

Gender-Diverse Students' Experiences in AISD



Executive Summary

Secondary students in Austin Independent School District (AISD) who identified as transgender, nonbinary, or questioning (collectively referred to as “gender diverse” herein) continued to report significantly worse perceptions of school climate than did their cisgender peers, according to results from the 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey.

For the 2020–2021 school year, gender-diverse secondary students (grades 6 through 11) in AISD reported lower academic engagement, lower quality relationships with peers and staff, lower academic persistence and self-efficacy, lower sense of safety at school, and more frequent bullying than did their cisgender peers. Differences between gender-diverse and cisgender students were statistically different (i.e., the 95% confidence interval¹ for each group did not overlap) for 35 out of 40 items on the 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey. These results largely mirror findings from previous reports by the AISD Department of Research and Evaluation (Clark, 2017; Fayles, 2018), as well as national studies on the school experiences of gender-diverse students (e.g., Kosciw et al., 2020).

Due to the substantial difference in sample size between survey respondents identifying as gender-diverse ($n = 317$) and cisgender ($n = 18,194$), as well as the limitations of null hypothesis significance testing (see Cumming, 2014), this report focuses on statistical differences with effect sizes greater than or equal to .3 (as measured by Cohen’s d) in order to better highlight the most meaningful differences in school climate perceptions between gender-diverse and cisgender secondary students. Descriptive statistics, confidence intervals, and effect sizes for all survey items can be found in Appendices A and B.

To provide added clarity to the experiences of gender-diverse students, this report includes selected responses to the following prompts:

- Do you ever feel welcome at school? What is one thing your school does to make you feel welcome?
- Do you ever feel unwelcome at school? What is one thing your school could do to make you feel more welcome?

This report highlights an ongoing need to strengthen supports for gender-diverse students. Recommendations can be found on page 12 and are largely similar to those noted in prior reports (Clark, 2017; Fayles, 2018).

¹ Confidence intervals (CIs) are used to make inferences about a population and can be interpreted (for the purposes of the CIs included in Appendix A) as allowing us to be 95% confident that the true mean agreement for a particular survey item falls within the stated CI for each sample group.

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Introduction

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For the 2020–2021 school year, gender-diverse secondary students (grades 6 through 11) in AISD reported lower academic engagement, lower quality relationships with peers and staff, lower academic persistence and self-efficacy, lower sense of safety at school, and more frequent bullying than did their cisgender peers. Differences between gender-diverse and cisgender students were statistically different (i.e., the 95% confidence interval¹ for each group did not overlap) for 35 out of 40 items on the 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey. These results largely mirror findings from previous reports by the AISD Department of Research and Evaluation (Clark, 2017; Fayles, 2018), as well as national studies on the school experiences of gender-diverse students (e.g., Kosciw et al., 2020).

Due to the substantial difference in sample size between survey respondents identifying as gender-diverse ($n = 317$) and cisgender ($n = 18,194$), as well as the limitations of null hypothesis significance testing (see Cumming, 2014), this report focuses on statistical differences with effect sizes greater than or equal to .3 (as measured by Cohen’s d) in order to better highlight the most meaningful differences in school climate perceptions between gender-diverse and cisgender secondary students. Descriptive statistics, confidence intervals, and effect sizes for all survey items can be found in Appendices A and B.

To provide added clarity to the experiences of gender-diverse students, this report includes selected responses to the following prompts:

- Do you ever feel welcome at school? What is one thing your school does to make you feel welcome?
- Do you ever feel unwelcome at school? What is one thing your school could do to make you feel more welcome?

