

**California FAIR Act,
Ten Years Later**
**Elementary Teachers Still Uncomfortable
With LGBTQ+ Curriculum**

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Abstract

In this article, we share preliminary data of our small pilot study utilizing Democratic Queer Theory framework (Camicia, 2016) and mixed methods data collection sought to understand if teachers are implementing LGBTQ+ curriculum in elementary schools. When evaluating the data collected, we found that California credential candidates are not comfortable including LGBTQ+ curriculum or do not have the resources to implement inclusive curriculum in elementary schools. Thus, it is the responsibility of teacher educators to ensure pre-service teachers are thoroughly prepared in pedagogy, theory, and professionalism to address the mandates of the bill as they

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enter their teacher careers. It is also important for teachers to feel comfortable implementing LGBTQ+ curricula in elementary schools, and in this article, the authors provide immediate implementations to minimize discomfort.

Key Words: LGBTQ+, Inclusive Curriculum, FAIR Act, Democratic Queer Theory

Introduction

In 2011, California passed an inclusive curriculum law known as the Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful (FAIR) Act (Fair Education Act, 2011). The Bill specifically states that instruction in social sciences shall include the early history of California and a study of the role and contributions of both men and women, Native Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, European Americans, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans, persons with disabilities, and members of other ethnic and cultural groups, to the economic, political, and social development of California and the United States of America, with particular emphasis on portraying the role of these groups in contemporary society (Fair Education Act, 2011).

Senate Bill 48 defines a variety of individuals that make up our world, and in California schools are expected to include them in the curriculum. In order to fully understand the connections of curriculum and the FAIR Act, curriculum must be defined. Curricula could take various forms: books or articles to view, posters, images, movies or videos, realia, field trips, community members sharing, family members contributing, and so on (California Department of Education, 2022).

On the California Department of Education Teaching and Learning website, frameworks, materials, and guidelines are accessible for all teachers. The California guidelines also include the California Healthy Youth Act (2016), in which LGBTQ-inclusivity is required in sexual health and HIV prevention. Thus, it is the responsibility of teacher educators to ensure pre-service teachers are thoroughly prepared in pedagogy, theory, and professionalism to address the mandates of the bill as they enter their teacher careers. It is also important for teachers to feel comfortable implementing LGBTQ+ curricula in elementary schools.

Theoretical Framework

Democratic Queer Theory encompasses lived experiences in society (Beck, 2020), as well as the understanding that children of all ages

have the right to learn about the variances in our world (Dewey, 2012; Ayers, 2009). Children deserve to know about the world in which they live and have the right to make informed decisions. Providing the core foundations of the society in which we live, coupled with allowing the space for our students to think, ask questions, and make informed decisions, will, in turn, develop informed citizens who are compassionate and empathetic in a pluralistic society (Beck, 2020).

To further connect the theory with LGBTQ+ implementation, Camicia (2016) made a few points that we would like to address. Specifically, Camicia says LGBTQ+ history connects with economic history and citizenship education that directly addresses social inequalities (p. 14). Also, democratic education takes space, communities, and lived experiences whether “historical or contemporary” (Camicia, 2016, p. 14) and embeds them within the district-adopted curricula to create the necessary development of children that helps them interpret not only themselves but the societies in which they live. To clarify further, connecting the key ideas of students learning by inquiry and to be contributors of society should be coupled with exposure and experience of the various cultures that contribute to this world, and that includes LGBTQ+ individuals.

We connect queer theory with democratic education because queer theory recognizes the strength in difference and approaches the contradictions and conflicts within the hegemonic heteronormative educative space (Evans-Santiago & Lin, 2016; Edelman, 1995). Students read textbooks written from a heteronormative, White perspective (Camicia, 2016, p. 16), in which minimizing perspectives in educative materials limits voices that represent non-White and/or LGBTQ+ and leave out important historical societal information. These silenced voices of impact are not recognized in curricula, which gives reason to analyze our data under a Democratic Queer theory lens. This theory helps us say: inclusion matters, students have the right to contribute to society and to question what is going on in the world, and LGBTQ+ people are important, too.

