professional to serve LGBT students because each school counselor serves significantly less students than school social workers and psychologists, and they are perceived as the greatest mental health need by administrators.

Perhaps the reason that school counselor are much more prevalent in schools is because of the role they serve in the school. The school counselor is expected to deliver services to students in four components, which are guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support. The latter is the only component in which school counselors are not providing direct services to students. The other three are available to all students that the school counselor serves. In fact, guidance curriculum and individual planning are both expected to be provided to every student. Therefore, school counselors are presenting classroom guidance lessons to every student in the school, developing individual plans of study or schedules with every student in the school, and providing responsive services to any student in need within the school.

On the other hand, the roles of the school psychologist and school social worker are not necessarily to serve every student in the school(s). Instead, school psychologists may give and interpret standardized assessments, serve on individual education plan (IEP) teams, and create and monitor behavior plans to certain students requiring those services (NASP). School social workers may serve as the liaison between the student, family, and school, treat emotional disorders, and provide truancy interventions to certain students requiring those services. While school psychologists and social workers may have a closer relationship with select students in the school, the school counselor is

recognized by and accessible to all students in the school. Therefore, LGBT students may not have a relationship, or even know, the school social worker or psychologist to be able to seek help and support, suggesting the school counselor's role may be best for understanding the needs of LGBT students to move forward in advocating for them.

In addition to holding a unique role within the school that may be best positioned to understand, support, and advocate for LGBT students, school counselors are also bound by high ethical standards that propose advocacy for LGBT students. However, little research exists regarding the school counselor's role in leading LGBT advocacy efforts, as well as what strategies, if any, school counselors are using to help LGBT students. Despite ASCA's strong recommendations to provide additional support to LGBT students, it is unknown if school counselors are providing any support or the barriers in place that prevent those advocacy efforts.

The ethical standards by which school counselors are guided originate from the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). Both national organizations have identified advocacy on behalf of clients and students as a responsibility of an ethical counselor. The ACA Code of Ethics Section A.7.a states that "counselors advocate at individual, group, institutional, and societal levels to address potential barriers and obstacles that inhibit access and/or the growth and development of clients" (ACA, 2012). The ASCA Ethical Guidelines further address advocacy and diversity by expecting school counselors to develop competencies in how power, prejudice, and oppression affect students and school stakeholders, seek experiences to improve knowledge and skills in working with diverse populations, use inclusive language, and work as an advocate and leader in the school to create equitable

school counseling programs for all students (ASCA, 2010). Furthermore, the 2012 ASCA National Model recognizes school counselors as ideally situated within a school to serve as an advocate for all students and as a leader in promoting school reform (ASCA, 2012). ACA and ASCA identify student empowerment as a strategy to advocate with students. School counselors increase student empowerment through direct student services in classroom guidance, individual and small group counseling, and individual planning (ASCA, 2012). Other advocacy efforts are on behalf of students and can be divided into three levels, all of which can be applied to advocacy for LGBT students. However, the body of research surrounding the school counselor's role in LGBT advocacy emphasizes its importance and gives general strategies, but does not include what strategies that school counselors are currently implementing or the reasons they are not advocating for LGBT students.

The three levels of advocacy in which school counselors work to improve the achievement on behalf of all students are student, community/school, and social/political (ASCA, 2012). Student advocacy is addressing the needs of individual students. ACA recommends identifying allies and carrying out an action plan, which is consistent with ASCA's recommendations of using referrals, consultation, collaboration, and action plans. Community/school advocacy is moving closer to a macro-level of advocacy in which the needs of the community and school are addressed. ACA recommends counselor competencies in community collaboration and developing advocacy plans, which translates to ASCA's recommendations of including all school stakeholders in an advisory council to address the needs of the school, selecting and implementing program goals, facilitating needs assessments, and developing curriculum action plans.

Social/political advocacy moves beyond the school level in attempt to make change in the community, state, or national level. ACA suggests allying with community members to educate the public about needed change and recognizing when student needs should be addressed through legislative or policy changes, which resembles ASCA's examples of changing vision and mission statements of schools, sharing action plan results with the school board and community, participating in national and state professional organizations, and working toward legislative changes (ASCA, 2012).

The ASCA National Model can also provide a framework for school counselors to advocate specifically for LGBT students. The four components of the National Model are foundation, management, delivery, and accountability. The foundation component is the vision, mission, and goals of the counseling program. Advocating for LGBT within the foundation component may be including LGBT students into vision and mission statements if specific groups are included and setting LGBT-specific goals, such increased attendance and graduation rates of LGBT students and decreased incidents of harassment and discrimination of LGBT students (ASCA, 2012). The foundation component of a counseling program relies on the beliefs of the school counselor and school system, so the counselor and other school educators are encouraged to evaluate biases and views about sexual orientation and gender identity/expression (Graybill, Varjas, Meyers, & Watson, 2009). School counselors should serve as the leader in gaining LGBT-specific training and developing LGBT competencies to better understand how to serve this student population (ASCA, 2012). With such training and competency, school counselors can encourage teacher professional development regarding LGBT topics and issues (DePaul, Walsh, & Dam, 2009). Also as a leader, school counselors will

be able to take their expertise about LGBT students and encourage other school staff to increase the visibility of LGBT issues in the school, such as creating visible safe spaces where LGBT students can have open discussions with school staff, including LGBT-inclusive posters or rainbow flags in classrooms, and including LGBT-related topics in the history, literature, and health curricula (Graybill et al., 2009). DePaul et al. similarly recommend that school counselors create a safer school climate for LGBT students by using inclusive language and promoting Gay-Straight Alliances (2009).

The management component of the National Model consists of the assessment and tools used to evaluate the school's needs and deliver the program. One tool frequently used by school counselors is the school counseling calendar, which informs students, school staff, and other stakeholders of the events in the comprehensive school counseling program. School counselors can advocate for LGBT students using the calendar by including LGBT events and activities, such as LGBT History Month, National Coming Out Day, or The Day of Silence (ASCA, 2012). Another management component recommended by ASCA is the advisory council, which can be made of students, teachers, community members, and other stakeholders, who make recommendations for the CSCP. A school counselor can invite an LGBT expert from the community or school to serve on the advisory council as a way to improve the school for LGBT students (ASCA, 2012). Using assessment is another piece of the management component, in which school counselors can use existing data, such as behavior files, attendance rates, and grades, to determine the needs of LGBT students (ASCA, 2012).

The third component, delivery, is perhaps where the school counselors can make the most improvement within a school for LGBT students. The delivery system includes

the aforementioned direct student services, which are guidance lessons, individual planning, and responsive services, and indirect student services, which are provided on behalf of a student. Guidance lessons are those provided to all students, and school counselors can advocate for LGBT students by including LGBT people and events in the guidance curriculum and also by addressing topics such as bullying, respect, and diversity (ASCA, 2012). School counselors provide significantly more individual planning at the middle and high school level in regards to career and college readiness for all students. For LGBT students, school counselors can research LGBT-friendly colleges and companies, as well as LGBT scholarships (ASCA, 2012). Responsive services typically encompasses individual or small group counseling available to all students. School counselors serving as LGBT advocates can provide individual counseling for LGBT students through the coming out process or through any rejection from friends and family (ASCA, 2012), as well as providing psychoeducation for LGBT students by presenting a positive history and culture of LGBT people (DePaul et al., 2009). Responsive services may also be provided to intolerant students, but it is important that these services provided by the school counselor are separate from the administration's discipline (ASCA, 2012).

However, school counselors can advocate for the appropriate discipline of harassment and discrimination of LGBT students as indirect services by requesting sexual orientation and gender identity/expression be enumerated in school policies (ASCA, 2012; DePaul et al., 2009). If inclusive policies are in place, all school staff should work to inform students of the policies and consequences at the beginning of each semester (Graybill et al., 2009). When advocating on behalf of LGBT students, Graybill

et al. also recommend that educators focus on educating others, rather than confronting or arguing, as well as framing targeted strategies and goals in terms of the negative consequences that will occur if LGBT students do not receive an equitable education (2009). Indirect services provided by school counselors also include working with families and resources. In working with families with an LGBT student, it is important to encourage support of their child and providing community and online resources to the family (ASCA, 2012; DePaul, 2009). If a student requires long-term counseling, the school counselor should be aware of local LGBT-affirming therapists to whom the student can be referred (ASCA, 2012). Also, educators should be aware of the legal rights of LGBT students and the legal rights of those advocating on their behalf (Graybill et al., 2009).

Finally, the fourth component is accountability, which requires school counselors to review and analyze program interventions to determine if goals are being met. School counselors should evaluate advocacy strategies and their results in order to continue improving the school climate and achievement of LGBT students (ASCA, 2012).

Barriers Preventing School Counselor Advocacy. Although the ethical guidelines of the school counseling profession clearly describe part of the school counselor's role as an advocate for LGBT students, LGBT advocacy easily fits within the framework of the ASCA National Model, and plenty of evidence exists supporting the benefits of LGBT-specific advocacy strategies, it is unclear if school counselors are actually using these strategies. The role of the school counselor has evolved to specifically include leadership and advocacy, as both of these are included as themes in the ASCA National Model, yet the existing literature does not detail the prevalence of

school counselors as leaders in LGBT advocacy, nor their role in implementing the specific strategies recommended by LGBT-affirming organizations and research. Either school counselors are indeed advocating for LGBT students and the literature does not reflect such efforts, or school counselors are not working toward creating a better school environment for these students.

If school counselors are indeed not advocating for LGBT students, another area of limited research is the barriers that prevent or limit these efforts. Among the literature that does exist pertaining to this topic, the primary barriers identified are lack of administrative and community support, lack of LGBT knowledge, incongruity of personal beliefs and LGBT advocacy, and inability to make changes in the large school institution.