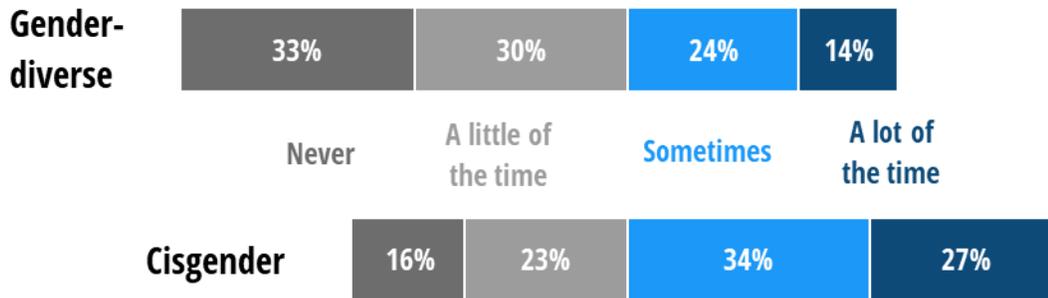
Readers will find a more simplified structure to this report than in previous years. Sections are organized by survey subscale and figures stand alone without explanatory text. We believe the stark differences in students’ perceptions across survey items and subscales need no further explanation. In short, these findings once again highlight the need to strengthen supports for gender-diverse students. Recommendations can be found on page 13 and are largely similar to those noted in prior reports (Clark, 2017; Fayles, 2018).

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Adult Relationships

Figure 1

Students' Responses to "It is easy for me to talk about my problems with the adults at my school," by Gender Identity



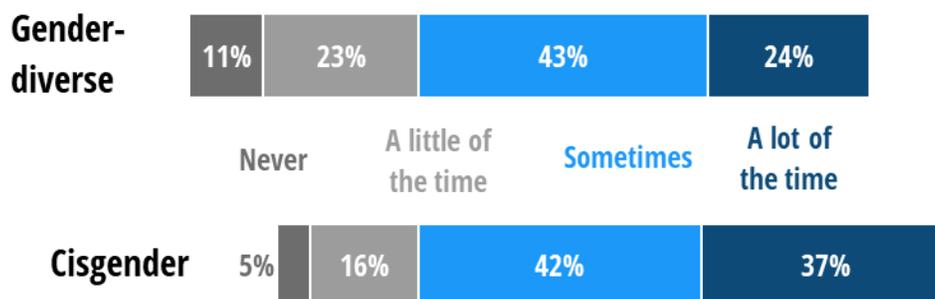
Source. 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey

Note. Responses of "Don't know / I prefer not to answer" were excluded. The survey sample was limited to students in grades 6 through 11.

**"One thing my school does to make me feel welcome is using my correct pronouns and respecting my identity."
– 6th grader (demigirl)**

Figure 2

Students' Responses to "My teachers know what I am good at," by Gender Identity

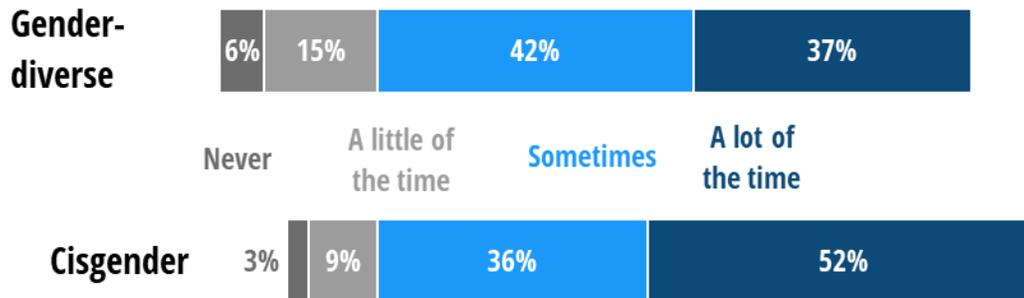


Source. 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey

Note. Responses of "Don't know / I prefer not to answer" were excluded. The survey sample was limited to students in grades 6 through 11.

