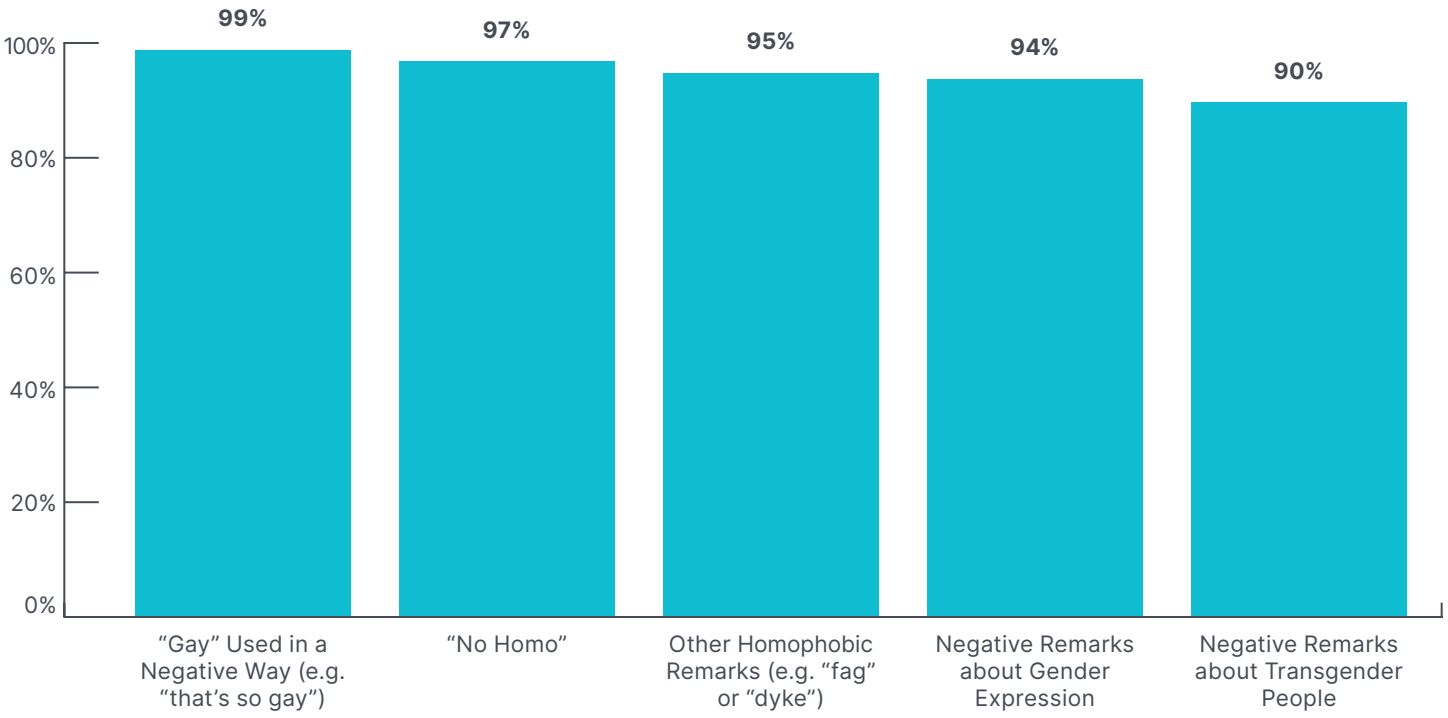
School Climate for LGBTQ+ Students in Indiana

Findings from the GLSEN 2021 National School Climate Survey demonstrate that Indiana schools were not safe for most LGBTQ+ secondary school students. In addition, many LGBTQ+ students in Indiana did not have access to important school supports. Of note, the 2020-2021 school year was unique in that the COVID-19 pandemic caused disruptions to schools across the country, as schools had to adapt in the wake of the pandemic, drastically changing how many students experienced school; in Indiana, 18% of LGBTQ+ students attended school only in-person, 14% attended only online, and 68% attended school in a hybrid setting.

The vast majority of LGBTQ+ students in Indiana regularly (sometimes, often, or frequently) heard anti-LGBTQ+ remarks (Fig. 1). Many also regularly heard school staff make homophobic remarks (63%) and negative remarks about someone's gender expression (75%).