Perhaps the most foundational barrier to advocating on behalf of LGBT students is the lack of knowledge of LGBT issues or lack of competency to address such issues. This barrier has been studied as it relates directly to the counseling and helping professions, as McCabe & Rubinson's study (2008) of counseling, school psychology, and education graduate students found that many students were never exposed to LGBT topics in their coursework. Furthermore, many studies indicate that school counselors are less prepared to work with LGB clients or students than mental health counselors, health care professionals, and teachers (Bidell, 2012; Farmer, Welfare, & Burge, 2013; Schmidt 2011). To measure counselor competency in working with LGB clients, Bidell (2005) developed the Sexual Orientation Counselor Competence Scale (SOCCS), which evaluates a counselor's knowledge, attitudes, and skills related to working with LGB clients. Bidell's research suggested that counselors' training did not adequately equip

them to work with LGB clients, especially in terms of skills needed (2005). His findings were similar to Farmer et al.'s (2013), in which counseling graduate students in community and school settings both reported high levels of LGB competence in terms of attitudes, but significantly lower levels of LGB competency in terms of skills. Also, school counseling graduate students reported lower levels of overall LGB competency than community setting counseling graduate students (Farmer, Welfare, & Burge, 2013). Unfortunately, the SOCCS and other counselor competency scales do not include measures for competency in working with transgender clients, further limiting the research surrounding school counselor competence with LGBT clients. Troutman and Packer-Williams make an important note that the accrediting body for counselor education programs, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), does not include gender identity or expression in its 2009 Standards definition of "multicultural", nor do the drafts for the 2016 Standards (2014).

Another barrier to advocating on behalf of LGBT students is the personal beliefs of school counselors. The most common reported beliefs that are associated with sexual prejudice or lack of LGBT-affirming attitudes are politically conservative beliefs and religious beliefs (Bidell, 2014; Herek, 2009; Rainey & Trusty, 2007; Satcher & Leggett, 2007). Counselors who identify more with conservative and right-wing political beliefs are more likely to score lower in attitudes toward LGB people (Rainey & Trusty, 2007; Satcher & Leggett, 2007). Norton and Herek (2013) also found that political conservatism was a predictor of negative attitudes toward transgender people. Also, counselors who report high religiosity and frequent church attendance are more likely to

score lower in attitudes toward LGB people (Bidell, 2003; Rainey & Trusty, 2007; Satcher & Leggett, 2007). Herek found that religiously conservative people held sexually prejudicial beliefs toward LGBT people, such as viewing them that they are immoral and their sexual orientations and gender identities are choices that can be changed (2009). Bidell's recent study (2014) of counselors suggested that religion is the most significant factor among others, such as education level and political beliefs, related to lower levels of LGB competence. Another personal factor that seems to affect positive attitudes toward LGB people are the larger the number of friends and acquaintances who are LGB (Rainey & Trusty, 2007; Satcher & Leggett, 2007).

Counselors and educators also cite lack of support as a barrier to advocacy for LGBT students. Graduate students in the education field reported a lack of administrative and colleague support if they intervened in cases of LGBT harassment or addressed LGBT issues (McCabe & Rubinson, 2008). The same study found that a lack of community support, especially in terms of religious beliefs of the community, would make it more difficult to discuss LGBT issues in the school (2008). Valenti and Campbell's study (2009) of GSA advisors found that the fear of losing one's job was a factor considered when deciding to advise and support the organization. Job security was also mentioned in McCabe and Rubinson's study (2008) of graduate students, as they felt particularly vulnerable as new, untenured school counselors, school psychologists, and teachers to advocate for LGBT students.

Another theme found in reported barriers to LGBT advocacy is the large political and legal structure of the school setting. DePaul et al. (2009) explain that school policies are often reflective of the beliefs of the surrounding community, as well as of the local,

state, and federal laws that apply to the school, making a systems change difficult for an advocate. Bidell (2012) provided a potential explanation to the lower levels of school counselors' self-reported competency, compared to their community counterparts, in working with LGB students as a perceived inability to make a change in the school system, which contains its own political pressures and fears. School counselors first recommended the need for political savvy to be able to be an effective change agent for any population of students in a school system (Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahon, 2010).

Conclusion

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people have been and continue to be marginalized legally and socially. Because the school system is a microcosm of the larger society, prejudiced beliefs have influenced the treatment of LGBT students in schools, leading to lower academic achievement and increased mental health problems. As the school is responsible for providing a safe and accepting learning environment for every student, LGBT advocates have brought forth many recommendations to educators in creating a supportive environment. The existing literature suggests that the many advocacy strategies can be divided into three broad categories, which are supporting LGBT-inclusive student-led organizations, implementing and enforcing LGBT-inclusive harassment and discrimination policies, and employing an LGBT-inclusive education, which incorporates curricula, resources, and staff training. The literature also provides evidence of the benefits received by LGBT students when these strategies are used, but rarely includes the specifics of the school professional who should be leading the

advocacy efforts. As the school mental health professional that is most prevalent in today's schools and whose responsibility it is to reach the largest number of students, it is logical that the school counselor is best suited to serve as an advocacy leader for LGBT students. The ACA and ASCA Ethical Guidelines and the ASCA National Framework name advocacy for all marginalized students, including LGBT, as a duty of the school counselor. However, the literature does not currently examine the advocacy efforts of school counselors on behalf of LGBT students, and it is limited in its investigation of barriers that exist which prevent LGBT advocacy. An exploration of the current advocacy efforts of school counselors and the barriers that prevent such efforts will provide valuable knowledge to current and future school counselors who desire to make a change in their schools, as well as provide guidance to counselor educators in methods to better prepare school counselors as LGBT student advocates.

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the research project was to become more aware of advocacy strategies targeted for LGBT students in schools, the school counselor's role in developing those strategies, and the barriers present that prevent school counselors from advocating on behalf of LGBT students. The objective of this project was to contribute to a body of knowledge that will provide information to school counselors and school counselor educators regarding school counselor beliefs and attitudes regarding LGBT students and the need for advocacy on their behalf.

Design and Instrument

A review of the literature revealed that many advocacy strategies for LGBT students in schools are recommended by various advocacy organizations. These strategies fall into three broad categories: inclusive student-led school organization, inclusive school policies, and inclusive school curricula and training. The instrument used in this project was a questionnaire developed by the researchers to examine what advocacy strategies are used in schools, to what extent did the school counselor play a role in implementing or maintaining those strategies, and what barriers may be preventing school counselors from advocating on behalf of LGBT students (Appendix A).

Procedures and Data Analysis

The participants in this study were current school counselors across fourteen US states who were willing to complete the questionnaire. After receiving approval from the Missouri State University Institutional Review Board (September 24, 2015; Study # 16-0059; see Appendix B), researchers reached out to potential participants via state-level school counseling associations and the American School Counseling Association online community SCENE. Researchers contacted officers of state-level school counseling associations and requested that the questionnaire be shared to members in electronic form with an electronic informed consent via an online community posting or listserv (see Appendix C).

Analysis of the project was designed to examine which advocacy strategies are currently being implemented in schools, how involved school counselors believe they are in executing or developing strategies, and what beliefs and barriers are hindering advocacy for LGBT students.

Assumptions and Limitations

Researchers conducting this study requested throughout the questionnaire that participants complete each item honestly. Therefore, researchers assumed that participants self-reported honestly and to the best of their abilities. Also, researchers have identified two limitations of this study. First, participants self-reported their responses to the questionnaire, which may have resulted in a social desirability bias. Second, because participation in this study was voluntary, participants may have been more likely to

advocate on behalf of LGBT students than participants from a randomly selected population.

RESULTS

The results of this study are organized into three categories which are parallel to the three research questions. The first research question sought to understand which of the three groups of LGBT advocacy strategies are currently implemented in schools. This question was addressed in the questionnaire by asking current school counselors if their schools have a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) or similar LGBT-inclusive organization, harassment and discrimination policies that specifically enumerate sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and an LGBT-inclusive curriculum. The second research question addressed the school counselor's role in developing and/or maintaining these strategies in the school. Each participant was asked to rate the involvement of his/her role as the current school counselor or the role of a previous school counselor in the three categories of strategies. The third question probed the barriers in place that prevent school counselors from advocating for these strategies in their schools. To address this question, each participant was asked a series of questions regarding their personal beliefs about LGBT people and regarding the reasons for hesitancy in advocating for LGBT people.

The participants in this study were school counselors currently working in a school district across 14 US states, but a large majority of respondents (67%) were school counselors in the state of Missouri (Table 1). The second largest respondent group (16%) were participants currently working as school counselors in the state of New York (Table 1). The school demographics of each participant varied in terms of community type, as some respondents identified their communities as urban (19%), while others as suburban (30%) or rural (51%) (Table 2).

Table 1. Demographics of Participants by State

State	N	Percent
Alabama	2	.55
Arkansas	4	1.1
Connecticut	2	.55
Georgia	1	.27
Kansas	4	1.1
Michigan	2	.55
Missouri	244	67
New Mexico	1	.27
New York	64	16
Ohio	34	9
Oregon	1	.27
Pennsylvania	2	.55
Utah	1	.27
Virginia	2	.55
Total	364	100

Table 2. Demographics of Participants by Community Type

Community Type	N	Percent
Urban	70	19
Suburban	108	30
Rural	186	51
Total	364	100

The demographics of age of students that each participant served varied as well, as some only serve elementary students (18%), some only serve middle school students (19%), and others serve only high school students (42%), while the remaining report serving multiple levels (21%) (Table 3). Because of the nature of the questionnaire, a different number of school counselors participated in each question, as many questions were not applicable to all school counselors. The number of participants (N) for each question can be found in each table.

Table 3. Demographics of Participants by Level Served

Level Served	N	Percent
Elementary	65	18
Middle	68	19
High	152	42
Multi-Level	79	21
Total	364	100

Research Question 1: What LGBT-targeted Advocacy Strategies are Currently Implemented in Schools?

The literature review conducted before the commencement of this study outlined three broad categories of advocacy strategies that the literature has supported in helping LGBT students. The first category, the presence of an LGBT-inclusive student-led organization, such as a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), is frequently noted in the literature for promoting a more accepting and safe environment for LGBT students.

In this study, 349 school counselors were asked if their school currently had a GSA or similar organization, and 78 (22.3%) reported that their school does, while 253 (72.5%) do not, and 18 (5.2%) were not sure (Table 4).