Figure 3

Students' Responses to "Adults at this school listen to students' ideas and opinions," by Gender Identity



Source. 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey

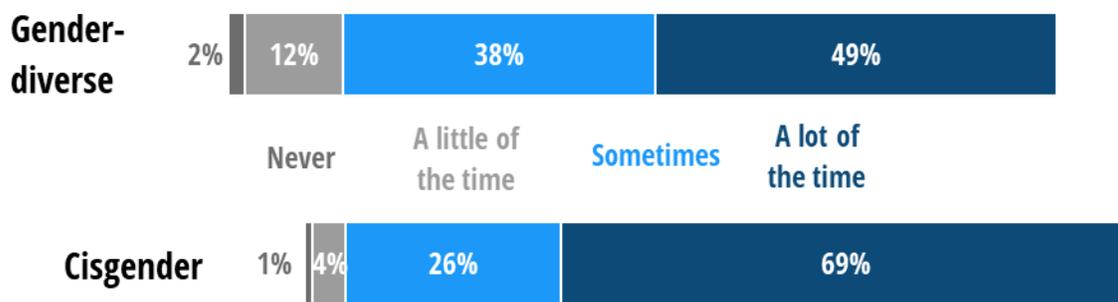
Note. Responses of "Don't know / I prefer not to answer" were excluded. The survey sample was limited to students in grades 6 through 11.

**"Have a genderless bathroom. I don't want to use the women's, because I'm not a woman, and I don't want to use the men's, because I'm not a man."
– 10th grader (nonbinary)**

Behavioral Environment

Figure 4

Students' Responses to "I am happy with the way my classmates treat me," by Gender Identity



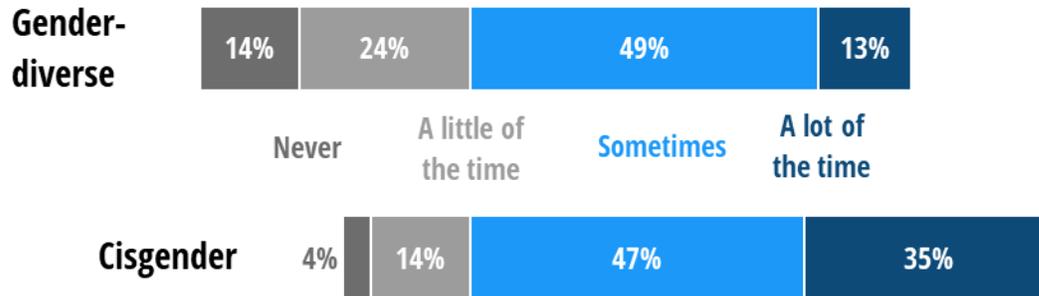
Source. 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey

Note. Responses of "Don't know / I prefer not to answer" were excluded. The survey sample was limited to students in grades 6 through 11.

Academic Persistence

Figure 5

Students' Responses to "I don't give up, even when I feel frustrated," by Gender Identity



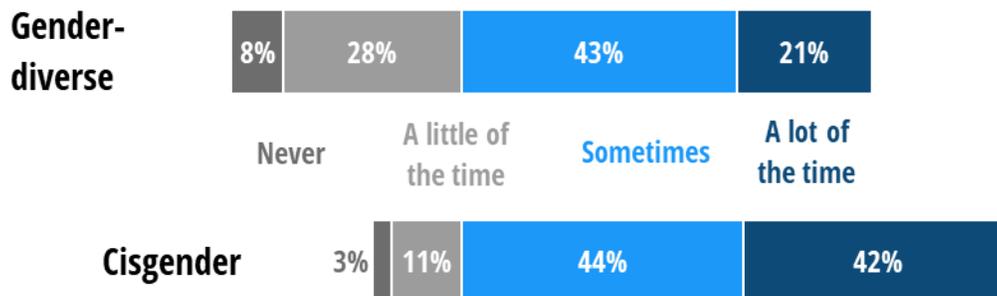
Source. 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey

Note. Responses of "Don't know / I prefer not to answer" were excluded. The survey sample was limited to students in grades 6 through 11.