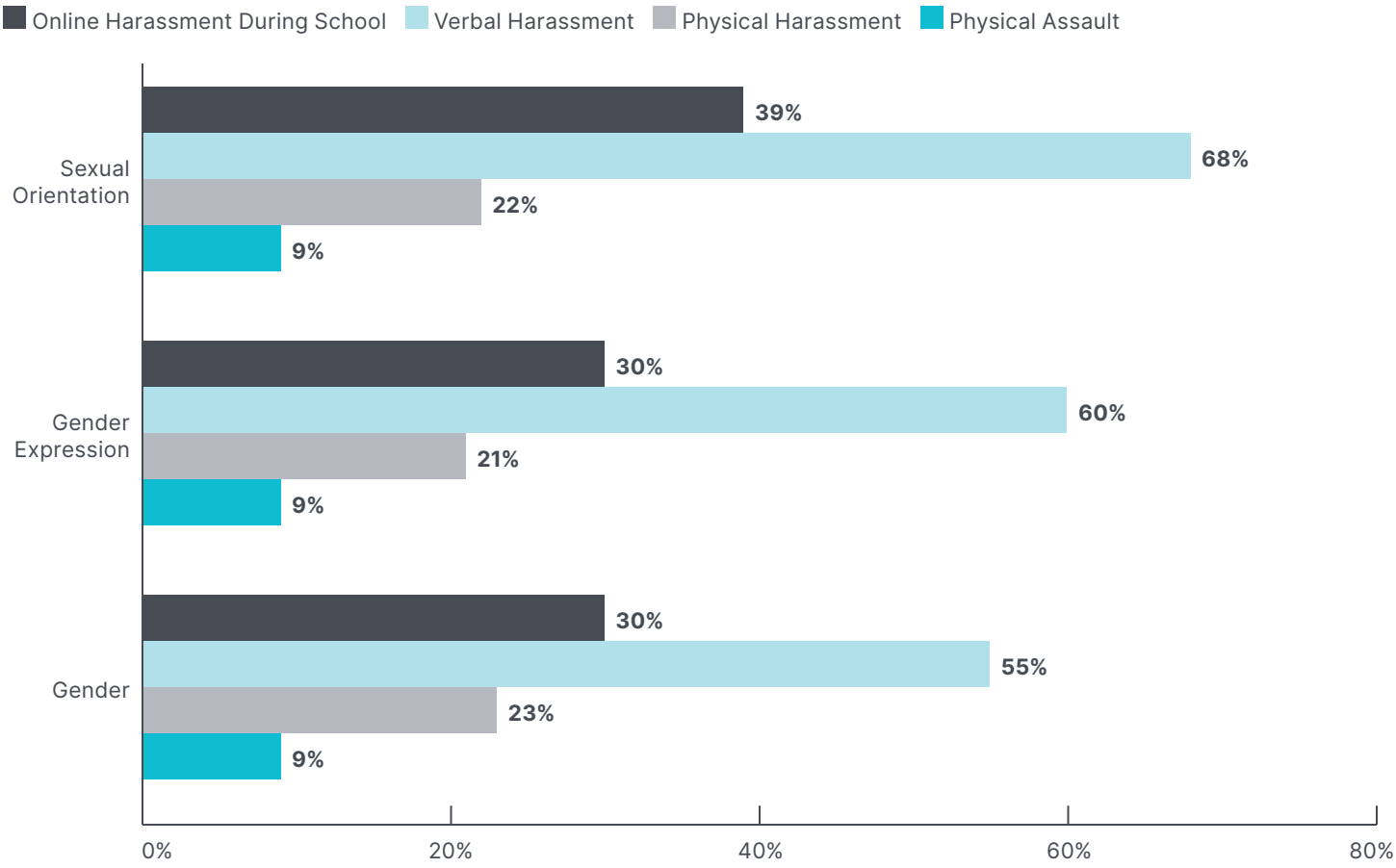
Most LGBTQ+ students in Indiana experienced anti-LGBTQ+ victimization at school (Fig. 2). They also experienced victimization at school based on religion (30%), disability (37%), and race/ethnicity (21%). Most never reported the incident to school staff (60%), and of those who had, only 23% of LGBTQ+ students said that it resulted in effective staff intervention.

Figure 1. Hearing Anti-LGBTQ+ Remarks from Students in Indiana Schools
(percentage of LGBTQ+ students ever hearing remarks)



continued >

Figure 2. Anti-LGBTQ+ Harassment & Assault in Indiana Schools
(percentage of LGBTQ+ students harassed or assaulted in the past year based on...)