Pilot Study Rationale and Methodology

In this article, we share preliminary data of our small pilot study utilizing Democratic Queer Theory framework (Camicia, 2016) and mixed methods data collection sought to understand if teachers are implementing LGBTQ+ curriculum in elementary schools. The data collected were from surveys and focus groups. Pre-service teachers at the State University spend up to 3 semesters gathering experience in

coursework and clinical practice. However, research shows that there is often a disconnect between what is learned in a university course and what is experienced or observed in practicum or clinical settings (Burns & Badiali, 2016; Jacobs et al., 2020; Milner, 2010).

For example, at the State University, students submit exit surveys upon completing the program. The teacher preparation program has data that demonstrates how a pre-service teacher exiting their program completes a survey and states they feel “confident” to teach multicultural education, yet when they finish their first year, they take another survey for their “first year out.” Data showed that some new teachers express concerns that they did not know how to communicate with a family with cultural differences from their own. This issue is especially true with the implementation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer lesson plans.

This experience of a disconnect between course materials and clinical experiences can be illustrated through the following exchange: “Dear Dr. Evans-Santiago, I shared your email address with my cooperating teacher in the hopes that [school district] will begin to move forward within elementary schools in order to gain knowledge of the LGBTQ+ community and how it should be properly represented in every classroom,” signed by a student from Evans-Santiago’s class.

Upon reading and reflecting on this email, Evans-Santiago referred to the second largest cause of death for children up to age 19, which is suicide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). She noted that over 2,000 hospital cases related to self-harm or suicide attempts were children under 13 in 2020 (Kincade & Chuck, 2021) in which most cases are connected directly to LGBTQ+ issues (youth.gov, 2022).

Because of this strong connection of the FAIR Education Act and safety with elementary children, the researchers moved forward with investigating why there is a disconnect, and what we can do to help teachers implement inclusive curriculum in their classrooms in California. This was completed through a small convenience pilot study within the county of the State University in which Evans-Santiago teaches, and surrounding areas which sought out to answer: How comfortable are K-8 educators when teaching LGBTQ+ curricula in schools?

An important note to consider is that while California was the first state to implement the Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful (FAIR) Act (Fair Education Act, 2011) it did not begin to enforce the use of texts to provide LGBTQ+ curriculum until 2017 (Reynolds, 2017), and many districts within California have yet to implement this bill. Additionally, the reason for sharing the implications from the pilot

study, as the larger study continues, is because it is estimated that the LGBTQ+ population is continually growing.

As statistics state, there are between 20 million and 60 million U.S. residents who identify as LGBTQ+ (Jones, 2021), which implies that there are at least 2-3 million children and adults with parents who identify as LGBTQ+ (Family Equality, 2020). Furthermore, at the end of 2019, there were only four states (California, New Jersey, Colorado, Illinois) that require LGBTQ+-inclusive curricula, while other states, such as Alabama, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Texas, and South Carolina have “no promo homo” laws (GLSEN, 2018, p. 1). These laws allow for the discrimination and promotion of anti-LGBTQ+ language and actions.

For instance, in Alabama, teachers are expected to emphasize that homosexuality is not a lifestyle and is a “criminal offense” (Brammer, 2018, para.10) while teaching sexual education. Currently there are 8 bills that passed and discriminate against LGBTQ+ individuals in several states:

- 3 anti-trans sports bans in Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee

- 1 anti-trans medical care ban in Arkansas

- 4 religious refusals bills, including in North Dakota, South Dakota, and two bills in Arkansas (Ronan, 2021).

Ronan (2021) also stated that in 2021, state legislatures have over 250 anti LGBTQ+ bills introduced, and most recently, the “Don’t say gay” bill was signed by Florida’s Governor in March, 2022 (Diaz, 2022). California continues to combat LGBTQ+ discrimination with travel bans (Prohibition on State-funded and State-sponsored Travel, 2022), and as researchers, we want to identify the districts throughout the state that are including LGBTQ+ curricula based on the FAIR Act.

