

An illustration of two hands holding a light blue rectangular sign. The hands are drawn in a simple, cartoonish style with pink skin and red nail polish. The sign contains the text 'BACK TO SCHOOL WITH GLSEN® STUDENT GUIDE'.

BACK TO
SCHOOL

WITH **GLSEN**[®]

STUDENT GUIDE

Welcome back, Students!

A new school year provides each of us with the opportunity to do things differently, make change, and grow! The GLSEN Back to School Student Guide provides support, tips, and resources to help you prepare for the upcoming school year, whether in person, virtual, or hybrid scheduling. In this guide, you will find tips for best practices, campaign and programming, policy information, and connection to GLSEN support and student networks. Returning to in-person schooling during a pandemic has certainly raised concerns regarding health and safety. You can help keep yourself and others safe by wearing your mask, and getting vaccinated and boosted if you are eligible!

BACK TO SCHOOL PREP TIPS

Back to school can be a stressful time! From choosing classes to worrying about making new friends, there is a lot to consider at the beginning of a new school year. The tips below are intended to help ease the anxiety and provide resources to help you navigate a new school year with ease.

Set Intentions for the School Year

Being in the know about LGBTQ+ related issues is essential to building trust with LGBTQ+ students. As you enter the new school year, it can be helpful to set intentions for what you hope to accomplish throughout the year. Having a clear set of goals in place can help guide your actions and assist you in making decisions that are going to serve you best in the future. You can write down your intentions, record a voice memo, or create a piece of art about them.

Some examples of intentions could include:

- Making new friends
- Trying a new extracurricular activity
- Mentoring younger students
- Performing well in classes
- Finding a class or subject you're passionate about
- Working on a personal project
- Finding a clearer vision for your future
- Or anything else you want to focus on!

Research the Climate at your School

Every school has a different culture, and some schools may be more or less LGBTQ+ inclusive than others. Before starting the new year (especially if you'll be attending a new school), you can do some research into your school's climate so you know what to expect. You can start by looking at your school's website to see if there's a GSA or other LGBTQ+ safe space. You can also look in your student handbook to see if your school's anti-bullying or non-discrimination policy specifically offers protection against harassment on the basis of gender identity or sexual

orientation. [GLSEN's Local School Climate Survey Tool](#) is a great way to assess the climate at your school. Consider partnering with other student groups, community organizations (like your local GLSEN chapter) and administrators at your school or district to conduct the survey.

Changing your Name and/or Gender Marker

Some students may be returning to school with a different name, set of pronouns, and/or gender identity. This shift can be accompanied by a lot of anxiety. Whether you're trying out a new set of pronouns for the first time or looking to get your name legally changed, there are many things to consider. Luckily, we have some resources to help! Check out [Reggie's Guide to Changing Your Name During Your Transition](#) for advice and information on how to make the name-change process as easy as possible, as well as our [LGBTQ+ Student Rights](#) resource, which outlines the anti-discrimination laws that protect LGBTQ+ students in public schools in the United States.

Getting Involved in Your GSA

Whether you're looking to join a GSA, start a new one, or grow an existing one, the beginning of a new school year is a great time to start! You can also join the National GSA Collaborative to be connected to GSA leaders and build skills for improving your GSA. [Sign up here!](#) Check out our GSA resources for tons of helpful information on all things GSA.

- [10 steps to start your GSA](#)
- [How to find a club advisor](#)
- [Guidelines for respectful GSA spaces](#)
- [Writing a mission statement](#)
- [Tips for finding new GSA members](#)
- [Making Your GSA Inclusive of Black LGBTQ+ Students](#)
- [Making Your GSA Inclusive of Trans Students](#)

RESOURCES

GLSEN also offers other resources to help students returning to school. Keep reading for more back to school tips, information on coming out, book recommendations, and guides for trans and nonbinary students.

10 Back to School Tips for LGBTQ+ Students

Members of GLSEN's National Student Council created this resource because they know that going back to school can be difficult, especially for LGBTQ+ students. These tips go out to the kids who worry about more than homework and first-day-of-school outfits during break. You deserve a school where you feel safe and respected, and we hope that these tips will make your school experience a little less complicated.

Coming Out Resource

To help with your coming out process, here are some points to think about and consider as you begin to share your identities around sexuality and gender. Remember, no two coming out stories are the same; there will be great experiences and not-so-great experiences. Check this resource for ideas on how to build your safety net and support. Hang in there—your identity is valid, no matter what anyone else says!

Resources for Trans and Nonbinary Students

- **Pronouns: A Guide from GLSEN**

- This guide is created to help anyone learn how to use people’s correct pronouns. Everyone in your school community should engage in learning, educating, and advocating for the inclusive use of pronouns for all.

- **Trans Action Kit**

- According to GLSEN research, compared to other students in the LGBTQ+ community, transgender and gender nonconforming students face more hostile school climates. The Trans Action Kit is a wealth of resources that center trans students, including nonbinary and gender non-conforming students and educators. These resources share personal experiences and can help students and educators learn about gender diversity, pronoun visibility, trans students’ rights, inclusive curriculum, and GSA practices.

National Student Council Book Recommendations

GLSEN’s National Student Council put together a list of books that are focused on diverse stories and LGBTQ+ characters for elementary, middle, and high school students. While this booklist highlights many LGBTQ+ authors, not all of them may be part of the community. Instead, they show solidarity through highlighting LGBTQ+ stories and characters. Content warnings are provided for these book lists.