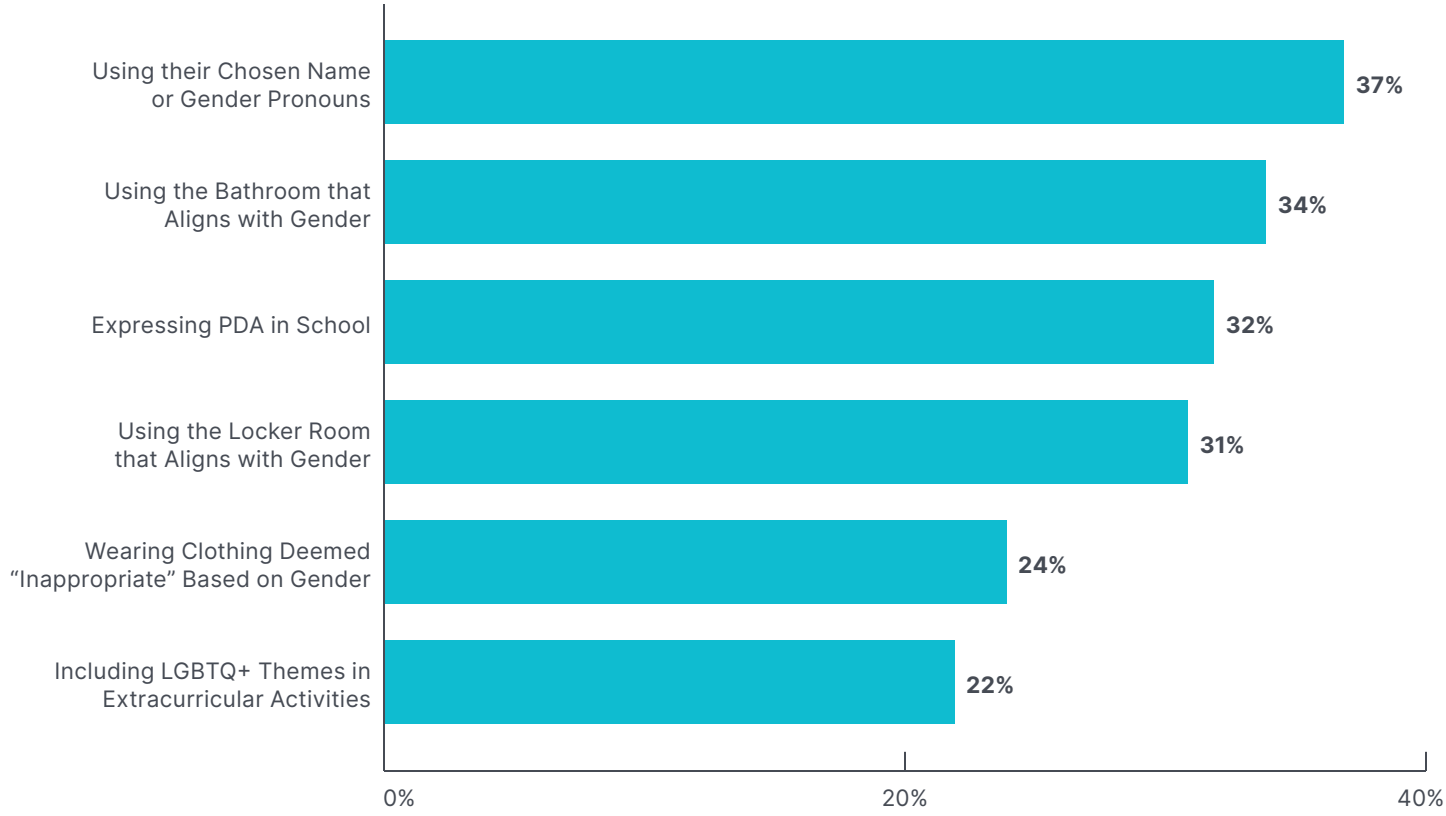


Many LGBTQ+ students in Indiana reported discriminatory policies or practices at their school (Fig. 3). More than 2 in 3 (69%) experienced at least one form of anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination at school. Figure 3 shows the most common forms of anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination experienced by LGBTQ+ students in Indiana.