Being fully aware that the curriculum we are studying does not focus on morality, we hoped to understand what is preventing Californians from implementing LGBTQ+ curriculum from data collected in this study. While our work identified some barriers and some suggestions for overcoming them, further research is needed to fully answer these questions.

The pilot study consisted of online surveys from 37 participants and focus groups from seven participants to not only answer the research question, but also determine what teachers in California know about the LGBTQ+ identifying terms and factors affecting their level of comfort to implement curriculum in their learning environment.

Results

When evaluating the data collected, we found that California credential candidates are not comfortable including LGBTQ+ curriculum or do not have the resources to implement inclusive curriculum in elementary schools. This is significant because it shows the disconnect and other factors that discourage teachers to implement what they have learned while in their teacher preparation programs.

Disquisition

Revealing Teacher Heteronormativity in LGBTQ+ Praxis

The quantitative data from the surveys demonstrated that there were more teachers less confident to include curricula (52%) and few teachers had access to curricula (0.09%). Participants were asked if they had students with same-sex families, 25/35 (71%) participants who answered the question said yes or were unsure. However, 16 teachers that said “Yes” when answering the follow-up optional question: “If yes (to same-sex parents), did this change anything about your practice as a K-8 schoolteacher? (Explain).” Of the 16 respondents, 50% said “no they did not change anything” and 50% said they did change by becoming more aware of the language used in the classroom including any negative comments, or they included literature to help with normalizing varieties of families.

Each person that answered this question was asked to explain their answers. This helped us see the true results. For instance, a teacher said, “No,” and followed up with comments, “I do what I have always done.” Unfortunately, understanding that curriculum is not in the classrooms, then this is considered a negative “no” to change. Two of the respondents who said “No” followed up with ways they are more aware and make a conscious effort to support their students, so it is assumed that those responses indicate a change.

This question was asked because traditionally educators do not adjust to LGBTQ+ identity or families (Evans-Santiago & Reinking, 2020). For instance, in our chapter “Are you a Boy or a Girl?” we recognize the themed days such as “Donuts with Dad,” or correspondence to families that say, “Dear Mom and Dad” and how many teachers have boy and girl lines (p.86). If teachers do not fully recognize family dynamics or gender identity, then they may not change how they are instructing or including students.

Although most teachers in California felt less comfortable teaching it, and hardly anyone had access to LGBTQ+ curriculum, most felt it should be included. A question from the survey asked, “what is your

opinion of how same-sex families should be included in classroom materials and curriculum?” and 75% of the participants chose 4 or 5 on the Likert scale that stated, “same-sex families should be included in the classroom curriculum.”

When asked, “Surveying your classroom, do the books, pictures, and units/themes represent gender expression, identity, and/or same-sex families?” only 3 California teachers said they had access to an inclusive LGBTQ+ curriculum in their school or classroom. But, when asked if they felt comfortable implementing same-sex families into the curriculum, only 48% indicated they felt “comfortable or very comfortable.” Most teachers that were uncomfortable were in their 1st to 4th year of teaching, and more experienced teachers felt more comfortable.

This suggests that newer teachers may contribute comfort of implementing LGBTQ+ curriculum to worrying about job security. Heteronormativity could also be a contributor to the formalities within school systems, which could make a teacher who wants to implement an LGBTQ+ curriculum feel nervous about doing so. Heteronormativity (Castro, et al., 2011) is the belief that being straight is normal and allowed, and curricula (Mayo, 2013; Vaccaro et al., 2012), social constructs (Kissen, 2002), and various political ideals (*Bathroom Bill*, 2017) focus heavily on the mindset that everyone is straight and that is the correct way of being. This marginalizes people who do not identify as heterosexual, thus devaluing those with non-hetero identities. Policies, practices, and social events in school settings often follow heteronormative constructs, and this could make a teacher feel uncomfortable to go against what is set in place at their school site.