Table 4. Reports of Current GSA

Response	N	Percent
Yes	78	22.3
No	253	72.5
Not Sure	18	5.2
Total	349	100

Also, the participants that reported their schools did not have a GSA were asked if anyone in their school was currently attempting to start a GSA or similar organization. Twenty-one (6%) of school counselors reported that someone in their school was attempting to start a GSA, 188 (53.9%) reported that no one was, and 60 (17.2%) participants were not sure.

The second category examined was the presence of formal LGBT-inclusive policies, as comprehensive harassment and discrimination policies are another recommendation by advocacy organizations to provide a safe school for LGBT students. In this study, 315 school counselors were asked if their schools had formal harassment and discrimination policies that specifically enumerated sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Table 5).

Table 5. Reports of Current Policies

Response	Sexual Orientation N	Sexual Orientation Percent	Gender Identity N	Gender Identity Percent
Yes	142	45.1	109	34.6
No	30	9.5	44	14
Not Sure	80	25.4	104	33
No Policy, Positive Climate	63	20	58	18.4
Total	315	100	315	100

If they did not have a formal policy, they were further asked if they believed their school still had a “positive climate” for LGBT students in terms of harassment and discrimination without the formal policy. Of those surveyed, 142 (45.1%) school counselors do have a policy which specifically protects sexual orientation, and 109 (34.6%) do have policy which specifically protects gender identity (Table 5). Thirty

(9.5%) reported that their schools do not have a formal policy or a “positive climate” in regards to sexual orientation, and 44 (14%) do not have a formal policy or “positive climate” in regards to gender identity (Table 5). Sixty-three (20%) participants and 58 (18.4%) reported not having a formal policy but having a “positive climate” in regards to sexual orientation and gender identity, respectively (Table 5).

The third category surveyed the inclusivity of LGBT people and topics into the schools’ curricula (Table 6), resources (Table 7), and staff trainings (Table 8).

Participants were asked to rate their schools’ inclusivity of LGBT people in a positive and supportive manner on a scale of 1 (very exclusive) to 9 (very inclusive).

Table 6. Reports of Inclusive Curriculum

Response	Core N	Core Percent	Sexuality N	Sexuality Percent	Guidance N	Guidance Percent
1 (Very Exclusive)	75	26.4	66	23.2	48	16.9
2	48	16.9	42	14.8	32	11.3
3	40	14.1	30	10.6	28	9.9
4	27	9.5	31	10.9	28	9.9
5	58	20.4	62	21.8	48	16.9
6	11	3.9	9	3.2	31	10.9
7	13	4.6	19	6.7	25	8.8
8	6	2.1	13	4.6	23	8.1
9 (Very Inclusive)	6	2.1	12	4.2	21	7.4
Total	284	100	284	100	284	100

The most common response for LGBT-inclusive sexuality education was a 1, as 66 (23.2%) of 284 participants rated their schools’ sexuality curricula as very exclusive of LGBT-related topics, while 62 (21.8%) rated their schools as a 5 (not particularly exclusive or inclusive), and 12 (4.2%) rated their schools as a 9 (very inclusive) (Table

6). Similarly, 75 (26.4%) rated their schools' core curriculum as a 1 (very exclusive), while 58 (20.4%) rated their schools as a 5 (not particularly exclusive or inclusive), and 6 (2.1%) rated their schools as a 9 (very inclusive) (Table 6). School counselors rated their schools' guidance curricula as more LGBT-inclusive, as 48 (16.9%) rated their schools' core curriculum as a 1 (very exclusive), while 48 (16.9%) rated their schools as a 5 (not particularly exclusive or inclusive), and 21 (7.4%) rated their schools as a 9 (very inclusive) (Table 6).

Participants were also asked if their schools provided access to LGBT-inclusive resources, such as fiction and non-fiction library books and online resources (Table 7).

Table 7. Reports of Inclusive Resources

Response	N	Percent
1 (Very Exclusive)	56	19.7
2	39	13.7
3	31	10.9
4	27	9.5
5	46	16.2
6	23	8.1
7	23	8.1
8	19	6.7
9 (Very Inclusive)	20	7
Total	284	100

Fifty-six (19.7%) of school counselors rated their schools' resources as a 1 (very exclusive), while 46 (16.2%) rated their schools' resources as a 5 (not particularly exclusive or inclusive), and 20 (7%) rated their schools' resources as a 9 (very inclusive) (Table 7).

In regards to staff trainings specifically targeting LGBT student topics and resources, participants were asked if their schools provided such workshops or trainings (Table 8). Fifty-nine (20.8%) reported available LGBT-related workshops, while 178 (62.7%) reported unavailability of LGBT-related workshops in their schools, and 47 (16.5%) of participants were not sure (Table 8).

Table 8. Reports of LGBT-specific Staff Trainings

Response	N	Percent
Yes	59	20.8
No	178	62.7
Not Sure	47	16.5
Total	284	100

Research Question 2: What is the Level of Involvement that School Counselors Take in Implementing or Maintaining These Advocacy Strategies?

To address this question, participants were asked to rate their level of involvement in developing and maintaining the three broad categories of advocacy strategies outlined above. For the first category, LGBT-inclusive student-led organizations, participants who work in schools with a GSA or similar organization were asked to self-report their involvement in creating the organization on a scale of 1 (not involved at all) to 9 (very involved) (Table 9). Ninety-nine school counselors participated in this part of the study, and the most common rating (28.3%) was a 1 (not involved at all), while the next most common response (22.2%) was a 9 (very involved) (Table 9). Also in this category, the same participants were asked to rate their level of involvement in maintaining the organization, such as serving as the advisor or assisting in planning events or speakers.

Similarly, the most common response (24.2%) was a 1 (not involved at all) and the next most common response (21.2%) was a 9 (very involved) (Table 9).

Table 9. Reports of School Counselor Involvement – GSA

Response	Creation N	Creation Percent	Maintenance N	Maintenance Percent
1 (Not involved at all)	28	28.3	24	24.2
2	10	10.1	14	14.1
3	8	8.1	6	6.1
4	6	6.1	9	9.1
5	5	5.1	11	11.1
6	5	5.1	4	4
7	9	9.1	4	4
8	6	6.1	6	6.1
9 (Very involved)	22	22.2	21	21.2
Total	99	100	99	100

For the second category of advocacy strategies, LGBT-inclusive policies, participants were first asked about various formal policies in their school, such as enumerating sexual orientation and/or gender identity in their harassment and discrimination policies. Of those 223 participants that do have at least one LGBT-inclusive policy, they were then asked to rate their involvement in advocating for those policies on a scale of 1 (not involved at all) to a 9 (very involved) (Table 10).

Table 10. Reports of School Counselor Involvement – Policies

Response	N	Percent
1 (Not involved at all)	57	25.6
2	10	4.5
3	17	7.6

4	7	3.1
5	34	15.2
6	16	7.2
7	26	11.7
8	27	12.1
9 (Very involved)	29	13
Total	223	100

The most common response (25.6%) was a 1 (not involved at all), and the next most common response was rated at a neutral level of a 5 (15.2%). The third most common response (13%) was a 9 (very involved) (Table 10).

The third category of LGBT-targeted advocacy strategies is an inclusive education, which includes a school’s curriculum, resources, and staff trainings. Participants who reported working in a school with an LGBT-inclusive curriculum, resources, and/or staff trainings were asked to rate their involvement in advocating for an inclusive education on a scale of 1 (not involved at all) to a 9 (very involved) (Table 11). The most common response (21.8%) was a 1 (not involved at all), and the next most common responses were rated at a neutral level of a 4 (13.5%) and a 5 (10.4%) (Table 11). Nineteen school counselors (9.8%) rated their involvement as a 9 (very involved) (Table 11).

Table 11. Reports of
School Counselor Involvement – Education

Response	N	Percent
1 (Not involved at all)	42	21.8
2	18	9.3
3	17	8.8
4	16	8.3

5	26	13.5
6	20	10.4
7	17	8.8
8	18	9.3
9 (Very involved)	19	9.8
Total	193	100

Research Question 3: What Barriers or Beliefs are Preventing School Counselors from Advocating for LGBT Students?

To address this research question, participants were asked a series of questions regarding their beliefs about LGBT people and another series of questions regarding the barriers that exist that make school counselors hesitant to advocate for LGBT people. Questions asked of participants for this research question were derived from reported barriers in the literature that educators have faced in advocating for LGBT students.

Participants (N=364) were asked to read eleven statements regarding their personal beliefs about LGBT and their communities, and strongly agree, agree, agree more than disagree, disagree more than agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statements.

More school counselors agreed than disagreed with the statement, “In general, LGBT students are marginalized in schools across the US,” (see column “Marg.”) as only 54 (14.9%) chose a disagree response (Table 12).

Table 12. LGBT Beliefs 1

Response	Marg. N	Marg. Percent	Edu. N	Edu. Percent	Resp. N	Resp. Percent
Strongly Disagree	4	1.1	33	9.1	3	.8
Disagree	21	5.8	56	15.4	0	0

Disagree more than agree	29	8.0	77	21.2	1	.3
Agree more than disagree	131	36.0	79	21.7	24	6.6
Agree	134	36.8	86	23.6	79	21.7
Strongly agree	45	12.4	33	9.1	257	70.6
Total	364	100.0	364	100.0	364	100.0

The second question, “My counselor educator program adequately equipped me to counsel and advocate for LGBT students,” (see column “Edu.”) had a larger discord with 45.7% of participants who chose a disagree response (Table 12). Nearly all participants (98.9%) agreed with the third question (see column “Resp.”), “It is the school’s responsibility to provide a safe and accepting learning environment for LGBT students” (Table 12). A majority of participants (75.3%) chose a disagree response to the fourth question (see column “Diff.”), “The colleagues in my school treat LGBT students differently than other students” (Table 13).