"My school needs to be more inclusive of people that identify outside of cisgender. [F]or example, changing normalized language like 'ladies' or 'girls.'"
– 11th grader (nonbinary)

Figure 6

Students' Responses to "I can reach the goals I set for myself," by Gender Identity

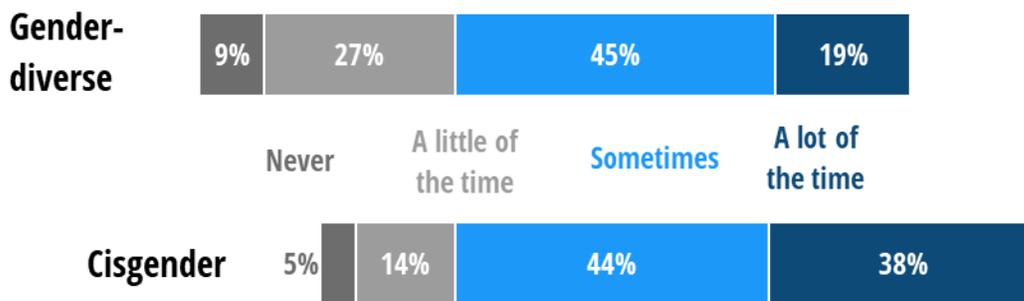


Source. 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey

Note. Responses of "Don't know / I prefer not to answer" were excluded. The survey sample was limited to students in grades 6 through 11.

Figure 7

Students' Responses to "I feel successful in my schoolwork," by Gender Identity



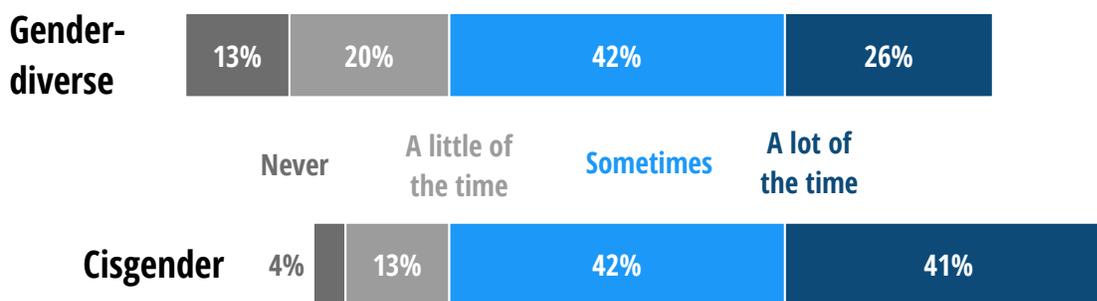
Source. 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey

Note. Responses of "Don't know / I prefer not to answer" were excluded. The survey sample was limited to students in grades 6 through 11.

**"They try to be inclusive but there aren't gender-neutral changing rooms, and the gender-neutral bathroom needs a key and it's embarrassing to ask for it... Create a space for trans or nonbinary students who do not feel comfortable changing in either locker room to make us feel safe."
– 10th grader (no gender identity provided)**

Figure 8

Students' Responses to "I can do even the hardest schoolwork if I try," by Gender Identity



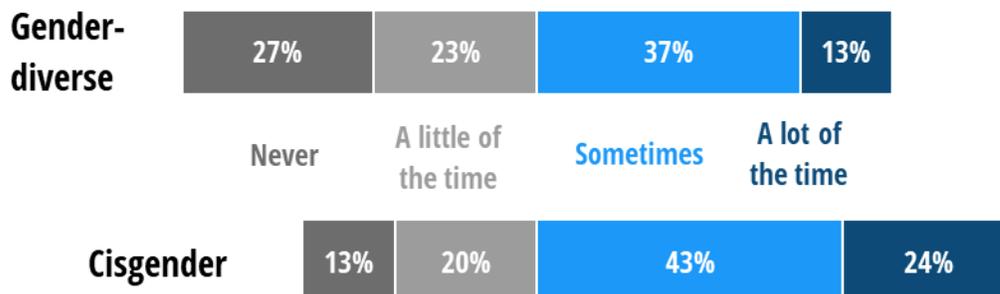
Source. 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey

Note. Responses of "Don't know / I prefer not to answer" were excluded. The survey sample was limited to students in grades 6 through 11.