Focus Groups Emphasized Teacher Needs for Implementation

Our focus groups were insightful because we had teachers who wanted to provide more input. To help us answer the research question: How comfortable are K-8 educators when teaching LGBTQ+ curricula in schools? They were asked specific open-ended questions, “what does inclusion mean to you?”, “how has your district supported LGBTQ+ inclusion?”, “how do you feel about the inclusion of LGBTQ+ families and youth in schools?” Answering these questions led to a lively discussion of what is needed for change and what we could do immediately to be more inclusive in K-8 schools.

Common threads throughout the focus groups were: professional development, administrative support, and student needs. The teachers believed that professional development specifically discussing social-

emotional learning with LGBTQ+ communities or gender identity would be helpful. They also said that some teachers may not know how to implement certain topics or have access to resources to provide the students with information to make their own educated decisions, and professional development in those areas would also benefit them.

They also felt that the administration must be supportive of inclusive curriculum implementation which would reduce fear. This means that administration should have written policies that prohibit discrimination and bullying, they include LGBTQ+ and gender identity in their common language, and they support the teachers when parents or families file grievances. Lastly, the continuous discussion of making students feel accepted and safe emerged throughout the data. They want to include curriculum so students feel seen and heard, and they suggested including lessons that would help minimize bullying or calling out differences that set them apart, versus bringing people together.

The conversations with the focus groups clarified some of the uncertainties that teachers may feel as to why they are uncomfortable. “You have to be careful without tenure,” said a participant when discussing possible reasons for not implementing LGBTQ+ curriculum. Job security concerns directly correlate to having administrative support. Historically, teachers experienced dismissal because of homophobic discrimination or assumption of LGBTQ+ identities (*Acanfora v. Board of Education*, 1973; Bishop et al., 2010; *Burton v. Cascade School District*, 1975; *Gaylord v. Tacoma*, 1977; Graves, 2007), and it still happens today, but cases may not always go to court and are settled through remediation, or the teacher leaves quietly.

They also emphasized the experiences they have witnessed based on the lack of knowledge and fear of implementation, which could inhibit the social-emotional growth and political, historical, and civic education of children of all ages in schools throughout this state. An example of this is when in 2018, a focus group member’s colleague was asked to finish their school year at home and was not rehired because she allowed a teacher-guided LGBTQ+ discussion about relationships to take place in her upper-grade classroom. A focus group participant stated, “[s]he lost her job because she allowed her student to be himself. What message does this give to other teachers?” The fear is present and for good reason--administrators are taking actions that increase worry in our teachers, which in turn could result in a lack of safety or emotional harm to students because they are not being supported properly.

There are a variety of cases within California that support the focus groups’ discussions about children’s safety. Some students won cases where they charged schools, personnel and/or students with

harm against them - physically, verbally, and/or mentally (*Donovan v. Poway Unified School District*, 2008; *Flores v. Morgan Hill Unified School District*, 2003; *M.D. v. Newport-Mesa Unified School District*, 2009; *Shaposhnikov v. Pacifica School District*, 2004). In other cases, students' ending their lives resulted in new CA laws (Ortiz, 2015; *Walsh v. Tehachapi Unified School District*, 2011).

Through the conversation with the focus groups, it seems as if there is a disconnect with the various entities that make up a school system. There are school-board representatives, school districts, administration, teachers, staff, parents, and students. But concerns for the group were, "how do we get everyone in these groups on board?", "how do we implement an LGBTQ+ curriculum to provide a safe and inclusive environment for some students that we will teach?" With heteronormativity at the forefront and the lack of knowledge of what LGBTQ+ truly encompasses, inclusive curricula are minimal, which is detrimental to students. Families will go unrecognized, and students will continue to be misgendered, bullied, or not validated because they do not fit with what heteronormativity defines as normal.

Dispatch

What Does This Mean for California Educators Today? What Can We Do Right Now?