- Many LGBTQ+ students in Indiana were **restricted from LGBTQ+ expression**: 32% were disciplined for public displays of affection (PDA) that did not result in similar action for non-LGBTQ students; 22% were prevented from discussing or writing about LGBTQ+ topics in extracurricular activities and 20% in class assignments/projects, 16% were prevented from wearing clothing supporting LGBTQ+ issues, and 4% were disciplined for identifying as LGBTQ+.
- Many LGBTQ+ students in Indiana experienced **discrimination at school related to their gender**; 37% were prevented from using their name or pronoun in their school, 34% were prevented from using the bathroom that aligned with their gender, 31% were prevented from using the locker room that aligned with their gender, 24% were prevented from wearing clothing deemed "inappropriate" based on gender, and 19% were prevented from playing on the sports team that was consistent with their gender.
- In Indiana, **transgender and nonbinary students in particular experienced gender-based discrimination**, specifically being prevented from: using their chosen name or pronouns (50%), using the bathroom that aligns with their gender (46%), using the locker room that aligns with their gender (41%), wearing clothing deemed "inappropriate" based on gender (27%), and playing on the school sports team that was consistent with their gender (26%).

continued >

Figure 3. Anti-LGBTQ+ Discrimination in Indiana Schools
(percentage of LGBTQ+ students prevented from...)