Table 13. LGBT Beliefs 2

Response	Diff. N	Diff. Percent	Bull. N	Bull. Percent	ComeOut N	ComeOut Percent
Strongly Disagree	48	13.2	29	8.0	12	3.3
Disagree	137	37.6	99	27.2	39	10.7
Disagree more than agree	89	24.5	95	26.1	97	26.6
Agree more than disagree	60	16.5	98	26.9	138	37.9
Agree	24	6.6	39	10.7	61	16.8
Strongly agree	6	1.6	4	1.1	17	4.7
Total	364	100.0	364	100.0	364	100.0

A smaller majority of school counselors (61.3%) chose a disagree response to the fifth question (see column “Bull.”), “LGBT students in my school are bullied and harassed more than other students” (Table 13). Similarly, 216 (59.3%) of participants agreed that

(see column “ComeOut”), “LGBT students in my school feel safe and accepted when they “come out” as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender” (Table 13). Only 30 school counselors (8.2%) disagreed with the statement (see column “Adv.”), “As a school counselor, I should be a leader in advocating for LGBT students in my school” (Table 14).

Table 14. LGBT Beliefs 3

Response	Adv. N	Adv. Percent	Admin. N	Admin. Percent	Coll. N	Coll. Percent
Strongly Disagree	10	2.7	5	1.4	2	.5
Disagree	8	2.2	13	3.6	16	4.4
Disagree more than agree	12	3.3	41	11.3	43	11.8
Agree more than disagree	53	14.6	87	23.9	117	32.1
Agree	111	30.5	121	33.2	123	33.8
Strongly agree	170	46.7	97	26.6	63	17.3
Total	364	100	364	100	364	100

Most participants agreed that their administration and school colleagues would support their advocacy efforts for LGBT students, as 83.8% agreed with the statement (see column “Admin.”), “My school’s administration would support my advocacy efforts for LGBT students,” and 83.2% agreed with the statement (see column “Coll.”), “My school colleagues would support my advocacy efforts for LGBT students” (Table 14).

However, fewer school counselors believed that their community would support their advocacy efforts or that their administration would financially support their advocacy efforts for LGBT students, as 42.6% disagreed with the statement (see column “Comm.”), “My community would support my advocacy efforts for LGBT students,” and 50.5% disagreed with the statement (see column “Financial”), “My school’s

administration would financially support my advocacy efforts for LGBT students” (Table 15).

Table 15. LGBT Beliefs 4

Response	Comm. N	Comm. Percent	Financial N	Financial Percent
Strongly Disagree	13	3.6	33	9.1
Disagree	50	13.7	56	15.4
Disagree more than agree	92	25.3	95	26.1
Agree more than disagree	117	32.1	107	29.4
Agree	65	17.9	50	13.7
Strongly agree	27	7.4	23	6.3
Total	364	100	364	100

The participants were also asked to respond with the same strongly agree – strongly disagree scale to statements regarding their hesitancy to advocate for LGBT students. The following potential barriers to advocacy were as follows: fear of losing one’s job, lack of community, school board, and/or administrative support, fear of being ostracized by school colleagues, belief that LGBT students are not in need of targeted resources, fear of losing friends or family, inconsistency between LGBT advocacy and religious beliefs, inconsistency between LGBT advocacy and personal beliefs, lack of financial support, lack of education and/or training to understand the needs of LGBT students, and report that another school professional is already advocating for LGBT students (Table 16). Each participant could answer any or all of these questions.

The most commonly chosen barrier (44.9%) is a lack of support from the community, school board, and/or administration (Table 9). At a very close second and third most commonly chosen barriers were a lack of financial support (41.2%) and a lack of

education or training (41.2%). Only eight participants (2.3%) reported that they feared losing friends and/or family by advocating for LGBT students. Twenty-six school counselors (19.1%) feared losing their job and 22 (16.2%) school counselors feared being ostracized by school colleagues if they advocated for LGBT students (Table 9).

Table 16. Reports of Barriers to LGBT Advocacy

Barrier	N	Percent
Fear of losing job	26	19.1
Lack of support	61	44.9
Ostracized by colleagues	22	16.2
LGBT not in need	37	27.2
Lose friends or family	8	5.9
Religious beliefs	37	27.2
Lack of financial support	56	41.2
Lack of education	56	41.2
Personal beliefs	27	19.9
Another advocate	16	11.8
Total	136	254.4

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was address the gap in the literature regarding the school counselor's role in advocating for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students. The current literature has conveyed a present need to support LGBT students in school because of their higher risk for depression, suicide, and risky behaviors than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts (Kosciw et al., 2014). Also in the current literature, with the support of LGBT-affirming organizations, are recommendations for effective advocacy strategies to create a safe and accepting learning environment for LGBT students (Kosciw et al., 2014). However, we also know that many schools are not implementing any or all of these strategies. Some of our schools do not allow LGBT students to start a Gay-Straight Alliance, others permit discrimination of LGBT students, and many do not include any LGBT people or events in any of the curricula (Kosciw et al., 2014). We know what strategies are helping promote a safe and accepting learning environment, and the literature is clear that the school is responsible for creating that safe learning environment, and yet we are not taking action for LGBT students. So, which school professionals should be leading this advocacy effort? The school counselor is in a unique position within the school, as he/she has access to all students and is also a mental health expert. While advocacy strategies are best implemented with a team approach, a school counselor may be in the best position to identify the school's needs and begin the process.

However, the current literature barely touches the role of the school counselor as that advocacy leader for LGBT students. School counselors are trained with a code of

ethics, which clearly identifies the need for advocacy specifically for LGBT students, but the literature does not examine the school counselor's perspective of his/her role in advocating. Because of the lack of implementation of these strategies in schools, despite evidence of their efficacy, it could be assumed that some inhibiting barriers are in place. A gap in the literature exists here as well, as studies have explored the biases that heterosexual and cisgender people have toward LGBT people, and a few studies have explored the barriers in schools that prevent advocacy in general. The literature does not explain the barriers that are preventing advocacy on behalf of LGBT students for school counselors, specifically. The purpose of gathering these data is to add to the growing body of knowledge surrounding LGBT students and also better understand the school counselor's perceptions of his/her role in advocating and the obstacles that are hindering the advocacy process. With this knowledge, counselor educator programs can better equip their counselor trainees for the unique position of a school counselor as an advocate and practicing school counselors will be given recommendations based on the barriers reported in this study.

Implications

Research Question 1. The first research question surveyed which of the recommended LGBT advocacy strategies are currently implemented in schools. The most commonly reported strategy that is currently implemented was a formal harassment and discrimination policy that specifically enumerates sexual orientation as a protected class, as 142 (45%) school counselors reported this policy in their schools (Table 5). Also, 109 (35%) school counselors reported the same policy protecting gender identity (Table 5).

Other school counselors (about 20%) reported that their schools do not have a formal policy, but that their school climate is in general positive for LGBT students in terms of harassment and discrimination (Table 5). Interestingly, 80 (25%) school counselors were unaware if their harassment and discrimination policies included sexual orientation, and 104 (33%) were not sure about inclusion of gender identity (Table 5). While these schools may indeed have enumerated protection, best practices argue that training for staff and education of students of this protected class is just as important as the policy itself (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2012; Kopels & Pacey, 2012; Kosciw et al., 2014; Lozier & Beckman, 2012). These results were unexpected as the current literature surveying students show a GSAs to be more common in schools than both inclusive policies and inclusive education, as only about 10% of students reported that their schools' policies protect sexual orientation and gender identity or expression (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Another recommended strategy is the establishment of an LGBT-inclusive student-led organization. School counselors participating in this study were more likely to not have a Gay-Straight or similar organization, as only 22.3% (78) reported that their school currently has an established GSA (Table 4). This is inconsistent with the current literature, in which about half of students report that their schools do have a GSA or similar organization (Kosciw et al., 2014). However, this study also included school counselors working in elementary buildings, which typically do not have GSAs or similar organizations.

This study also surveyed school counselors regarding their schools' degree of LGBT-inclusivity in core, sexuality, and guidance curricula. "Inclusive" was defined as

supportive and affirming. While an inclusive core curriculum is part of many recommendations and is implemented on a large scale in California with the FAIR Education Act (2011), this was reported as not implemented in a majority of schools. On a scale of 1 (very exclusive) to 9 (very inclusive), only 12.7% (36) participants reported a positive rating (scores of 6 or higher) for their core curriculum (Table 6). This was consistent with the current research in which only about 18% of students reported hearing positive statements about LGBT people in their classes (Kosciw et al., 2014). Therefore, a vast majority of LGBT students in these schools will not find other LGBT people represented in their history or literature classes, despite the significant impact LGBT people have had on our country's history and literature. Curiously, the participants reported a greater degree of inclusivity in their schools' sexuality education curricula, as 53 (18.7%) participants reported a positive rating (score of 6 or higher on the same scale) (Table 6). This contradicts common reasons for excluding LGBT topics from the public schools, as a common argument is the inappropriateness of discussing sex at all, but especially how it relates to sexual minorities, in schools (Gowen and Wings-Yanez, 2014). While topics relevant to LGBT students may be discussed more frequently in a positive manner in sexuality education than in the core education, we are still left with a large number of students who may only hear "sexual orientation" or "gender identity" as they relate to HIV or deviance, or they may not hear the terms at all. More positively and expectedly, are the results for an LGBT-inclusive guidance curriculum, as 100 participants (35.2%) rated positively (score of 6 or higher) (Table 6). While nearly twice the schools in this study teach an inclusive guidance curriculum compared to an inclusive core or sexuality education, still more than half of students are not learning about

acceptance of diverse families and people in regards to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Research Question 2. The second research question sought to address the gap in the literature regarding the school counselor's role in LGBT student advocacy. All school counselors who reported the current implementation of any strategy were also asked to rate their level of involvement in that implementation on a scale of 1 (not involved at all) to 9 (very involved). School counselors were more likely to be involved than not (a rating of 6, 7, 8, or 9) in helping establish a GSA or inclusive policy than an inclusive curriculum. However, in all three strategy categories, the most common singular response was a 1 (not involved at all). Twenty-eight (28.3%) of participants who worked in schools with a GSA or similar organization reported that they were not involved at all in helping establish that organization, and 24 (24.2%) participants reported that they are not involved at all (rating of 1) in maintaining that organization (Table 9). However, 42 (42.5%) school counselors reported that they were more involved than not involved (rating of 6 or higher) in creating that organization, and 35 (35.3%) were more involved than not in maintaining that organization (Table 9). Similarly, 57 participants (21.8%) in schools with at least one inclusive policy reported that they were not involved at all in advocating for that policy, but 98 (44%) reported that they were more involved than not involved (score of 6 or higher) (Table 10). Forty-two (21.8%) of participants working in schools with an inclusive curriculum reported that they were not involved at all in advocating for an inclusive curriculum, while 71 (38.3%) reported that they were more involved than not involved (score of 6 or higher) (Table 11). An explanation for the high frequency of school counselors who report that they are not involved at all in these

advocacy strategies may be because another school professional had already taken responsibility. For example, GSAs are commonly advised by a teacher, who would most likely be the most involved in establishing the organization (other than the students) and be the most involved in maintaining the organization (Kosciw et al., 2014). Also, formal policies and curricula are often chosen by the administration and/or school board, so those schools with inclusive policies and curricula may have had a school board member or administrator begin the advocacy process.

