

AUSTIN Independent School District



Transgender Students' School Perceptions and Experiences

Last year's inaugural report (Clark, 2017) established that Austin Independent School District (AISD) students who identify as transgender or gender non-conforming reported a significantly worse school experience than did their peers. This research brief analyzed data from the 2017–2018 Student Climate Survey, 2017–2018 attendance records, and 2018 State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) math and reading test passing rates to determine whether significant differences existed between the perceptions and experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming students and their peers in AISD.

Background

Transgender and gender non-conforming students face numerous challenges as a result of their gender identity and expression, including biased language, verbal and physical harassment, discrimination, and physical assault; such victimization and discrimination has a substantial negative effect on their school experience, resulting in a **greater number of missed school days, lower grades, and weaker feelings of connection and safety at school** (as cited in Clark, 2017).

Similar to last year, the 2017–2018 Student Climate Survey asked students to identify their gender with response options of “boy,” “girl,” or “I’d prefer to self-identify.” If students elected to self-identify, they were provided with the option to write in their gender identity. Whereas only middle- and high-school students were asked in 2016–2017, students in grades 3 through 11 were provided the option to self-identify their gender in 2017–2018. Of the 38,269 students who completed the survey, **281 students in grades 4 through 11 chose to identify as something other than their assigned gender**. Responses from students in 3rd grade were not included due to concerns regarding comprehension and validity of self-identification responses.

It is important to note that this report **only includes students who explicitly identified as transgender or gender non-conforming**. As such, it is possible that some students who identify as transgender or gender non-conforming were not included in this analysis if they selected the opposite gender than the one they were assigned at birth or failed to provide a specific response about how they self-identify. These responses were excluded to ensure that the sample used to conduct analyses was as accurate as possible.

The following tables compare responses to the 2017–2018 Student Climate Survey and include notation indicating statistically significant differences between transgender/gender non-conforming students and their non-transgender peers. The Student Climate Survey included five response options (*a lot of the time, sometimes, a little of the time, never, and don't know*). The following tables include the percentage of each group who responded *sometimes* or *a lot of the time* (while excluding responses of *don't know*) to maintain consistency with previous reports.

A discussion of differences between 2017–2018 attendance rates and 2018 STAAR math and reading test passing rates can be found in the sidebar on the next page.

Student Engagement

Table 1.

Transgender students reported lower levels of engagement and relevancy with respect to schoolwork and homework than did their non-transgender peers.

Student engagement	Transgender	Non-Transgender
I like to come to school.	56%	72%***
I enjoy doing my schoolwork.	48%	66%***
My homework helps me learn the things I need to know.	53%	75%***
My schoolwork makes me think about things in new ways.	59%	77%***
I have fun learning in my classes.	70%	78%***
My teachers connect what I am doing to my life outside the classroom.	55%	67%***
I receive recognition or praise for doing good work.	69%	81%***

Source. 2017–2018 Student Climate Survey

Note. Numbers represent the percentage of students who responded *sometimes* or *a lot of the time*. Pearson chi square goodness of fit tests were conducted to determine significant differences between groups. *** = $p < .0001$.

Behavioral Environment

Table 2.

Transgender students reported lower satisfaction with the school environment, a lower sense of school safety, and higher rates of bullying than did their non-transgender peers.

Behavioral environment	Transgender	Non-Transgender
My classmates show respect to each other.	81%	86%*
My classmates show respect to other students who are different.	76%	83%*
I am happy with the way my classmates treat me.	81%	87%***
I feel safe at my school.	74%	88%***
Students at this school treat teachers with respect.	71%	83%***
Students at my school follow the school rules.	67%	79%***
My classmates behave the way my teacher wants them to.	61%	72%**
Our classes stay busy and do not waste time.	72%	83%***
Students at my school are bullied (teased, messed with, threatened by other students).	64%	55%**
At my school, students take care of each other.	70%	82%***

Source. 2017–2018 Student Climate Survey

Note. Numbers represent the percentage of students who responded *sometimes* or *a lot of the time*. Pearson chi square goodness of fit tests were conducted to determine significant differences between groups. *** = $p < .0001$; ** = $p < .001$; * = $p < .05$.

Academic Self-Confidence

Table 3.

Transgender students were significantly less confident in their academic abilities than were their non-transgender peers.

Academic self-confidence	Transgender	Non-Transgender
I can do even the hardest schoolwork if I try.	77%	88%***
I can reach the goals I set for myself.	81%	90%***
I try hard to do my best work.	91%	95%***
I feel successful in my schoolwork.	73%	89%***

Source. 2017–2018 Student Climate Survey

Note. Figures represent the percentage of students who responded *sometimes* or *a lot of the time*. Pearson chi square goodness of fit tests were conducted to determine significant differences between groups. *** = $p < .0001$.

What do transgender and gender non-conforming mean?

The term *transgender* is used to describe someone who does not identify as the gender they were assigned at birth. This includes persons assigned male or female at birth but who now identify as the opposite gender. Persons who identify as neither male nor female are considered non-binary or non-conforming. This includes other terms such as *agender*, *genderqueer*, and *gender fluid*. This report frequently uses *transgender* as an umbrella term for both transgender and gender non-conforming students.

