



Hillary Clinton's plan to fight for LGBT youth

Annette Konoske-Graf

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The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) recently released the findings of a national school climate survey of students and teachers, which found that over half of students regularly heard anti-gay, sexist, and racist comments at school.

One presidential candidate is taking note. Last week in North Carolina, Hillary Clinton introduced a major plan designed to fight bullying in schools and communities across the country. The plan, called “Better than Bullying,” is no small initiative—it dedicates \$500 million to support states that develop comprehensive plans to address bullying.

Clinton's plan would provide extensive support for students impacted by bullying, and build dramatically upon the Obama administration's efforts to support LGBT youth.

Bullying affects students from all populations. But many of our nation's LGBT students are even more likely to face exclusionary and threatening environments at school.

Nearly three out of four students who identify as LGBT reported being verbally harassed at school in the past year, according to a 2013 nationwide survey by GLSEN—one of the few organizations dedicated to researching LGBT students' experiences at school. The same survey found that 56 percent of LGBT students experienced discriminatory school practices and policies, such as not being able to wear clothing deemed gender “inappropriate” and not being able to bring a same-sex partner to a school dance.

It doesn't end there. Schools in most states fail to address LGBT topics in the classroom. The same GLSEN survey found that only 18.5 percent of LGBT students were taught about LGBT people, history, or events in their schools, while conversely 15 percent had been taught *negative* content on LGBT topics. Fewer than half of students could find LGBT-related content in their libraries or even via the Internet provided at school. Access to these kinds of resources has serious implications: students at schools with an LGBT-inclusive curriculum experience much lower rates of harassment.

This is a policy area that demands immediate attention, especially because youth who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual are four times more likely to attempt suicide than those who identify as straight. What's more, one quarter of transgender young people have made a suicide attempt. Because of the link between suicide and bullying, Clinton's plan includes a recommendation that

states implement suicide prevention and mental health programs in high schools. These programs could particularly benefit LGBT youth.

Some policymakers and school leaders are spearheading efforts to make sure that all students feel welcome in the classroom. In Columbus, Ohio, the Arts and Preparatory Academy prioritizes both inclusion and academics, with awareness, kindness, and respect for diversity serving as just three of the school's seven values. Meanwhile, California's Board of Education is leading the way by including LGBT history in curriculum outlines.

But nationwide, we could be doing more. And that's where Hillary Clinton's plan comes in.

Under Clinton's proposed initiative, the federal government will provide grants to states to tailor anti-bullying plans to their unique contexts, as long as these plans reflect the following national priorities:

1. Developing comprehensive anti-bullying laws and policies that explicitly prohibit bullying on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and religion.
2. Making the Internet a safer space for kids by addressing cyberbullying.
3. Supporting educators working to improve school climate.
4. Providing support for students impacted by bullying and abuse.
5. Expanding behavioral health programming—teaching young people to control their impulses, recognize the feelings of others, and manage stress and anxiety.

Clinton's plan is a step toward providing LGBT students with the safe, inclusive school environments they deserve. Chad Griffin, president of the Human Rights Campaign, issued a celebratory statement in response to Clinton's proposal. "We know from our own research and work in schools that growing up LGBTQ in America today is not easy," Griffin said. "Hillary Clinton's comprehensive anti-bullying plan is a crucial and welcome step toward improving the lives of our youngest, most vulnerable Americans."

Despite the accolades, some have already criticized the initiative. Neal McCluskey, the director of the CATO Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, described Clinton's plan as "feel-good federal policy at its worst." In the Washington Examiner, McCluskey wrote that addressing bullying is "something states are capable of doing on their own."

Are states protecting the freedom of their most vulnerable students, though? Clinton's decision to unveil her plan in North Carolina was certainly intentional—the state has been making headlines since the legislature passed HB2 in March, which (among other things) directs all government agencies and public schools to require employees and students to only use bathrooms that correspond with the "biological sex" stated on their birth certificate.

And this isn't just an issue in North Carolina—just a day after Clinton's announcement, the Supreme Court decided to hear a case concerning a transgender high school student in Virginia

seeking to use the boys' restroom at school. (Clinton has already pledged to support judicial and federal efforts to clarify that “under federal statutes, ‘sex discrimination’ includes discrimination on the basis of ‘gender identity’ and ‘sexual orientation.’”)

Troublingly, students across the country were less likely today to report that school staff intervened when hearing homophobic remarks compared to the results of a similar survey in 2005. In her speech last Thursday, Clinton acknowledged that teachers believe this election has only worsened the bullying problem in their classrooms. And the toxicity of this election isn't likely to disappear on Tuesday.

Clinton ended her announcement with this: “I've been fighting for kids throughout my career. I will fight for them every single day of my Presidency.”

We look forward to that fight.