Research Question 3. Finally, the goal of third research question was to address another gap in the literature regarding the barriers and beliefs present that prevent school counselors from advocating for LGBT students.

Barriers to Advocacy. In one part of the study, participants who do not advocate or who have faced challenges in advocating were asked various statements were reasons that they do not or are hesitant to advocate for LGBT students. The barriers that school counselors more frequently reported agreeing more than disagreeing with were a lack of support from the community, administration, and/or school board, lack of financial support, lack of education in regards to LGBT students (Table 16). Other commonly reported barriers were the lack of belief that LGBT students need targeted intervention and the inconsistency between the participant's religious beliefs and advocating for LGBT students. Very few participants (5.9%) feared losing friends or family, but 19.1% reported fear of losing their job (Table 16). This supports the current literature by Valenti and Campbell (2009), in which GSA advisors reported a fear of losing their jobs as a consideration when deciding to serve as the GSA advisor. While biases toward LGBT people in the current literature are often cited as primarily due to religion and political

beliefs, the primary ones reported for school counselors are instead revolving around support, whether financially and/or from school stakeholders. However about 27% of these participants did report religion as a reason for not advocating (Table 16), which was expected based on the current research (Bidell, 2014; Herek, 2009; Norton & Herek, 2013; Rainey & Trusty, 2007; Satcher & Leggett, 2007). A much smaller number of school counselors reported a fear of losing their job than those that reported a lack of support from school stakeholders (Table 16), indicating support is not necessarily desired for “permission,” but rather to ensure the strategies can actually be implemented. Some school counselors (16.2%) reported not advocating because of fear of being ostracized by school colleagues (Table 16), which is consistent with current research cited above in which LGBT students are occasionally mistreated by school staff (Kosciw et al., 2014). Perhaps, school counselors are aware of other school staff who are not supportive of LGBT students and fear backlash for openly supporting them. Education seems to be another theme, as 27.2% of participants reported that LGBT students are not in need of targeted interventions (Table 16), despite the overwhelming evidence that they are more academically, behaviorally, and socially at risk than heterosexual and cisgender students. Also, 41.2% of participants were aware that they were not educated enough about LGBT students to be advocating for them (Table 16).

Beliefs about LGBT People Preventing Advocacy. These results were consistent with the questionnaire items that surveyed all of the participants’ (N=364) beliefs about LGBT people and their communities, as a lack of support and a lack of education were also indicated in this section of the questionnaire.

For example, a majority of school counselors (54.4%) reported that their graduate program in counseling did not adequately prepare them in LGBT-related topics (Table 12). Similarly, McCabe and Rubinson (2008) found that many graduate-level education students were never exposed to LGBT issues in their graduate programs. Furthermore, 14.8% of school counselors do not agree that LGBT students are marginalized in schools, suggesting the need for further education (Table 12).

The theme of support also appeared in the beliefs section of the questionnaire. Just as participants reported fearing that they may be ostracized by school colleagues for advocating for LGBT students in the barriers section of the survey, 24.7% of school counselors reported that they believe LGBT students are treated differently by school colleagues compared to heterosexual and cisgender students, and 16.8% disagreed that they would have colleague support in advocating (Tables 13 and 14). Also, only 12 (8.2%) of school counselors disagreed that they should be the school advocacy leader for LGBT students, yet only about half of participants believe that they would receive community or financial support (Tables 14 and 15). The literature provides support as a reported barrier to advocate for LGBT students as well, as participants in McCabe and Rubinson's (2008) study of graduate-level education students reported feeling vulnerable to advocate as a new school counselor, school psychologist, or teacher. Furthermore, Bidell (2012) found school counselors were less prepared to work with LGBT students than mental health counselors partly because of the difficulty in navigating and making change in large, political structure of the school system, also indicating a lack of support as a barrier to school counselors.

Recommendations for Practicing School Counselors

Analysis of the data indicates that a large number of participating school counselors are hesitant to advocate for LGBT students. Upon examining the barriers to advocating reported by school counselors, their hesitancy is understandable, as almost half would not feel supported and feel they are not educated well in this topic, while nearly 20% fear they would lose their job or be ostracized by school colleagues. For those surveyed, advocating for LGBT students may come at a high price, while others may feel very prepared and supported to begin or continue advocacy. Therefore, recommendations for practicing school counselors would be inappropriate if presented as if all school counselors in all communities are searching for recommendations in the same level of advocacy. Instead, recommendations will be separated based on a simplified version of a micro- to macro-level continuum of advocacy in a school setting. First, recommendations will be presented on an individual level, then a building level, and then a district level.

Recommendations for Individual Advocacy. For practicing school counselors who are not aware of LGBT students in his/her school, who are uncertain about specific challenges faced by LGBT students in schools, or who are interested in learning more and supporting these students but fear negative consequences should begin at this level. At the individual advocacy level, a school counselor is primarily focusing on educating him/herself and finding ways to support and affirm individual LGBT students. The following are recommendations to begin advocacy on behalf of LGBT students:

Educate Yourself. Seek professional development opportunities at nearby universities or at your regional, state, or national school counselor association conference. While at these workshops or conferences, it is important to obtain contact information of

the presenters for support in the future. Also, be engaged at workshops by participating to the fullest, arriving with questions you already have, and prepared to ask for local and online resources for further support and information. Also, refer to online resources for information, stories, and legal and ethical considerations. The population of out LGBT people is growing and changing and includes many different terms. It is important to think about sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression as three separate pieces of a person's identity that do not have to relate to each other. These identities are typically on a continuum, which means a bisexual person may be attracted to women and men but have a preference for women, or a transgender woman may have been born male, identify primarily as a woman with some masculine features to her identity. A cisgender male may identify as a man but enjoy dressing as a woman every so often. Also, these identities can be fluid throughout a person's life. Research the definitions of terms that typically fall under the large umbrella of "transgender" (e.g. non-binary, androgynous, gender non-conforming) and the terms that do not fit perfectly into the definitions of lesbian, gay, or bisexual (e.g. pansexual).

Examine Your Own Biases. We all have prejudices, as it is natural to fear or be wary of things we do not understand. However, it is important to seek understanding of LGBT people and then explore any biases you may have toward them. Where are those biases coming from? Are they rational or irrational? Will they interfere with your working with an LGBT student or parent? Find a support person who is LGBT-affirming but not judgmental that is willing to help you through the process of acceptance. This person may be another school counselor, a personal friend, a teacher in your building, or a mental health counselor.

Seek out LGBT People. Rainey and Satcher (2007) found that having a friend or acquaintance who identifies as LGBT is more likely to increase positive attitudes toward LGBT people. Therefore, if homophobia and transphobia are the result of a lack of understanding, then it is up to you to seek that understanding. After examining your own biases, use your community resources to find out LGBT people. Most universities have a diversity or multicultural center, and some have a specific place on campus just for LGBT students. Students who work or hang out in these centers are more likely to be LGBT or LGBT-affirming and are typically open to discussion, as allies are very important to them. Call ahead and explain your situation, which may be that you are a school counselor who just had your first gay or transgender student come out to you and you're looking for support, or you are a school counselor who wants to be more LGBT-affirming and you are unsure of where to start. Ask if you could schedule a meeting with someone who is simply willing to share their story or someone who is willing to process with you what "LGBT-affirming" means for you. When at this meeting, or if you just drop by the center, use the active listening skills you already know to hear stories, take notes to convey that their stories and information are important to you, ask questions, and ask for strategies and what they wish their school counselors had done to support them. Be sure you take time to reflect after such a meeting, as many stories that LGBT students share can be difficult to hear and process. Also, larger communities have social centers for LGBT people that are not associated with a university, which may be a coffee lounge, restaurant, or bar. Students with whom you met will most likely know where they are, so simply ask. Go to these places to meet more LGBT people and allies. Gain experience

with LGBT people so you can better empathize with LGBT students you may currently have or will have in the future.

Use Gender-Neutral Language. This takes a lot of practice, but do not assume that someone who seems to be male has a girlfriend and someone who seems to be female has a boyfriend. If asking about a significant other in a student's life, rather than saying, "Do you have a boyfriend?" ask instead, "Do you have a boyfriend? Girlfriend?" or, "Do you have a significant other?" If that student is gay or bisexual, you may have provided an opportunity for that student to come out in the future to you, and you have begun earning their trust by not setting expectations for them just as society has. If that student is heterosexual, you may have an opportunity to age-appropriately explain that you do not suspect the student is gay or bisexual, but you simply do not assume anything about any student, and you will support a student regardless of sexual orientation.

This gender-neutral language also applies to parents. When asking students about their home life, do not assume that all students have a mother and a father. If a student more consistently talks about a mother figure, and you are curious about another parent, ask, "Does another parent live with you?" or, "Do you have another parent in your life?" Once again, this builds trust with students who may have two mothers or two fathers, or single gay parents. By using gender-neutral language here, you may be the first school professional that did not hold an expectation of a mother and father nor require that student to feel he/she has to explain his/her parents' sexual orientation. Using gender-neutral language in regards to parents is important in information sent home as well. Address a student's parents in letters as, "Dear Johnny's Parents," rather than, "Dear Johnny's Mother and Father." A gay couple may be used to the school's and society's

expectation that they should be a heterosexual couple, or they may fear discussing the matter with the school, so they may never address the issue with the school, but ensuring all of your school contact is gender-neutral may serve as a relief to gay or bisexual parents.

