

This is a template letter that can be used to alert school officials about policies that discriminate against LGBTQ+ students, ban books, censor curricula, and put students at risk. Letters should be customized to describe the particular facts and relevant laws and policies in a school or district. Nothing in this template letter is legal advice, but rather, it is meant to provide a basic framework for advocating for inclusive policies and practices. If you have concerns about a particular policy or discrimination against a student, you should consult legal counsel about the specific facts and laws related to any individual circumstance.

Dear [Superintendent/Other Contact]:

I am writing to alert you to policies in [name of school/district] that [restrict the freedom to learn]/[discriminate against LGBTQ+ students]/[(and)are harmful to the school climate for all students. **[IF APPLICABLE:** am one of many parents who oppose this policy and demand that [name of school/district] change it and commit to supporting all of its students.

[PLACEHOLDER: Describe the policy; if it's a written policy, quote directly from the policy, but also add any experiences in how the policy is actually enforced. If it's an unwritten policy, use specific examples to demonstrate what you believe is happening in the school, while being careful to not out particular students or educators who might want anonymity.]

[USE THIS SECTION IF ADDRESSING BOOK BANS AND CURRICULUM RESTRICTIONS]

Students should be able to see their identities—and their families' identities—affirmed and uplifted in the books they can access at school and the lessons they learn in the classroom. Moreover, reading and learning about other people's identities, including gender diversity and LGBTQ+ individuals and families, as well as other people's experiences with racism and discrimination, helps students build empathy and better relate to people who have different experiences and perspectives. When diverse books are banned¹ and school curriculums are whitewashed to exclude lessons on Black history and/or systemic racism and discrimination, students are less able to learn and less prepared to lead in an increasingly diverse 21st-century America.² This erasure impacts students' health, safety, and future successes. Children should be free to read, free to learn, and free to better understand and celebrate the diversity of those around them. Book bans and curriculum restrictions have no place in our schools.

[USE THIS SECTION IF URGING SCHOOL BOARD OFFICIALS TO ADVOCATE FOR STRONGER GUN SAFETY LAWS]

Children shouldn't have to risk their lives to go to school. However, easy access to weapons of war has cost far too many students' lives and created a climate of fear. Firearms are now the leading cause of death for people under the age of 18,³ school shootings are on the rise,⁴

¹ Mason expert says that book banning hurts students' access to learning, George Mason University (January 20, 2022), <https://www.gmu.edu/news/2022-01/mason-expert-says-book-banning-hurts-students-access-learning>

² Ishena Robinson, Why Truthful, Inclusive Education Benefits All Students—And How To Make It Happen, Legal Defense Fund (April 28, 2022), <https://www.naacpldf.org/protect-truth-and-inclusivity-in-public-schools/>

³ Matt McGough, Krutika Amin, Nirmita Panchal, and Cynthia Cox, Kaiser Family Foundation (July 18, 2023), <https://www.kff.org/mental-health/issue-brief/child-and-teen-firearm-mortality-in-the-u-s-and-peer-countries/>

⁴ New Everytown Report Finds Average Number of Gunfire on School Grounds Incidents Nearly Quadrupled During Last School Year, Everytown for Gun Safety (August 19, 2022), <https://everytownsupportfund.org/press/new-everytown-report-finds-average-number-of-gunfire-on-school-grounds->

and gun violence at schools is associated with worsened academic performance, higher rates of mental health conditions, and lower earnings later in life.⁵ I urge you to use your position of authority in our educational system to call for stronger gun safety laws [specify based on local policies: <https://everytownresearch.org/rankings/>]. Commonsense reforms can save lives, and by reducing gun violence in schools, we can make it easier for students to focus on what they should be focusing on: learning.

[USE THIS SECTION IF ADDRESSING ANTI-LGBTQ+ POLICY/POLICIES]

Any policy that makes LGBTQ+ students feel ostracized and rejected is a matter of grave concern because we know that the current climate of anti-LGBTQ+ policies and environments that foster discrimination, bullying and ostracization contribute to high levels of depression and suicidal ideation among LGBTQ+ youth.⁶ But we also know that this is not inevitable; LGBTQ+ students in schools with inclusive policies and supportive teachers fare significantly better, showing that our efforts to be supportive **do** make a difference.⁷

[INCLUDE SUPPORTING BULLET(S) BASED ON SPECIFIC ANTI-LGBTQ+ POLICY/POLICIES]

- **[USE THIS IF ADDRESSING PRONOUN POLICY]** When adults misgender their students, they form an antagonistic relationship with their students, with negative effects on student learning and mental health. However, using preferred names and pronouns consistent with a student's gender identity is associated with a large decrease in depressive symptoms, suicidal thoughts, and even suicide attempts.⁸
- **[USE THIS IF A POLICY OUTS STUDENTS]** A policy that outs students against their will after they bravely confide in a teacher or administrator can place the student in danger, can harm the student's relationship with that adult, and contributes to a fearful school climate. I urge you to allow teachers and administrators to be sources of support for students and not be forced to betray their trust.

incidents-nearly-quadrupled-during-last-school-year/#:~:text=During%20the%202021%2D2022%20school,tracking%20these%20trends%20in%202013.