This pilot study was shared because the data needs to reach more people in order to make immediate change. Our goal with this article is to provide immediate implications, in hopes to have stronger positive correlations when continuing our study and data collection in the next 3 years. We address California policy, community and school advocacy for LGBTQ+ Social Justice, and celebration of families and abolishing non-inclusive practices.

California Policy. California has implemented various policies and legislative acts to prohibit discrimination. A policy for an inclusive curriculum to include LGBTQ+ people was implemented in 2011 through the CA FAIR Education Act, and there is a statewide travel ban to specific states that use the 1st and 14th Amendments to discriminate against LGBTQ+ patrons (Prohibition on State-funded and State-sponsored Travel, 2022). This bill should provide administrators and educators a foundation to implement curriculum, because after all—it is the law. Understanding that LGBTQ+ curricula are lacking presence in California, it is important to note that "This law [CA FAIR Act] doesn't teach morality; it teaches our students that gay Americans have been an integral part of our society and continue

to shape our current world” (Harrell, 2018, para 2). This is necessary to mention because media can often portray the LGBTQ+ community as immoral or harmful, and lack of experience or exposure to reality could lead to skewed views of a cultural population within the United States (Marcus, 2019). It is possible to teach about people regardless of personal or moral beliefs, especially in a historical context when recognizing contributors to our society.

Examples of curriculum implementation beyond historical contributions could include literature and projects that identify different types of families or gender and identity awareness. There are immediate actions that can take place to implement LGBTQ+ inclusivity, and there are some developmental steps that could occur for sustaining changes in schools. Evans-Santiago resides in a geographical space (California) that directly connects to the rich history of LGBTQ+ populations. For example, the founding of the Daughters of Bilitis, the first Gay Pride marches, Harvey Milk’s assassination, and many more key events occurred in San Francisco, where lessons could incorporate these events and incorporate historical conversations and texts. Beyond curriculum, immediate professional develop should also occur more regularly.

Community and School Advocacy for LGBTQ+ Social Justice

The focus group data helped us see that there is a fear of implementing due to reactions from educational leaders. This could stem from familial grievances, traditional heteronormative practices, or lack of knowledge and/or experience with LGBTQ+ topics. Professional development must take place at three levels: school leadership or administrative levels, teacher levels, and familial levels. In order for fear in California to subside, administrators, curriculum leaders, teachers, and families must learn about this contributing population within our society.

All counties should provide more resources and training sessions in order to learn about LGBTQ+ people and the curricula available. Teachers should not have to fear losing their job for implementing inclusive curricula. Administrators should be the support system within school sites, but if they are not, teachers do have the union to support them as well. The California Teachers Association (2021) states:

Social Justice means that we work actively to eradicate structural and institutional racism, classism, linguicism, ableism, ageism, heterosexism, religious bias, and xenophobia. Social Justice means that we, as educators are responsible for the collective good of society, not simply our own individual interests (Social Justice section). That

means they will support teachers who are trying to ensure that “all students should have equal access to a high-quality public education free from discrimination or bias” (CTA, 2021, Civil Rights in Education section).

If school leaders show educators, students, and families that they are inclusive and supportive, then it provides a safe space to implement the curriculum in classrooms. A real example of this is having a poster in the main office that states “All are welcome here,” versus an office that has one United States President nominee in a cardboard cut-out that greets the parents as soon as they enter.

Another idea provided by the focus group was to implement parent and family groups within schools or the district. These groups should be support groups, a place to ask questions, or even a place to voice concerns. Families come with questions and have guided discussions, have a guest speaker to help clarify learnings or questions, and it is a space to implement change for their children. As mentioned before, if a teacher is anxious about this, but sees the need and wants to act upon it, the union supports teachers who choose to lead or advocate for these groups. The parents in these groups would create a bridge to communicate to other parents who may not accept or support LGBTQ+ inclusive curricula.