Download the Gay, Straight, and Lesbian Education Network (GLSEN) Safe Space Kit. It is available online: <http://www.glsen.org/participate/programs/safe-space>. This \$20 kit includes strategies to support LGBT students as well as “safe space” posters and stickers. As a school counselor new to LGBT student advocacy, hanging a small safe space sticker in your office can make all the difference to an LGBT or questioning student. This sticker (or poster) indicates that your office is safe for students to be themselves, including LGBT students. If you are unaware of any LGBT students in your school, it does not necessarily mean that they are not there, it may just mean they are not comfortable being out. This is understandable, as an LGBT student may not know which teachers or school staff are LGBT-affirming and which ones are not, so simply not talking about it to staff is the safest option. However, by hanging a safe space sticker, you are sending the message that you are LGBT-affirming and that builds trust with LGBT students. Students are perceptive, so heterosexual and cisgender students may also take notice, which provides you the opportunity for a discussion. However, this discussion may look different depending on your school climate. In an open and accepting school climate, the conversation is more likely to age-appropriately explain that in your office students are safe and accepted regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. This is an opportunity to educate all students about LGBT acceptance. If your school is not as accepting of LGBT students, or it is not talked about at all, these conversations

may be more ambiguous, such as, “This sticker means that every student is safe and accepted in my office, no matter who they are.” This vague response will prevent a student from telling parents or teachers that the “counselor loves gay people” or the “counselor asked if I was gay” which may be misconstrued by parents and school staff and potentially end your advocacy efforts here.

Find LGBT-Relevant Books. Another small but significant resource to have in your office are LGBT-relevant books. LGBT students in schools may not have access to fiction and non-fiction books in their libraries with LGBT main characters and stories. Search your school’s library for LGBT-related books and make a list to give to LGBT students who are interested, so they do not have to ask the librarian for what they are searching. Offer to check out the books for them if your school climate is especially intolerant. If your school’s library does not have age-appropriate books that are relevant to LGBT students, then find some and keep them in your office for students to check out from you that is completely confidential. You can also search for stories online that are free to download to be able to share with students.

Research LGBT-Affirming Resources. These resources can be in the community and online. If your community has a social place for LGBT people, then meet the director of the center and what age groups are welcome. Such places and people will also be a resource to you in finding LGBT-affirming mental health providers, medical providers, and churches. Build a list of LGBT-affirming places in the community that your LGBT students would be welcome and accepted to engage socially and/or religiously with other LGBT people and allies, receive mental health services if needed, and access affirming physicians.

Ask Questions. No matter your experience with LGBT students and people, your strategies and language will not perfectly fit with every LGBT student, because it is such a large and diverse group of people. It is important to ask LGBT students questions, as you may be the first person who did not assume anything about their identity. If a student identifies as “pansexual,” it may be helpful to know some background information or a general definition to share with the student to indicate that you do take time to understand this population, but it is more important to understand what that identity means to the student. For example, you could respond, “I believe pansexual typically means that you are not attracted to anyone based on their biological sex or gender identity or expression, but I also believe that every person’s identity is multi-faceted and individualized. What does pansexual mean for your identity?” or, “I am so thankful that you have shared this part of your identity with me. I look forward to supporting you, as well as learning from you! What does pansexual mean for your identity?” Also, if a student comes out as transgender or gender non-conforming, always ask if the student would like you to use a preferred name and/or pronoun in your office. Explain that your office is a safe place and the information will remain confidential, and you simply want to accept students for who they really are. If you are in a more accepting school, also ask what pronouns and name the student would prefer in front of others, as they may not be out to anyone else in the school. If you are in an unaccepting school, you may discuss the use of a preferred name and pronoun outside of your office and implications that may occur if others overhear. While you want to affirm the student’s identity, you do not want to put them in danger, physically or emotionally.

Recommendations for Building-Level Advocacy. If you believe you are LGBT-affirming and practice the above strategies with individual students, but are unsure how to make your building a more accepting place for LGBT students, then you should begin here.

Talk to Teachers. Begin having conversations with individual or small groups of teachers and other school professionals regarding LGBT topics. Search for teachers whom you believe are LGBT-affirming and ask what their opinions are of the school climate. Use this group as a support system in your school in working toward making your building more LGBT-inclusive.

Meet with Your Building Administrator(s). You can choose to make this meeting formal or informal, but an informal one in which you are prepared may make the principal feel the most comfortable and unthreatened. Explain what you believe your building is missing that is resulting in a hostile or unaccepting school environment for LGBT students. Have facts and information ready to support your statements. You may want to meet with the principal alone first and then name other school staff (who are willing) that are supportive in your efforts. Provide the principal with very few recommendations (see examples below) for small change within the building, so as not to overwhelm the administrator. Be sure you are using active listening so the principal is free to voice concerns and so you can properly address each one.

Meet with the Librarian. Use this time to request that LGBT-relevant and age-appropriate fiction and non-fiction books be available to students. Provide the librarian with a list of books that you feel are appropriate for your building's students.

Present to School Staff. Request to conduct a presentation during a professional development day to school staff about an LGBT-inclusive building. Include challenges faced by LGBT students and people, examples of supporting them, and how to identify LGBT harassment and discrimination and how to effectively handle it in the classroom or hallways. Pass out safe stickers to teachers who are willing to hang them in their classrooms. Also request teachers with posters on their walls to include posters of diverse family configurations (e.g. a family with two mothers).

Hang Safe Space Posters. These are encouraged in your office, classrooms, hallways, locker rooms, and libraries with teacher permission and assurance that the teacher is willing to enforce a safe space.

Start a Small Group. Identify LGBT students and allies that would be interested in meeting once a week. This could be a typical responsive service small group, which would require permission from guardians and not work for some students. Instead, this could be a “lunch with the counselor” one day a week with LGBT students and allies. You can choose to have lessons, such as art expression, sharing online stories of LGBT students, reviewing the history of LGBT people and events, processing how to handle heterosexism at school, or journaling, or you can simply provide a time for students to come together in a safe place where they may want to just talk about their day, talk about how to improve the school climate, or vent about struggles they experienced with their identity at school or at home.

Establish a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). Ask students in your LGBT group or students who are out to you what they know about GSAs and if they are interested. Explain the purpose of a GSA, especially that it is student led, the benefits of a GSA in a

school, and that you (or another school staff member that you have already confirmed) will serve as the advisor. As the advisor, ensure the organization is able to meet at school before or after the school day. Encourage allies to join immediately so no one is outed as LGBT simply by joining. Promote participation by all members and emphasize the importance of planning events to keep current members engaged and potential members interested.

Celebrate LGBT Holidays. Research the various LGBT holidays and LGBT History Month. Hang posters notifying students of the upcoming holidays and provide explanations of those holidays. Encourage teachers to participate by discussing the history of those holidays. Promote serious engagement in holidays, such as providing tape to put on students' mouths and enforcing silence in the hallways during the Day of Silence.

Research Lesson Plans. There are many online resources and lesson plans related to LGBT topics, people, and events to share with teachers. Ask that they include these topics in their lessons when appropriate and relevant.

Meet with Your Health Teacher. Work with your health teacher or nurse and principal to provide inclusive sexuality education lessons. Offer to help your health teacher or nurse plan the lessons to ensure appropriate language is used and that LGBT topics and people are included in an affirming way. Ask if you can co-facilitate the lesson if the health teacher or nurse is inexperienced with LGBT students or is uncomfortable, and so you are available to answer questions from students. Allow your principal to review the lessons before executing them. Also discuss with this team how you plan to address unique restroom and locker rooms needs of a transgender student that is best for

your school. Safe options are allowing the student to choose which gender restroom he/she wants to use based on gender identity or allowing the student to change in and use the nurse's restroom.

Meet with Your Technology Coordinator. Work with your technology coordinator and principal to provide access to safe and appropriate LGBT online sites for students to view. Research which sites are safe and appropriate on your own to share with the team and explain the importance of each for LGBT students and allies.

Find a Guest Speaker. Find an LGBT person or people in the community who would be willing to share their experiences with your students. Ask that they present to multiple classes during your guidance time or during a supportive teacher's instruction time or present to the entire building in an assembly environment. This gives LGBT students a role model and other students the perspective of someone who is facing challenges just because of sexual orientation and/or gender identity or expression.

Recommendations for District-Level Advocacy. If you feel your building has a fairly positive school climate for LGBT students, but your teachers typically do not include LGBT topics in their lessons, formal policies do not include protection for LGBT students, and/or other buildings in your district are not as accepting of LGBT students, then your advocacy may continue here.

Present to School Staff. Prepare a presentation to groups of school staff within your district during professional development days. Examples of groups of school staff are building administrators, to whom you would tailor your presentation to include topics on leadership and facilitating a positive school climate, school counselors, to whom you would tailor your presentation to include topics such as those discussed in the individual

and building-level advocacy strategies listed above, school nurses, to whom you would tailor your presentation to providing safe and accepting health care to LGBT-students, and teachers, to whom you would tailor your presentation to include topics such as how to affirm LGBT students and students with LGBT parents in the classroom and how to include LGBT topics in lessons. Provide safe space stickers and posters to those willing to take to their buildings.

Present to School Board Members Regarding Curriculum. Request to present to your school board and administrators regarding the importance of an LGBT-inclusive curriculum. Explain the need for an inclusive core curriculum, enrichment curriculum, and guidance curriculum, and provide examples of each. Request that elementary counselors be able to use LGBT-related books (e.g. *And Tango Make Three*, a children's story about two gay male penguins whom a zookeeper gives a child) in bibliotherapy to promote acceptance at an early age. Provide ways for the audience to take perspective of LGBT students who are currently not represented in any of their classes, despite a strong influence on our history and culture provided by LGBT people. Cite states that are currently implementing an inclusive curriculum, such as California, to show an example of a successful implementation. Be prepared with facts and data and use active listening to answer questions and address concerns. Ask the school board to vote on implementing an inclusive curriculum in the district, or to vote on officially allowing teachers to include LGBT topics in the classroom without repercussions.

