



Florida LGBTQ+ Student Concerns

Perhaps there is nothing more instructive than hearing from our LGBTQ+ students during the time of COVID-19 and virtual learning statewide. Students are relaying their challenges below via their youth-serving agencies that some students interact with during the present pandemic. Remember that most LGBTQ+ youths do not have access to youth-serving agencies but the ones that do are pointing us toward their challenges at home and school. **The below youth concerns have been relayed via five LGBTQ+ youth-serving nonprofits statewide from the Panhandle to South Florida that speak with LGBTQ+ students regularly.**

Our district students have shared the following:

Newly Summarized Challenges for Florida LGBTQ+ Students as of Late May 2020:

- Youth who may be living in crowded homes with large families are experiencing difficulty in having privacy and quiet time to do schoolwork.
- Social distancing has created an increased sense of internalized homophobia among LGBTQ+ youth. Many youths have expressed starting to feel isolated from the LGBTQ+ community as a whole, have deepening feelings of self-criticisms, and have negative thoughts about their belonging to the community.
- There are increased fears about not being able to successfully finish the school year.
- Rising family tensions have been a serious point of concern as families are often unable to understand or affirm their youths' identities and social needs due to isolation. Additionally, some youth have experienced being kicked out of their homes.
- There has been an increase in thoughts of self-harm and suicidal ideation among LGBTQ+ youth.
- Having to suppress their true, authentic identities is negatively impacting the mental health of our LGBTQ+ youth.
- LGBTQ+ youth are becoming disengaged with virtual learning platforms and youth-serving organization programming due to the burnout that is being experienced by having to spend multiple hours on end in front of digital devices.
- The lack of community, uncertainty, and emotional distress caused by COVID-19 has been significantly impacting LGBTQ+ youth.



- Disengagement and feelings of burnout are also causing youth to fall behind in their classes, which has resulted in having to withdraw from courses and, in some extreme cases, having to re-do the school year.
- A vast majority of youth are struggling to maintain a regular routine, causing them to sleep late. Due to this lack of routine and irregular sleep and food/water intake, youth have been experiencing an additional increase in anxiety and depression. The unique school schedule also causes a large amount of youth to miss programming from LGBTQ+ youth-serving organizations due to the fact that they are asleep during programming opportunities.

Highlighted areas below denote points where Florida LGBTQ+ students tell us that these challenges are still present in late May 2020.

- During this time, it is very important to check in with LGBTQ+ students. The Trevor Project research shows that LGBTQ+ youth who report having at least one accepting adult were 40% less likely to report a suicide attempt in the last year.
- **Many LGBTQ+ students no longer have access to the affirming communities they may have found in schools. Those who rely on GSAs or friends at school for accepting communities may feel especially isolated.** Schools should work to ensure that opportunities such as GSA involvement are available to students when virtual school is in session.
- In addition, these youth also report greater rates of sexual, psychological and physical abuse than straight/cisgender peers at home and in the community (Baams, et al., 2018). The Trevor Project's crisis contact volume has spiked by nearly two times the normal call volume since COVID-19. Please contact 866.488.7386, and/or thetrevorproject.org/help.
- Those in contact with LGBTQ+ students can ask them directly about whether or not they feel safe and supported in their current living situation. Efforts to proactively support youth in nonsupportive environments can help them problem solve in order to provide physical and emotional safety.
- Limited access to food, housing, and internet connectivity at home by some students.
- **Youth have been more difficult to reach, possibly due to a number of factors such as being overwhelmed, sad, and feeling unsafe.**



- **Dead names (birth names) on online platforms have been a highly common occurrence in virtual school district platforms throughout the state.** Research reminds us that misgendering a student can lead to very high rates of depression and suicidal ideation. Please work with your I.T. Department to update your Student Information System to reflect students' affirmed names. (Note: there is a link in this email pertaining to how FOCUS and SKYWARD have been used by Martin and St. Lucie school districts to add student affirmed name fields.)
- **Students are consistently reporting depression, anxiety, anger, and boredom. They are also reporting sadness about graduation in Florida schools being canceled.**
- **Some students are not being affirmed at home and are often in unaccepting, unsupportive households and are sometimes frightened of being outed.**
- Youth can be triggered without access to resources (See this email for Qchat, Trevor and Gender Spectrum Lounge links for students that do not have LGBTQ+ youth-serving agencies near them.)
- Many youths log on in unsupportive or semi-supportive environments, and those that do not or can not log on to virtual youth nonprofit chats or zooms are the ones who are often in the most unsupportive households. Others find places they can go to be alone and log on such as garages, bedrooms, and closets.
- **"Is this a good time for me to ask you some identity questions?" , could be a prudent way to test the safety level of LGBTQ+ youth when at home.**
- Youth-serving agencies that have transgender virtual youth groups are having very high attendance rates. Voice chats have higher attendance sometimes than virtual video chats.
- More students who are "closeted" can interact on "DISCORD," a virtual platform that offers more safety. (Consider using 'Discord' for GSA groups, etc.)
- **Students are asking for more programming opportunities from their LGBTQ youth-serving agencies so they can feel more supported.**

QUESTIONS? REACH OUT TO US AT:
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