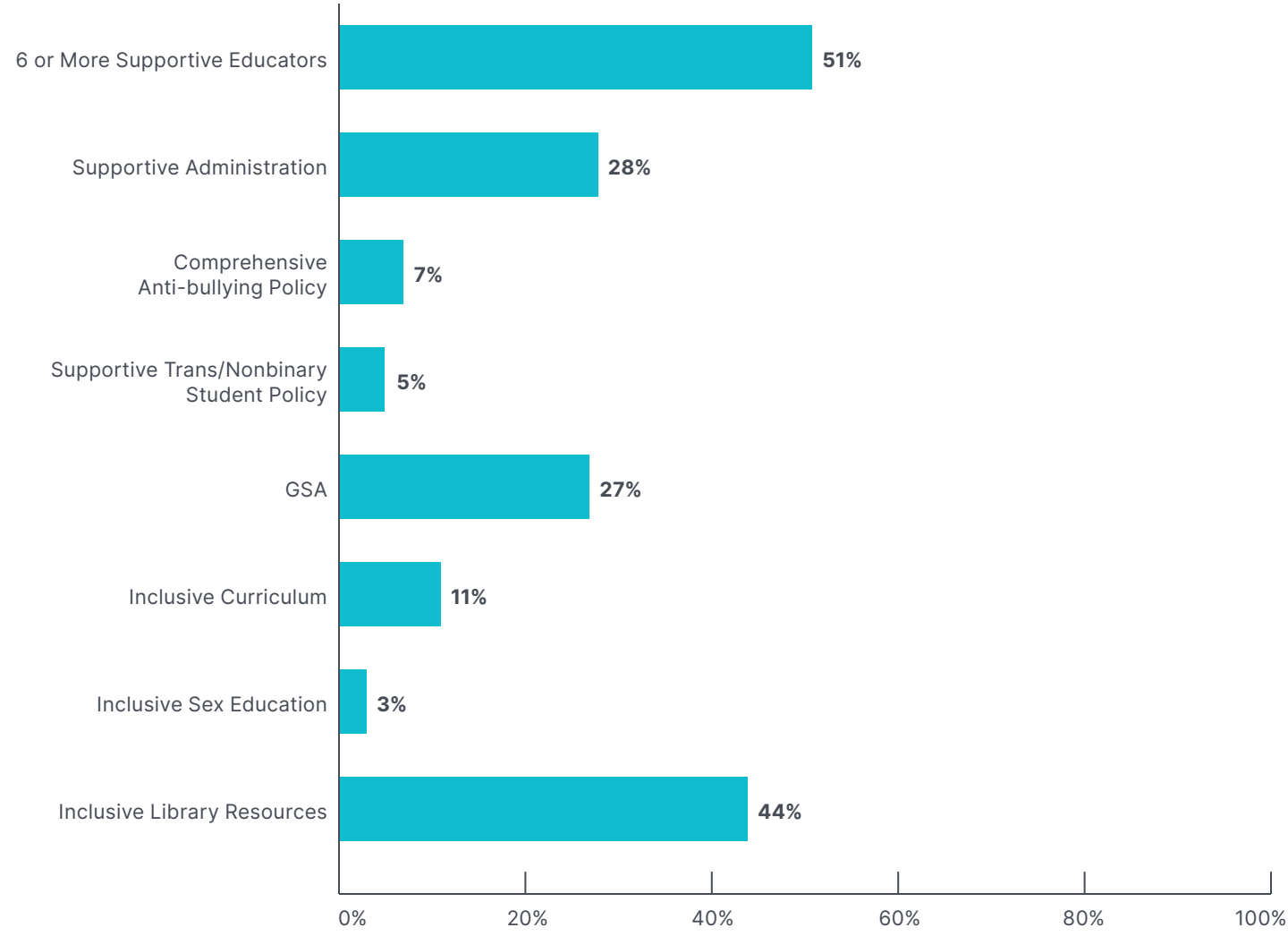


Many LGBTQ+ students in Indiana did not have access to in-school resources and supports (Fig. 4).

- Many (97%) could **identify at least one school staff member supportive of LGBTQ+ students**, but only 51% could **identify 6 or more supportive school staff**.
- Only 28% of LGBTQ+ students reported that their **school administration was somewhat or very supportive** of LGBTQ+ students.
- Only 11% were taught **positive representations of LGBTQ+ people, history, or events** ("inclusive curriculum"), 44% had access to **inclusive library resources**, and 3% of LGBTQ+ students in Indiana reported receiving **LGBTQ+-inclusive sex education** at school.
- Only 7% of LGBTQ+ students attended a school with a **comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policy** that included specific protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Only 5% had a **policy or official guidelines to support transgender and nonbinary students**.
- Only 27% had access to a **GSA or similar student club** which provides a safe and affirming space and promotes a more welcoming school climate for LGBTQ+ students.

continued >

Figure 4. Availability of LGBTQ+-Related and Supports in Indiana Schools



RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from the 2021 National School Climate Survey demonstrate that students attending schools with affirming LGBTQ+ resources and supports report more positive school experiences, including lower victimization and absenteeism, and higher academic achievement.

Given the high percentages of LGBTQ+ students in Indiana who experience harassment at school, and the limited access to key resources and supports, it is critical that Indiana school leaders, education policymakers, and other individuals who are obligated to provide safe learning environments for all students take the following steps:

- Implement supportive and inclusive school policies, such as comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment and supportive transgender and nonbinary student policies;
- Support GSAs;
- Provide professional development for school staff on LGBTQ+ student issues; and
- Increase student access to LGBTQ+-inclusive curricular resources.

continued >

Details on Indiana's current status regarding the adoption of the above recommendations can be found on Indiana's Policy Score Card, located at **maps.glsen.org/state-policy-scorecards/**. Adopting the above mentioned resources and policies can move us toward a future in which all students in Indiana will have the opportunity to learn and succeed in school, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

To learn more about GLSEN and to get involved, visit glsen.org or contact info@glsen.org.

To learn more about the state and local level policy landscape, visit the GLSEN Navigator, located at maps.glsen.org.

To find contact information for your State Policy Fellow, your regional Freedom Fellow, and other key Indiana contacts, visit maps.glsen.org/advocates/.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

In 2021, GLSEN conducted the eleventh National School Climate Survey, a biennial survey of the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in U.S. secondary schools. The national sample consisted of 22,298 LGBTQ+ students from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and Guam. A total of 574 respondents were attending schools in Indiana. The Indiana sample was 1% AAPI (Asian American/Pacific Islander), 2% Black, 8% Latinx, 1% MENA (Middle Eastern and North African), 6% multiracial, 0% Native or Indigenous, and 82% White. The gender composition was 29% cisgender, 30% transgender, 33% nonbinary or genderqueer, and 8% questioning. 91% attended public schools and 5% attended a religious-affiliated school. The school community makeup was 43% rural/small town, 37% suburban, and 20% urban. The results reported for Indiana had a margin of error of +/- 4%.

For the full 2021 National School Climate Survey report or for any other GLSEN research, go to **glsen.org/research**.

Follow **@GLSENResearch** on Twitter.

Suggested citation: GLSEN. (2023). *School Climate for LGBTQ+ Students in Indiana (2021 State Snapshot: Indiana)*. New York: GLSEN.

GLSEN is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students.

© GLSEN 2023