Student Engagement

Figure 9

Students' Responses to "I like to come to school," by Gender Identity



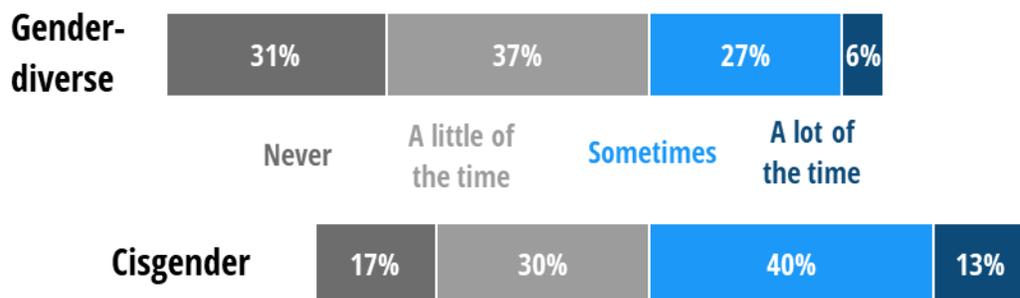
Source. 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey

Note. Responses of "Don't know / I prefer not to answer" were excluded. The survey sample was limited to students in grades 6 through 11.

**"I know some students at school are bullied for being a part of the LGBTQ+ community, and being a pansexual trans guy, it scares me."
– 8th grader (trans)**

Figure 10

Students' Responses to "I enjoy doing my schoolwork," by Gender Identity

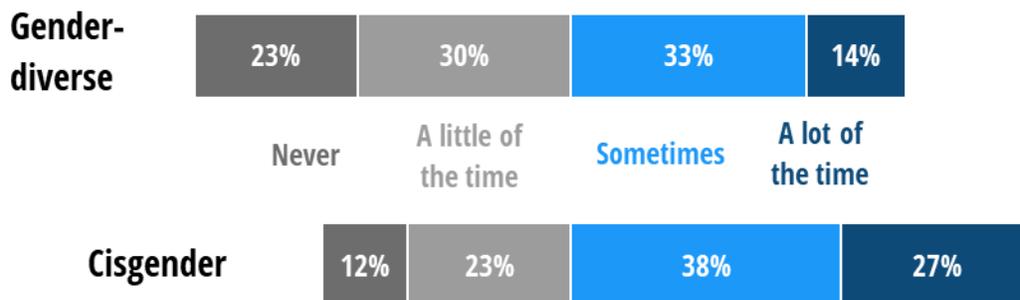


Source. 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey

Note. Responses of "Don't know / I prefer not to answer" were excluded. The survey sample was limited to students in grades 6 through 11.

Figure 11

Students' Responses to "My homework helps me learn the things I need to know," by Gender Identity



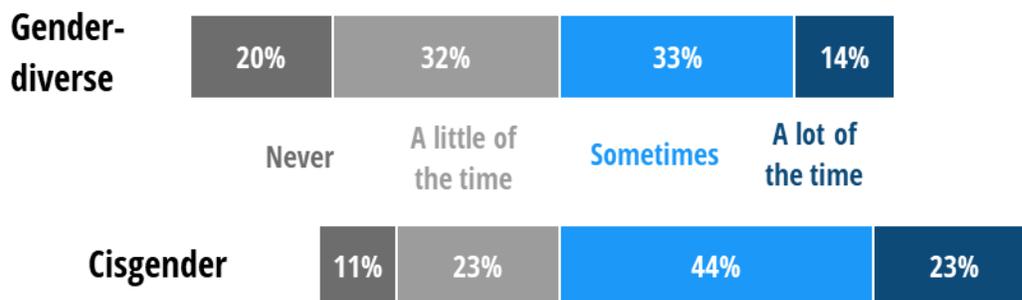
Source. 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey

Note. Responses of "Don't know / I prefer not to answer" were excluded. The survey sample was limited to students in grades 6 through 11.