Celebration of Families and Abolishing Non-inclusive Practices

Another immediate change involves individualized classrooms providing visual support. One of the participants in the study stated that she proudly displays her framed family picture like everyone else; her family consists of two moms, two children, and a dog. If all teachers share pictures of their families, all family structures become normalized. If only heteronormative families are displayed and other families' photos are asked not to be displayed, then the hidden curriculum here is that not all teachers' families are valid or important. We want to demonstrate an appreciation of all families that make up such an important space for students' lives. Modeling acceptance and celebrating people for who they are and all of the funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2009) they bring into the classroom will create the tone for the learning environment.

Some teachers in the focus group said providing inclusive posters is an easy way to say “All are welcome.” Some of these posters are available on various websites (See Table 1 for Resources for Educators). Large, bright, and colorful posters create an environment of positivity and inclusivity while modeling acceptance for all people. Inclusive language

Table 1
Resources for Educators

<i>Resource Type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Location</i>
Kit Virtual Folders for LGBTQ lessons TK-8	Teacher-made lessons Hope in a box	 www.hopeinabox.org
Posters, stickers, etc. Positive visuals in various sizes	Gay Lesbian & Straight Education Network Human Rights Campaign	www.GLSEN.org www.hrc.org
Research and reports Data and Survey reports youth, BIPOC folx, and more	Gay Lesbian & Straight Education Network Human Rights Campaign	www.GLSEN.org www.hrc.org
Laws and bills Current bills and laws to provide reference and foundation for advocacy	American Civil Liberties Union Williams Institute (UCLA) Movement Advancement Project	https://www.aclu.org/ https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/ https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/non_discrimination_laws
Teacher advocacy National and local organizations that support with legal advocacy and human rights	National Educators Association California Teachers Association California Faculty Association	https://www.neamb.com/about-us/movement-toward-a-just-future https://www.cta.org/our-advocacy https://www.calfac.org/council-for-racial-social-justice/
Author recommended texts Books that have helped guide teachers with implementation	Referenced books on reference page New text! October 2023	Darling-Hammond, K. & Evans-Santiago, B. (2023). <i>T* is for Thriving: Blueprints for Affirming Trans* and Gender Creative Lives and Learning in Schools</i> . Myers Education Press

can immediately provide affirmation of identities and removes gender bias barriers. There is a great tool in *Gender Diversity and LGBTQ Inclusivity in Schools* (Chappell et al., 2018) that discusses “instead of... try these” practices and implementation that could begin today. An example of this is instead of using terms such as calling the class together by saying, “boys and girls,” educators should call the class together by saying, “class,” or “scholars” to avoid gender biases (See Table 1).

We must find alternative ways to celebrate people and bring families to campus. Examine events such as “muffins with moms” which excludes a variety of families, including LGBTQ+. Often, a teacher will say, “or anyone can come,” but the students will already feel marginalized or silenced because the curricula do not mention their family dynamics and thus are not validated (Evans-Santiago & Reinking, 2020, p.86).

Teachers should also seek out education kits that provide tools and resources to implement the curriculum. The authors have worked with California teachers to create tools for educators at all levels and more kits and ideas are available free of charge or for small donations (See Table 1).

Teacher Educators Need to Address Heteronormativity in Pedagogical Practices

Teacher educators should facilitate discussions and guide research about LGBTQ+ topics because pre-service teachers will eventually teach some of the 6 million children who are a part of the LGBTQ+ community in some capacity—and it is a state law. We as teacher educators can model inclusive language (Evans-Santiago & Lin, 2016) and provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to become aware of their own unconscious biases. Acknowledging and removing biases about the LGBTQ+ community will help pre-service teachers feel better prepared to teach LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum in their classes. Many students say, “I avoid gender discussions,” or “[h]er mom did her hair so cute this morning.”

