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Playgrounds and prejudice: elementary school climate in the United States. A survey of students and teachers

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Organizations:

Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, GLSEN
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Description:

Students' school education consists of not only what they are explicitly taught in the classroom, but also what they implicitly learn through the language, attitudes and actions of other students and teachers. When these attitudes, remarks and actions are unsupportive or hostile, they create a school climate that can negatively impact students' feelings of safety and their interest in school and learning. Understanding school climate is an important first step in ensuring that all students feel safe and supported in their learning environments. Previous research conducted by GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network) has documented the prevalence of biased language, name-calling and bullying, as well as supportive resources, at the secondary school level; yet, the precursors to secondary school climate are less understood. The current study examines school climate, student experiences and teacher practices at the elementary school level. In this study, students in elementary school were asked about their school climates, including hearing biased remarks, witnessing and experiencing bullying as well as lessons they received on bullying, gender issues and family diversity. Elementary school teachers were asked similar questions about school climate, as well as questions about attitudes and efforts toward students with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) parents and students who may not conform to traditional gender norms, their schools' anti-bullying or harassment efforts and their own professional development experiences. The findings from this study provide an important context for the discussion of bullying and harassment across school grades and insight into the precursors of the types of biased language and bullying that characterize secondary schools, particularly the middle school years when bullying and harassment are most prevalent.

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