**"When I was in student council,
 we talked about the LGBTQIA+ and
 it made me feel happy that we
 were discussing problems in the
 community and not just avoiding it."
 – 6th grader (they/them)**

Figure 12

Students' Responses to "My schoolwork makes me think about things in new ways," by Gender Identity

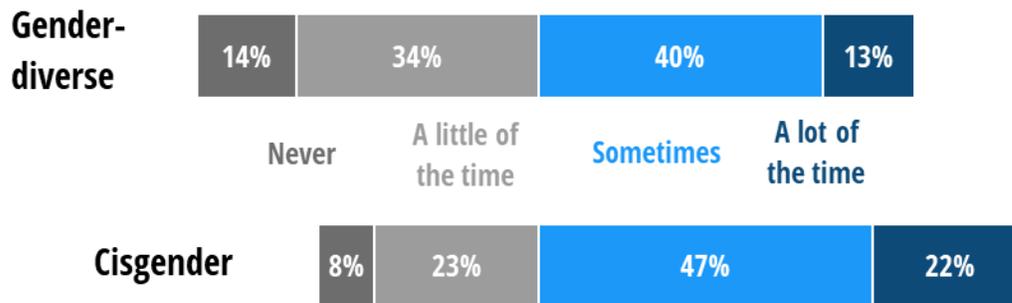


Source. 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey

Note. Responses of "Don't know / I prefer not to answer" were excluded. The survey sample was limited to students in grades 6 through 11.

Figure 13

Students' Responses to "I have fun learning in my classes," by Gender Identity



Source. 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey

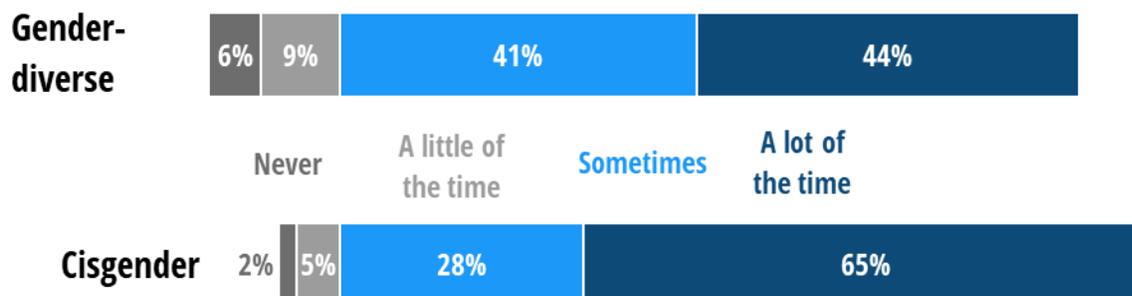
Note. Responses of "Don't know / I prefer not to answer" were excluded. The survey sample was limited to students in grades 6 through 11.

**"I don't feel welcome [at school].
Acknowledge the negative
culture [of] sexism, racism."
– 11th grader (they/them)**

Safety and Respect

Figure 14

Students' Responses to "I feel safe at my school," by Gender Identity

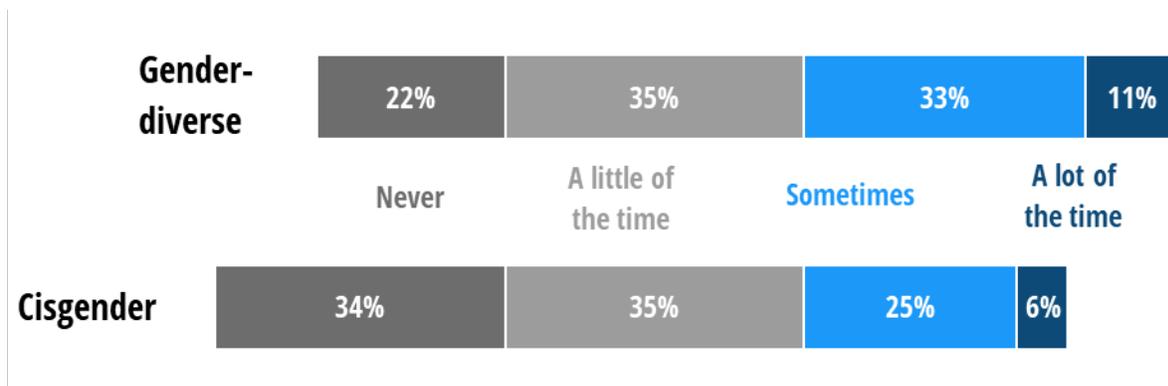


Source. 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey

Note. Responses of "Don't know / I prefer not to answer" were excluded. The survey sample was limited to students in grades 6 through 11.