These are relatable examples of unconscious biases that we make based on our own experiences. Avoiding conversations about gender sends a message that students’ gender is irrelevant when to them it could be very important. Assuming that a mother did the child’s hair demonstrates bias because it could have been a father or the partner of the parent. We must help our new teachers acknowledge that gender matters and families matter, and we must move toward justice for

our students in their learning environments. We can help teachers recognize the limits of their comfort zones and understand that change happens when we are uncomfortable but are able to unpack our thoughts in a “brave space” (Winters, 2020).

There are immediate actions that should be taken today. Educational leaders should support the inclusion of gender and LGBTQ+ families. Families could work together to learn more about the LGBTQ+ community and teach other parents. Teachers could provide more inclusive visuals and take steps to affirm gender with their students. Teacher educators should guide pre-service teachers with conversations and research that influences inclusive actions (see resources).

Limitations

We initially set out to gather data across the country, but unfortunately, teachers in many states do not associate with this topic and chose not to participate. Because this study was conducted by three faculty members who reside in California and Illinois, the convenience of the snowball effect with participants resulted in more data from the two states. Currently, the researchers are investing more time and effort to gather data from other states, but COVID-19 has minimized travel and we will continue to reach out to more states for data as this study continues. When we looked at the data collected (mostly from Illinois and California), it became apparent that Illinois was further along in the process of including LGBTQ+ curricula into schools as compared to the California region where we gathered our data from.

At the time of the initial larger study, Illinois had just passed the inclusive curriculum bill (School Code, 2019). The teachers surveyed in Illinois, as part of our larger project, reported higher rates of “being comfortable” and “having access” to LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum, as compared to peers in California. Illinois comfort level was 4% higher than California’s and access to curricula in California was extremely low at 0.09% compared to Illinois at 33%. Further, 70% of the Illinois teachers surveyed felt it was very important to incorporate an LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum, while only 51% of the California participants answered the same. Due to this discrepancy, along with other data points, we had further questions about the results because we assumed California would have the highest rates all around, and that was not the case. So, we began to dig deeper into the findings, specifically for the teachers located in California.

Conclusion

The data gathered from this small pilot were eye-opening and will influence future research in the work of transforming education to be equitable for all. Therefore, we deemed it necessary to share the implications and next steps immediately, even while the research continues. A study of implementation across California is currently underway, and a 50-state study, due for completion in 2025 will give further insight. This pilot study also identified changes teachers and other educational leaders can implement immediately, which cannot wait three more years while children's mental and physical health are at stake.

Those interviewed and surveyed as part of the pilot study showed us that there is more work to do. Teachers need the materials and administrative support to move forward, and they should not fear losing their job because they included inclusive curricula that affirms gender or LGBTQ+ families. As we continue this research by observing curriculum implementation and conducting more focus groups, we will have more data on the impact of inclusive curricula at various levels. Curricula is available, and teachers are ready to implement, but they must feel safe and equipped to do so. We are also going to continue to interview teachers across the country to get a clearer understanding of what teachers are doing and how they feel about LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum.

As educators, it is disheartening to know that children experience feelings of hopelessness or invisibility while attending school, the space that should empower them and develop them as informed citizens. Over 6 million people identify as LGBTQ+ in the United States. Over 3,000 children took their own lives due to hopelessness or depression, which might have been heightened while they were at school. It is time to accept the responsibility of being law-abiding with all cultural areas in our classrooms, accept and move into the feelings of discomfort, and be willing to make changes for our generations to come. We have an obligation as educators to ensure that our students are not silenced or ignored and that children of all ages have mirrors where they see themselves in some capacity, windows to explore and learn about others, and sliding glass doors to step out and experience the world (Bishop et al., 2010).

Our marginalized students suffer enough on a day-to-day basis, let's not add to their fears of isolation and hopelessness. Instead, let's validate their existence. Our children deserve recognition and humanization, and a queer democratic education is a step in the right direction for

California's schools. Applying these pertinent recommendations from this research "will begin to move forward within elementary schools in order to gain knowledge of the LGBTQ+ community and how it should be properly represented in every classroom," just as Evans-Santiago's student requested.

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