Lower attendance rates and STAAR math and reading passing rates

Attendance rates for 2017–2018 (calculated as the percentage of days missed out of total days enrolled) were significantly lower for transgender students than non-transgender students (95.5% vs. 96.1%, $p < .05$).

Similarly, 2018 STAAR test passing rates were lower for transgender students (reading, 67%; math, 69%) than non-transgender students (reading, 69%; Math, 73%), though these differences were not statistically significant.

Adult Fairness and Respect

Table 4.

Transgender students reported feeling significantly less confident and secure in their relationships with teachers and other school staff members than did their non-transgender peers.

Adult fairness and respect	Transgender	Non-Transgender
Teachers at this school care about their students.	87%	93%***
Adults at this school listen to student ideas and opinions.	72%	85%***
Adults at this school treat all students fairly.	81%	89%***
The staff in the front office show respect to students.	87%	94%***
My teachers are fair to everyone.	80%	89%***
Teachers at this school know who I am.	82%	91%***
My teachers know what I am good at.	79%	87%***

Source. 2017–2018 Student Climate Survey

Note. Numbers represent the percentage of students who responded *sometimes* or *a lot of the time*. Pearson chi square goodness of fit tests were conducted to determine significant differences between groups. *** = $p < .0001$.

Culture and Language

Table 5.

Transgender students reported a lower schoolwide sense of respect for different cultures, languages, and identities than did their non-transgender peers.

Culture and language	Transgender	Non-Transgender
At my school, there is respect for different cultures.	86%	91%*
At my school, there is respect for students who speak languages other than English.	89%	93%*
At my school, some students are not treated fairly because of who they are.	65%	53%*

Source. 2017–2018 Student Climate Survey

Note. Numbers represent the percentage of students who responded *sometimes* or *a lot of the time*. Pearson chi square goodness of fit tests were conducted to determine significant differences between groups. * = $p < .05$.

Social and Emotional Learning Skills

Table 6.

Transgender students reported significantly lower confidence in SEL-related skills than did their non-transgender peers.

SEL skills	Transgender	Non-Transgender
I use ways to calm myself down.	67%	76%**
I don't give up, even when I feel frustrated.	76%	86%***
It is easy for me to talk to adults at my school about my problems.	50%	68%***
I say "no" to friends who want me to break the rules.	80%	88%***
During my school day, I am aware of when my feelings change.	80%	89%***
During my school day, I am aware of when my thoughts change from positive to negative.	84%	89%*
During my school day, I am aware of how my body feels when my feelings change.	84%	88%
At my school, I often notice how people feel and act.	85%	90%
If I get angry with a classmate, we can talk about it and make it better.	57%	73%***
I make friends easily at school.	72%	86%***

Source. 2017–2018 Student Climate Survey

Note. Numbers represent the percentage of students who responded *sometimes* or *a lot of the time*. Pearson chi square goodness of fit tests were conducted to determine significant differences between groups. *** = $p < .0001$; ** = $p < .001$; * = $p < .05$.

Teacher Expectations

Table 7.

Significantly fewer transgender than non-transgender students reported high expectations from teachers.

Teacher expectations	Transgender	Non-Transgender
My teachers expect me to think hard about the things we read.	93%	94%*
My teachers expect everybody to work hard.	94%	97%***

Source. 2017–2018 Student Climate Survey

Note. Numbers represent the percentage of students who responded *sometimes or a lot of the time*. Pearson chi square goodness of fit tests were conducted to determine significant differences between groups. *** = $p < .0001$; * = $p < .05$.

College Intentions

Table 8.

Transgender students reported slightly less confidence in their college intentions than did their non-transgender peers.

College intentions	Transgender	Non-Transgender
I will go to college after high school.	71%	74%

Source. 2017–2018 Student Climate Survey

Note. Response set included *yes*, *maybe*, and *no*. Numbers represent the percentage of students who responded *yes* or *maybe*. Pearson chi square goodness of fit tests were conducted to determine significant differences between groups.

Conclusion

This report details significant differences between the perceptions and experiences of transgender students in AISD and their non-transgender peers. Similar to 2016–2017, transgender students expressed that their school experience was worse than that of their peers across all items on the Student Climate Survey. Transgender students also reported lower confidence in college intentions and had lower attendance rates and STAAR math and reading passing rates than did their non-transgender peers.

As argued by Clark (2017), AISD should take additional steps to (a) **ensure middle and high schools have active and supported gay-straight alliances**, (b) **implement a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning, and others (LGBTQ+)-inclusive curriculum**, (c) **provide professional development opportunities to school staff that focus on transgender issues**, (d) **provide training for school staff that focuses on intervention strategies with respect to harassment and victimization of transgender students**, and (e) **update anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies to include specific reference to gender identity and expression**. Additionally, **enhanced mental health services** would serve as a substantial resource not only for transgender students, but for all AISD students.

References

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



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