Figure 15

Students' Responses to "Students at my school are bullied," by Gender Identity



Source. 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey

Note. Responses of "Don't know / I prefer not to answer" were excluded. The survey sample was limited to students in grades 6 through 11.

Recommendations

When viewed in the context of prior reports that found similarly troubling student perspectives (Clark, 2017; Fayles, 2018), these findings highlight the necessity of addressing the systemic factors affecting the school experiences of gender-diverse students. With respect to actions for district leaders to consider, we defer to Kosciw et al. (2020), who recommended the following (p. XXIX):

- increasing students' access to appropriate and accurate information regarding LGBTQ people, history, and events through inclusive curricula, and library and internet resources
- supporting student clubs (e.g., gay/straight alliances) that provide support and address LGBTQ issues in education
- providing professional development opportunities for school staff to improve rates of intervention and increase the number of supportive teachers and other staff available for students
- ensuring that school policies and practices, such as those related to dress codes and school dances, do not discriminate against LGBTQ students
- enacting school policies that provide gender-diverse students with equal access to school facilities and activities and specify appropriate educational practices to support these students
- establishing clear and effective systems for reporting and addressing incidents that students experience

References

Clark, C. (2017). *Transgender students' school perceptions and experiences*. Austin Independent School District.

Cumming, G. (2014). The new statistics: Why and how. *Psychological Science*, 25(1), 7–29.

Fayles, C. (2018). *Transgender students' school perceptions and experiences*. Austin Independent School District.

Kosciw, J., Clark, C., Truon, N., & Zongrone, A. (2020). *The 2019 national school climate survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools*. GLSEN.

Appendix A

Descriptive Statistics, Confidence Intervals, and Effects Sizes for 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey, by Gender Identity

Item Code	Cisgender					Gender Diverse					Cohen's <i>d</i>
	Mean (<i>m</i>)	Standard deviation (<i>s</i>)	Number of responses (<i>n</i>)	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI	<i>m</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>n</i>	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI	
a	3.13	.80	15618	3.11	3.14	2.60	.89	294	2.50	2.70	.58
b	3.25	.77	15818	3.23	3.26	2.77	.87	299	2.67	2.87	.54
c	2.72	1.03	14267	2.70	2.73	2.19	1.04	280	2.06	2.31	.52
d	3.15	.82	16035	3.13	3.16	2.74	.87	307	2.64	2.84	.45
e	2.81	.96	15808	2.80	2.83	2.38	1.00	297	2.27	2.50	.43
f	2.78	.95	15362	2.76	2.79	2.36	1.01	294	2.24	2.47	.43
g	2.48	.92	15832	2.47	2.50	2.07	.89	307	1.97	2.17	.43
h	3.20	.82	15671	3.18	3.21	2.81	.96	294	2.70	2.92	.42
i	3.56	.68	14823	3.55	3.57	3.23	.85	266	3.13	3.34	.40
j	2.78	.92	15741	2.77	2.80	2.41	.97	303	2.30	2.52	.39
k	3.62	.63	14590	3.61	3.63	3.33	.76	243	3.23	3.43	.36
l	3.11	.85	13965	3.09	3.12	2.80	.93	262	2.69	2.91	.33
m	2.82	.86	15988	2.81	2.83	2.51	.88	308	2.41	2.61	.33
n	3.38	.76	14840	3.36	3.39	3.10	.86	292	3.00	3.20	.32
o	2.04	.91	10059	2.02	2.05	2.33	.94	175	2.19	2.47	.30
p	3.47	.71	14618	3.46	3.48	3.23	.77	265	3.14	3.32	.29
q	3.01	.86	15333	3.00	3.03	2.76	.88	294	2.65	2.86	.28
r	3.56	.66	14066	3.54	3.57	3.33	.73	252	3.24	3.42	.27
s	3.59	.71	14174	3.58	3.60	3.39	.83	246	3.29	3.49	.24
t	3.05	1.00	13364	3.04	3.07	2.82	1.08	230	2.68	2.96	.24
u	3.67	.61	15224	3.66	3.68	3.49	.73	273	3.40	3.58	.23
v	3.62	.63	14801	3.61	3.63	3.44	.71	272	3.35	3.52	.23
w	2.62	.98	14182	2.60	2.63	2.39	1.02	278	2.27	2.51	.23
x	2.62	.56	15976	2.61	2.63	2.45	.58	317	2.38	2.51	.23
y	2.82	.83	5246	2.80	2.85	2.64	.84	105	2.47	2.80	.20
z	3.57	.65	14200	3.56	3.58	3.41	.74	256	3.32	3.50	.20
aa	3.41	.65	14893	3.40	3.42	3.26	.73	273	3.17	3.34	.19
bb	3.46	.64	14720	3.45	3.47	3.31	.69	258	3.23	3.39	.19
cc	3.16	.91	15274	3.14	3.17	2.98	.95	291	2.87	3.09	.19
dd	3.63	.64	15177	3.62	3.64	3.48	.71	284	3.40	3.57	.18
ee	1.90	1.03	12738	1.88	1.92	2.07	1.03	233	1.94	2.21	.17
ff	3.27	.66	15089	3.26	3.28	3.14	.74	290	3.05	3.22	.16
gg	3.74	.56	12261	3.73	3.75	3.62	.63	192	3.53	3.71	.15
hh	3.28	.67	14298	3.27	3.29	3.21	.67	259	3.13	3.29	.08
ii	3.73	.55	14828	3.72	3.74	3.67	.59	289	3.60	3.74	.08
jj	2.91	.95	14379	2.89	2.93	2.84	1.06	270	2.72	2.97	.07
kk	3.73	.56	14302	3.72	3.74	3.68	.56	256	3.61	3.75	.06
ll	3.42	.78	15273	3.41	3.43	3.37	.83	296	3.27	3.46	.06