Present to School Board Members Regarding Policies. Request to present to your school board and administrators regarding the importance of LGBT-inclusive policies, especially harassment and discrimination. Provide examples of LGBT-specific

victimization and discrimination and include evidence of effects of such victimization. Such evidence should include the mental health of students, such as depression and suicide, the behaviors of students, such as risky sexual engagement and drug use as means to cope with unacceptance, and the academic suffering of students, such as low attendance due to feeling unsafe at school. Suggest a plan of action for the discipline of students who harass LGBT students, which should be parallel to a student disciplined for using the “N” word and pushing an African American student. The policy should also require staff and student training to educate the entire building about the expectations of treating LGBT students and the discipline process if the policy is not followed. In this presentation, also cite nearby districts that already have formal harassment and discrimination policies that protect sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as any legal examples, such as court cases that have sided with the LGBT student in regards to harassment and discrimination. Ask the school board to vote on a harassment and discrimination policy that specifically enumerates “sexual orientation” and gender identity or expression” as protected classes.

Recommendations for Counselor Educators

The results of this study suggest that the most common barriers that are preventing school counselors from advocating for LGBT students are a lack of education and a lack of support. To be successful advocates, school counselors-in-training should have a foundation of knowledge regarding LGBT people and topics and a set of skills that promote a collaborative and trusting school and community environment.

Recommendations to Address Lack of Education. Although LGBT students are indeed marginalized in schools, just as LGBT adults are in the “real world,” current school counselors are not aware of the evidence that absolutely points to discrimination and marginalization. Therefore, counselor preparation programs should address LGBT topics in all eight of the competency areas of a CACREP-accredited program. For example, the hostile environment for LGBT students in schools, the current discrimination that LGBT adults face in housing, employment, and adoption, and the higher risk for suicide and depression due to homophobia and transphobia are crucial topics in a counseling diversity course. Also, reviewing the ASCA and ACA ethical codes, as they both include LGBT support and advocacy, and the practical implications of those ethics is an important piece of a counseling ethics course.

An additional way to provide LGBT-specific training and experience to counselors-in-training (CITs) would be through the use of an LGBT and ally community panel. To implement this recommendation, counselor educators should encourage LGBT adults and students in the community to a class period or other event to share their stories as students in dealing with other students and teachers, as sons and daughters in dealing with family reactions to their coming out, and as humans in dealing with daily struggles in harassment and discrimination. LGBT adults could share what they wish a school counselor would have done to help them as a student, and LGBT students could share what their school counselors are currently doing or not doing to support them. Hearing from LGBT people in person will provide CITs with examples of harassment and discrimination faced by LGBT people years ago and today in the school and community, as well as examples of strategies to support and affirm LGBT students in the future. Also,

this opportunity may be the first real experience a CIT has with an out LGBT person, which may assist in the CIT seeing the issues at hand as more real rather than just in text books they have read.

A recommendation on a larger scale is to work with counselor educators from various program and school counselor associations to develop a “train the trainer” module used to prepare counselors-in-training to train other school personnel on LGBT issues and topics in the schools. Implementing this recommendation would take a vast amount of collaboration with many school counselors, counselor educators, and LGBT advocates. This module should be one method of providing a standard of knowledge to CITs in LGBT-specific topics, such as the school climate for LGBT students, society’s biases toward LGBT people, ways to effectively handle discipline for LGBT harassment, examples of lesson plans in various subjects that are inclusive of LGBT people and events, and strategies in working with LGBT students. This module should be available in a class period or as a professional development opportunity through the university or the state’s school counselor association. The primary purpose should be preparation of the CIT to teach the material to other school professionals. Upon graduation and securing a job, new school counselors would be prepared to train school staff in professional development meetings rather than seeking outside professionals.

Recommendations to Address Lack of Support. A more difficult topic to train graduate students is in support, especially because each school and community in which a counselor-in-training (CIT) will eventually work will have its own culture and beliefs. However, arming a graduate student with ethical guidelines and knowledge allows a school counselor to understand the reasons for advocacy and provides hard evidence to

present to stakeholders. While lecture and text are important components to prepare CITs, practice is key, especially in terms of discussions about controversial topics and using data to defend one's stance.

The first recommendation to address support is to provide opportunities for CITs to present difficult or controversial topics and encourage classmates to ask questions that indicate resistance. For example, a CIT could prepare a presentation on the topic of restroom and locker rooms issues for transgender students that they will present to their peers, but pretend their peers are school board members, parents, teachers, and administrators. Classmates will ask questions such as, "Isn't it dangerous to have a boy in a girl's bathroom?" and "Why are we rewarding a silly child who just wants attention?" The CIT presenting will gain practice in responding objectively and professionally, as well as using active listening skills in a potentially hostile or resistant environment.

Another recommendation for counselor educators is to heavily emphasize the use of data and evidence in those presentation opportunities. While the counselor educators and counselors-in-training may understand the importance of supporting LGBT students just because of their training in empathy, other school stakeholders may not be trained in taking perspective. Therefore, speaking in terms that are objective is important, especially to school board members and administrators who may analyze decisions based on financial and data sense. To appease these school stakeholders, who are key in making change in a school, counselor educators should train CITs to prepare for these difficult conversations and presentations with data and evidence from the literature. One piece of literature that is useful and important is the ethical codes published by ASCA, by which school counselors are expected to counsel. Citing this source and comparing the school

counselor's ethical obligation to advocate for LGBT students to a doctor's ethical obligation to "do no harm" or an attorney's ethical obligation to obey client-attorney confidentiality may be a way to better way to aid others in understanding the need for school counselors to be supporting LGBT students. Other examples of literature that may be included are statistics of victimization and bullying of LGBT students, rates of depression and suicide among LGBT students, and academic struggles of LGBT students. If in a small community in which school stakeholders claim LGBT-inclusive organizations, policies, and education are not important because they are unaware of any LGBT students in the school, further statistics may be needed for the average age of a student coming out as gay, bisexual, or transgender, indicating that students are often unsure or questioning or fear the repercussions for doing so. Also, information about the estimated percentage of the population who identify as LGBT is crucial for this argument to demonstrate the likeliness that at least one LGBT student, out or not, is in the school. It also allows the audience to grasp the level of diversity in our world today, and by not teaching all students about LGBT people and events in history nor promoting a school environment that does not tolerate harassment or discrimination of a group of students is doing an injustice to all students by not preparing them for the "real world" outside of school.

Recommendations for Future Studies

As the literature surrounding LGBT students grows and researchers continue to examine the barriers in place for educators in advocating for LGBT students, it would be wise to continue to specifically explore the school counselor's role in advocacy, because

of the unique position in the school. Also, this study broadly surveyed the school counselor's role in all three categories of advocacy for LGBT students. In the future, examining the school counselor's role in specific categories to better understand differences in barriers for each strategy may be beneficial. In addition, rather than probe the level of involvement of the school counselor's role in advocacy, future studies may benefit from qualitatively probing the nature of the school counselor's role, such as specific duties.

Another recommendation would be moving forward with the correlation between beliefs about LGBT people and students and actual behaviors that school counselors engage in to advocate for LGBT students. While this study explored beliefs and barriers, future studies focused on determining which beliefs contribute most to a lack of advocacy would be beneficial.

Finally, a majority of respondents in this study were from Missouri, indicating a need for Missouri school counselors and counselor educator programs to increase awareness of LGBT student needs. A future study probing what LGBT topics are missing in graduate counseling programs would be helpful to compare to recommendations of LGBT-affirming organizations. That comparison could be used to work toward a model for counselor educators in Missouri to follow in preparing graduate counseling students for working with LGBT students and for practicing Missouri school counselors to follow in advocating and supporting LGBT students.

Although this study answered questions for a small population of school counselors, and more research is published very frequently around this popular subject,

school counselors and counselor educators still have a lot to learn about how we can best support LGBT students in schools.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Thesis Questionnaire

AN EXPLORATION OF THE PREVALENCE OF ADVOCACY EFFORTS AND THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR IN LGBT STUDENT ADVOCACY

This survey is completely anonymous. Please do not put your name or the name of your school district on the survey. The information gathered will be accessible only by the investigators and will be kept secure. Your individual responses will never be reported alone. Aggregated data from all participants' responses will be the only information reported from this survey.

Demographic Information

Please choose the response that best fits your school district:

1. In what state is your school district?				
2. How would you describe the community in which your school district resides?	Urban	Suburban	Rural	
3. What levels do you serve as a school counselor?	Elementary	Middle	High	Multi-level
4. What is the approximate student-to-counselor ratio in your building?	<250:1	250-500:1	>500:1	

LGBT Affirmation

The following questions relate to how affirming you are of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. LGBT-affirming describes someone who is in support and accepting of LGBT people. Please rate yourself based on a scale of 1 (not affirming) to 9 (very affirming).

5. How LGBT-affirming do you believe you are?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6. How LGBT-affirming do you believe others perceive you?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

LGBT Beliefs

The following questions relate to your beliefs about LGBT people. Please choose the response that best fits with you and your community.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree more than agree	Agree more than disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
7. In general, LGBT students are marginalized in schools across the US.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. My counseling program adequately equipped me to counsel and advocate for LGBT students.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. It is the school's responsibility to provide a safe and accepting learning environment for LGBT students.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. The colleagues in my school treat LGBT students differently than other students.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. LGBT students in my school are bullied and harassed more than other students.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. LGBT students in my school feel safe and accepted when they "come out" as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. As a school counselor, I should be a leader in advocating for LGBT students in my school.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. My school's administration would support my advocacy efforts for LGBT students.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. My school colleagues would support my advocacy efforts for LGBT students.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. My community would support my advocacy efforts for LGBT students.	1	2	3	4	5	6

17. My school's administration would financially support my advocacy efforts for LGBT students.	1	2	3	4	5	6
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Gay-Straight Alliances

Please choose the response that best fits your school district.