TAKE ACTION

There are opportunities throughout the year to be inclusive and advocate for LGBTQ+ identities. This section will connect you to the GLSEN School Year Calendar and GLSEN Programming.

Changing the Game

GLSEN’s Changing the Game program aims to help schools provide safe and inclusive opportunities for LGBTQ+ students in sports as well as physical education. This program offers resources for administrators, physical education teachers, coaches, families, and students.

GLSEN Rainbow Library

This program sends LGBTQ+ affirming K-12 texts and resources to schools across the country — for free! Schools in nearly 31 states are eligible to request a set, and we plan to continue expanding over the course of this school year. Over 60% of the books on our list were written by BIPOC LGBTQ+ authors and over 40% were written by trans or nonbinary authors.

Solidarity Week

Solidarity Week is a student-powered campaign dedicated to building collective support for LGBTQ+ students and educators. The purpose of this campaign is for young people to experience and learn about the importance of collective work to enact change.

Liberation Week

Liberation Week aims to orient young people to envision what liberation means, create understanding and deepening analysis of resistance and survival of BIPOC LGBTQ+ people, generate inclusive curriculum for the classroom that uplift BIPOC LGBTQ+ history and initiate activism and advocacy in young people by developing critical thinking of current systems centered in social justice.

Day of Silence

This is the largest LGBTQ+ student led day of action! Every year, students, educators, and community members take a vow of silence to protest the harmful effects of harassment and discrimination of LGBTQ+ people in schools. At the end of the day, they Break the Silence in celebration of their identities, existence, and day of action.

POLICY

Federal court decisions, as well as directives from the U.S. Department of Education, have affirmed nondiscrimination protections of LGBTQ+ students and educators. We encourage you to review these resources to become more familiar with these protections, and to see what other inclusive policy changes you can advocate for in your school, community, or state.

- [LGBTQ+ Educator Rights](#)
- [LGBTQ+ Student Rights](#)
- [Policy Maps](#)
 - [Gender Affirming and Inclusive Athletics Participation \(Issue Brief\)](#)
 - [Inclusive Curricular Standards \(Issue Brief\)](#)

Register to vote!

Registering to vote, and exercising the right to vote is essential, especially with LGBTQ+-exclusionary legislation being introduced at an alarming rate. You can check your registration and sign up for election reminders [here](#). You can also help young people prepare to be active and engaged citizens by sharing our [Pledge to Register](#) tool, which will send a reminder text on their 18th birthday and help them register to vote. Your voice matters — [register to vote now!](#)

Model Local Education Agency Policy on Transgender and Nonbinary Students

According to the 2019 GLSEN National School Climate Survey, 22% of LGBTQ+ students reported they were prevented from using their chosen name or pronouns in school.¹ This is especially an issue for transgender and nonbinary students, who face increased rates of marginalization at school. This model policy, developed by GLSEN and the National Center for Transgender Equality, can guide your school or district to ensure all transgender and nonbinary students benefit from a safe and welcoming educational environment.

The Safe Schools Improvement Act

(SSIA) protects every student from bullying and harassment in K-12 learning communities. SSIA requires states that receive federal funds under Title IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) ensure that local education agencies (LEAs) adopt evidence-based best practices to prevent and effectively respond to bullying and harassment. SSIA has earned bipartisan support from members of Congress since it was first introduced over a decade ago.

The Equality Act

Amends the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other civil rights laws to establish explicit federal nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ+ people in housing, employment, public education, credit, public spaces, federally funded programs, and jury service. It also prohibits discrimination against women for the first time in public spaces and federal programs, and prohibits racial and religious discrimination in public spaces not covered by current law.

Check out our [Action Center](#) for additional advocacy opportunities and supports.

GET CONNECTED

If you do not have access to local LGBTQ+ affirming organizations or live in an unsupportive home environment, check out these spaces. Even if you do have affirming spaces, connecting to others can expand your support system and build peer-to-peer learning. Here are links to some spaces where you can connect with other students or programs.

GLSEN Youth Membership

This program connects students interested in advocacy through monthly meetings for different programs such as GSA or student club organizing, athlete networking through Changing the Game, and webinars, workshops, and social media live engagement opportunities.

Changing the Game Ambassador Program

Game Changer Ambassadors have potential opportunities for media engagement, GLSEN's platform to talk about experiences as an athlete. Ambassadors will receive potential swag giveaways, resources to bring to your team, activity ideas for Pride game days, updates on laws that could affect state and schools, and encouraging shout outs from pro athletes and peers from across the country to let them know that they are not alone!

Q-Chat

A CenterLink program, Q Chat Space provides online discussion groups for LGBTQ+ teens ages 13 to 19. It is not a forum. It is live and chat based; there is no video or audio. Everyone chats during the same pre-scheduled time. Conversations are facilitated by experienced staff who work at LGBTQ+ centers around the country. *Note: Q Chat Space facilitators are NOT mental health professionals.

TrevorSpace

TrevorSpace is an affirming international community for LGBTQ+ young people ages 13-24. Find friends, get advice and support, all in a safe environment created by and for young people.

Find Your GLSEN Chapter

Connect with GLSEN! Email students@glsen.org for questions and comments.

Endnotes

¹ Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., Truong, N. L., & Zongrone, A. D. (2020). *The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN.

GLSEN[®]

glsen.org/BackToSchool