⁵ Maya Rossin-Slater, Surviving a school shooting: Impacts on the mental health, education, and earnings of American youth, Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research (August 2022), <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/health/surviving-school-shooting-impacts-mental-health-education-and-earnings-american>

⁶ Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2019, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/su/pdfs/su6901-H.pdf>; Madeleine Roberts, New CDC Data Shows LGBTQ Youth Are More Likely to Be Bullied Than Straight Cisgender Youth, Human Rights Campaign (Aug. 26, 2020), <https://www.hrc.org/news/new-cdc-data-shows-lgbtq-youth-are-more-likely-to-be-bullied-than-straight-cisgender-youth>.

⁷ Joseph G. Kosciw, Caitlin M. Clark, and Leesh Menard, The 2021 National School Climate Survey, GLSEN, <https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/NSCS-2021-Full-Report.pdf>; 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, The Trevor Project, https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/assets/static/trevor01_2022survey_final.pdf.

⁸ Tanya Albert Henry, For transgender kids, gender-affirming names can be lifesaving, American Medical Association (June 4, 2021), <https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/population-care/transgender-kids-gender-affirming-names-can-be-lifesaving> (“A landmark 2018 study in the Journal of Adolescent Health found that transgender youth who could use accurate names and pronouns experienced 71% fewer symptoms of severe depression, a 34% drop in reported suicidal thoughts and a 65% decrease in suicide attempts.”).

- [USE THIS IF ADDRESSING BATHROOM POLICY] Medical experts recognize that “[d]enying transgender students [access to bathrooms and facilities consistent with their gender identity] endangers their health, safety and well-being, leads to negative health outcomes and heightens stigma and discrimination,” and worsens their mental health.⁹ I urge you to adopt an inclusive policy that takes into account the safety and dignity of transgender and gender non-conforming students.
- [USE THIS IF ADDRESSING BULLYING/HARASSMENT] More than 75 percent of LGBTQ+ youth report being verbally harassed based on their sexual orientation, gender, or gender identity during the last year.¹⁰ And we know that students are experiencing bullying and harassment at [name of school/district]. [describe any specific incidents, as appropriate]. Students should focus on learning, not avoiding certain people and places within the school—but they can only do so if [school/district name] lives up to its responsibility to take a firm stance against bullying and harassment.
- [USE THIS TO ADDRESS CENSORSHIP OF SUPPORTIVE SYMBOLS] Schools that foster a safe, welcoming, and supportive environment consistently report better health and academic outcomes for students—and supportive teachers and administrators are a huge part of creating that kind of climate.¹¹ Teachers have always used flags and symbols in the classroom—American and state flags, inspirational posters, Black history displays, college pennants, signs thanking veterans—to make students feel welcome and express their values. The [school/district] must allow teachers to care for and stand up for their students by proudly displaying [these symbols].

[CONCLUSION – USE FOR ALL]

Most of us in this community believe that every child, no matter what they look like, where they come from, or how they identify, deserves a safe and welcoming public school where they can thrive and prepare for their future. It is why educators are called to this profession by a singular purpose: their unwavering and unequivocal commitment to students’ learning, well-being, and potential. I look forward to working with you to ensure that these problems are quickly resolved so that all students can focus on their education and reach their potential.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

cc: [Consider copying individual school board members, supportive parent organizations, and supportive local officials]

⁹ Tanya Albert Henry, Exclusionary bathroom policies harm transgender students, American Medical Association (April 17, 2019), <https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/population-care/exclusionary-bathroom-policies-harm-transgender-students#:~:text=For%20the%20sake%20of%20transgender%20students%E2%80%99%20physical%20and,and%20locker%20rooms%20that%20match%20their%20gender%20identities.>

¹⁰ Joseph G. Kosciw, Caitlin M. Clark, and Leesh Menard, The 2021 National School Climate Survey, GLSEN, <https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/NSCS-2021-Full-Report.pdf> at 19.

¹¹ Joseph G. Kosciw, Caitlin M. Clark, and Leesh Menard, The 2021 National School Climate Survey, GLSEN, <https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/NSCS-2021-Full-Report.pdf>, 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, The Trevor Project, https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/assets/static/trevor01_2022survey_final.pdf.