18. Does your school have a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) or a similar student organization?	Yes	No	Not Sure							
19. If your school does not have a GSA or similar organization, is a school professional or student attempting to establish one?	Yes	No	Not Sure							
20. To what degree is/was the school counselor involved in creating that organization?	1 Not involved	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 Very Involved	N/A
21. To what degree is/was the school counselor involved in maintaining that organization?	1 Not involved	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 Very Involved	N/A
22. If the school counselor did not play a part in creating or maintaining the organization, which school professional(s) did? Choose all that apply.	School	Social worker	Teacher	Administrator	Other: _____				N/A	

Inclusive Policies

Please choose the response that best fits your school district. Please choose the last option ("No Policy, Positive Climate") if your school does not have a policy regarding the matter, but your school climate would allow the circumstance (e.g. My school does not have a policy written to permit same-sex dates to a dance, but students regularly bring same-sex dates to dances without interference).

23. Does your school's student discrimination and harassment policies specifically include protection for actual or perceived sexual orientation?	Yes	No	Not Sure	No Policy, Positive Climate
24. Does your school's student discrimination and harassment policies specifically include protection for actual or perceived gender identity and expression?	Yes	No	Not Sure	No Policy, Positive Climate

25. If either of these policies include sexual orientation or gender identity, is there a formal process for handling complaints?	Yes	No	Not Sure	No Policy, Positive Climate						
26. Does your school policy permit same-sex dates to school-sponsored dances?	Yes	No	Not Sure	No Policy, Positive Climate						
27. Does your school policy allow students to use the restroom and locker room that is preferred based on their gender identity rather than their legal sex?	Yes	No	Not Sure	No Policy, Positive Climate						
28. Does your school have at least one gender-neutral restroom and locker room, or does your school provide transgender students with other safe facilities (e.g. nurse's office, staff restroom)?	Yes	No	Not Sure	No Policy, Positive Climate						
29. Does your school policy allow transgender students to choose a preferred name that is not on the birth certificate or other records used for your student information system?	Yes	No	Not Sure	No Policy, Positive Climate						
30. Does your school policy permit students to dress in a manner that is not consistent with the traditional clothing expectations of their legal sex (e.g., boy wearing a dress)?	Yes	No	Not Sure	No Policy, Positive Climate						
31. Does your school policy allow students to wear clothing that supports LGBT rights (e.g., t-shirt with a rainbow flag)?	Yes	No	Not Sure	No Policy, Positive Climate						
32. To what degree is your school currently attempting to make these policies more inclusive for LGBT students?	1 Not trying at all	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 Trying very hard	
33. To what degree was/is the school counselor involved in making your school's policies more LGBT-inclusive?	1 Not involved	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 Very Involved	N/A

34. If the school counselor did not play a part in advocating for more LGBT-inclusive policies, which school professional(s) did? Choose all that apply.	School psychologist	Social worker	Teacher	Administrator	Other: _____			N/A

Inclusive Education

Please choose the response that best fits your school district.

35. Does your school have a sexual education curriculum?	Yes	No	Not Sure						
36. To what degree is your school's sexual education curriculum inclusive and sensitive to LGBT topics (i.e. provides an open dialogue that is positive and accurate of LGBT-related information regarding sexual health)?	1 Very Exclusive	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 Very Inclusive
37. To what degree is your school's general education curriculum inclusive of LGBT topics (i.e. history and literature including LGBT people and events)?	1 Very Exclusive	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 Very Inclusive
38. To what degree is your school's guidance curriculum inclusive of LGBT topics (i.e., guidance lessons promoting LGBT tolerance and acceptance)?	1 Very Exclusive	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 Very Inclusive
39. To what extent does your school have readily available resources and information for LGBT students (e.g., fiction and nonfiction library books, internet access to LGBT websites, or list of LGBT community resources)?	1 Very Exclusive	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 Very Inclusive
40. Does your school celebrate any LGBT holidays (e.g. National Coming Out Day, Day of Silence, Pride Month)?	Yes	No	Not Sure						
41. Does your school offer educational workshops for teachers and other school personnel regarding LGBT issues?	Yes	No	Not Sure						

42. To what degree is your school attempting to make your school's education more inclusive for LGBT students?	1 Not trying at all	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 Trying very hard	
43. To what degree was/is the school counselor involved in making your school's education more inclusive for LGBT students?	1 Not involved	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 Very Involved	N/A
44. If the school counselor did not play a part in advocating for a more LGBT-inclusive education, which school professional(s) did? Choose all that apply.	School psychologist	Social worker	Teacher	Administrator	Other: _____				N/A	

Advocacy Barriers

The following items relate to your personal experience and struggles in advocating for LGBT students. If you DO advocate for LGBT students, please skip ahead to question 55. If you are reluctant to advocate for LGBT students, please complete the following questions. For each item, show how well it describes you or your experience by choosing the appropriate number on the scale. Answer as honestly and as accurately as you can. Thank you.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree more than agree	Agree more than disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
45. I do not advocate for LGBT students because I fear that I will lose my job.	1	2	3	4	5	6
46. I do not advocate for LGBT students because my administration, school board, or community would not support my efforts.	1	2	3	4	5	6
47. I do not advocate for LGBT students because I fear being ostracized by my coworkers.	1	2	3	4	5	6
48. I do not advocate for LGBT students because those students are not in need of targeted resources or interventions.	1	2	3	4	5	6

49. I do not advocate for LGBT students because I fear that I will lose friends and/or family.	1	2	3	4	5	6
50. I do not advocate for LGBT students because I do not have the financial resources to do so.	1	2	3	4	5	6
51. I do not advocate for LGBT students because I do not feel educated about this group's needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6
52. I do not advocate for LGBT students because it is inconsistent with my religious beliefs.	1	2	3	4	5	6
53. I do not advocate for LGBT students because it is inconsistent with my personal beliefs.	1	2	3	4	5	6
54. I do not advocate for LGBT students because another school professional is already doing so. School Professional Title: _____	1	2	3	4	5	6

55. If you do, or are attempting to, advocate for LGBT students in your school, please describe any frustrations or obstacles you have faced:

Thank you for completing this survey! If you would like to participate in a potential follow-up study, please send an email to this address expressing your interest:
lacey113@live.missouristate.edu

Appendix B. Institutional Review Board Approval

To: Angela Anderson
Counseling, Leadership and Special Education
901 S National Ave Springfield MO 65897-0027

From: MSU IRB

Date: 9/24/2015

RE: Notice of IRB Exemption

Exemption Category: 1. Educational setting

Study #: 16-0059

Study Title: An Exploration of the Prevalence of Advocacy Efforts and the Role of the School Counselor in LGBT Student Advocacy

This submission has been reviewed by the Missouri State University IRB and was determined to be exempt from further review according to the regulatory category cited above under 45 CFR 46.101(b).

Investigator's Responsibilities:

If your study protocol changes in such a way that exempt status would no longer apply, you should contact the above IRB before making the changes.

CC: Lacey Berry,
Counseling, Leadership and Special Education

Appendix C. Informed Consent

Consent to Participate in a Research Study Missouri State University College of Education

An Exploration of the Prevalence of Advocacy Efforts and the Role of the School Counselor in LGBT Student Advocacy

**Principal Investigator: Dr. Leslie Anderson
Co-Investigator: Lacey Berry**

Introduction

You have been asked to participate in a research study that is part of the requirement for a Master's degree in Counseling for Lacey Berry. Before you agree to participate in this study, it is important that you read about and understand the study and the procedures it involves. If you have any questions about the study or your role in it, be sure to ask the investigators. You may contact the investigator(s) at:

Dr. Leslie Anderson: 417-836-6519

alanderson@missouristate.edu

Lacey Berry: 314-489-0860

lacey113@live.missouristate.edu

You will need to select "yes" in the box below, giving us your permission to be involved in the study. Taking part in this study is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part, but later change your mind, you may stop at any time. If you decide to stop, you do not have to give a reason and there will be no negative consequences for ending your participation. You are encouraged to print this form to keep for your own records.

Purpose of this Study

The reason for this study is to examine the role of school counselors in advocating for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students, as well as barriers that prevent school counselors from advocating for these students. You have been asked to participate because you are a member of a professional school counselor organization. This study will review the role of school counselor advocacy for LGBT students of school counselors across the United States.

Description of Procedures

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to fill out a multiple-choice questionnaire with optional short answer questions which will ask some demographic information about your school (e.g., state location, number of students, student-school counselor ratio, etc.), information about your school's LGBT organizations, inclusive policies, and inclusive education (e.g., does your school have a gay-straight alliance? Does your school's harassment policy name sexual orientation as a protected group? Does your school have a guidance curriculum promoting tolerance for LGBT students?), information about your role in creating or maintaining LGBT advocacy strategies (e.g.,

To what extent was your role in making your school policies more inclusive?). Finally, the questionnaire will list statements related to your beliefs about LGBT advocacy (e.g., as a school counselor, I should be the leader in advocating for LGBT students in my school) and about advocacy barriers (e.g., I do not advocate for LGBT students because I fear I will lose my job) that will request that you select the most appropriate response from the following choices: strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree, or not applicable. This questionnaire will take about 30 minutes to complete. Any information about you will be kept confidential. To protect your privacy, you will be asked not to include your name or your school district's name on the questionnaire, and your results will be assigned a coded number to further protect any potential identifying information.

What are the risks?

We estimate that the potential risks of this study are minimal. However, you may experience some psychological discomfort when answering questions about your role in advocating for LGBT students.

What are the benefits?

It is not anticipated that you will experience any direct benefits from this study. Nonetheless, your participation in this research will help investigators examine the beliefs of school counselors in their role of advocating for LGBT students and the primary barriers that prevent advocacy on behalf of LGBT students. This information may be useful in developing new or improving current advocacy strategies for LGBT students, as well as strategies to eliminate current barriers that prevent those strategies from being implemented.

How will my privacy be protected?

The results of your questionnaire will not include your name and will be assigned a coded number to protect any potential identifying information. The information gathered will only be accessible by the investigators and it will be kept in a locked facility on campus. All data collected will be disseminated in aggregated form, so your individual responses will not be shared.

Consent to Participate

If you want to participate in this study, *An Exploration of the Prevalence of Advocacy Efforts and the Role of the School Counselor in LGBT Student Advocacy*, you are required to read the statement below and check the "yes" box as an indication of your willingness to participate:

I have read and understand the information in this form. I have been encouraged to ask questions and all of my questions, if any, have been answered to my satisfaction. I have also been informed that I can withdraw from the study at any time. I have had the opportunity to print this form for my own records. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Yes No