

Michigan: Establishing Safe and Supportive School Environments

Problem Overview:

A CDC analysis of Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data found that sexual minority students, especially those who identified as homosexual or bisexual, were disproportionately likely to engage in many health risk behaviors, including sexual risk behaviors (such as having sexual intercourse for the first time at younger ages, having multiple sex partners, and not using condoms); tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use; and behaviors related to attempted suicide. Negative attitudes toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students put them at increased risk for experiences with violence, compared with heterosexual students. Violence can include behaviors such as bullying, teasing, harassment, physical assault, and suicide-related behaviors.

Program/Activity Description:

In an effort to ensure that LGBT and questioning (LGBTQ) students are physically and emotionally safe at school, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) convened a workgroup to address this critical issue. Under the guidance of the workgroup, and in coordination with the Detroit Public Schools, the Calhoun Intermediate School District (ISD) compiled and published a resource guide, *A Silent Crisis: Creating Safe Schools for Sexual Minority Youth* (<http://www.emc.cmich.edu/products/SilentCrisis/default.htm>), to address the health and safety needs of LGBT youth. The MDE adopted the guide (with permission from the Calhoun ISD) and, through CDC-Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH) support to the Detroit Public Schools, revised the guide throughout the next decade.



Printed and distributed with funding support from CDC-DASH, this resource is designed for use by teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, and other professionals. First published in 2001, the 2010 fifth edition of *A Silent Crisis* includes many new resources, practical tools, and strategies for providing safe, respectful, and supportive learning environments for all students.

Program/Activity Results:

Over the past 10 years, the MDE —

- Conducted more than 44 workshops on using *A Silent Crisis: Creating Safe Schools for Sexual Minority Youth*—training nearly 1,600 representatives from 257 school districts across the state that collectively serve more than 900,000 students. Following these trainings —
 - More than 100 high schools in Michigan (public and private, combined) have established gay-straight alliances (GSAs).
 - Schools have conducted in-service programs for their staff, revised school policies to establish safe spaces for students, revised curricula and classroom resources to be inclusive of all youth, and identified health services referrals, as appropriate, to facilitate access by students to health service providers not on school property.
- Co-founded a state-level youth advisory council, the Michigan Youth (MY) Voice on Adolescent Sexual Health, to train and empower youth to support policy-makers and program leaders in developing policies and programs that better meet the needs of all youth.

- Added a same-sex sexual behavior question to the Michigan YRBS (2011) and will be adding a sexual identity question to the YRBS in 2013.
- Developed a directory of high schools across the state that report having a GSA—to facilitate communication, networking, and sharing of best practices.
- Identified lessons that include discussions of LGBTQ youth for supplemental use by school districts wanting to address sexual orientation and gender identity more specifically as part of their middle and high school health curricula.
- Included the *Silent Crisis* trainings and follow-up support as one of the interventions that schools funded through the U.S. Department of Education’s Safe and Supportive Schools grant (focused on high-need high schools across Michigan) can choose. Seven of the 23 funded high schools have selected the *Silent Crisis* intervention.



Through *A Silent Crisis: Creating Safe Schools for Sexual Minority Youth*, Michigan is working to create a positive school climate for all students to help youth feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe and supported—and ready to learn.

Note: This success story, including background data and outcomes, reflects information as reported by the participating program.