Note. See Appendix B for list of survey items that correspond to letter codes. Survey responses were scored (4) *a lot of the time*, (3) *sometimes*, (2) *a little of the time*, (1) *never*. Responses of “Don’t know / I prefer not to answer” were excluded from calculations. The survey sample was limited to students in grades 6 through 11.

Appendix B

List of Items From the 2020–2021 AISD Student Climate Survey

- a. I don't give up, even when I feel frustrated.
- b. I can reach the goals I set for myself.
- c. It is easy to talk about my problems with the adults at my school.
- d. I feel successful in my schoolwork.
- e. My homework helps me learn the things I need to know.
- f. I like to come to school.
- g. I enjoy doing my schoolwork.
- h. I can do even the hardest schoolwork if I try.
- i. I feel safe at my school.
- j. My schoolwork makes me think about things in new ways.
- k. I am happy with the way my classmates treat me.
- l. My teachers know what I am good at.
- m. I have fun learning in my classes.
- n. Adults listen to students' ideas and opinions.
- o. Students at my school are bullied.
- p. Adults at my school trust and respect students' ideas and opinions.
- q. I receive recognition or praise for doing good work.
- r. My classmates treat me with respect.
- s. I say "no" to friends who want me to break the rules.
- t. If I get angry with a classmate, we can talk about it and make it better.
- u. Teachers at this school care about their students.
- v. Adults at my school treat all students fairly.
- w. My teachers connect what I am doing to my life outside the classroom.
- x. I will go to college after high school.
- y. Students' ideas and opinions directly influence policies at my school.
- z. My classmates show respect for other students who are different.
- aa. Students at my school treat teachers with respect.
- bb. My classmates show respect to each other.
- cc. I use ways to calm myself down.
- dd. My teachers are fair to everyone.
- ee. At my school, some students are treated unfairly because of who they are.
- ff. My classmates behave the way my teachers want them to.
- gg. The staff in the front office show respect to students.
- hh. Students at my school follow the school rules.
- ii. At my school, there is respect for different cultures.
- jj. At my school, I often notice how others are feeling.
- kk. At my school, there is respect for students who speak languages other than English.
- ll. During my school day, I am aware of when my feelings change.



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