

Recommended Actions for Understanding the Experience of LGBTQ Youth in Iowa Schools
Iowa Governor's Conference on LGBTQ Youth
April 2013

The 2013 Iowa Governor's Conference on LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Questioning) Youth, took place on April 29, 2013, in Altoona, Iowa. The conference included a session titled [*The Experience of LGBTQ Youth in Iowa Schools*](#). The session included a presentation of national and state data which may indicate the experience of Iowa LGBTQ youth, and discussion regarding the limitations of these data specific to the experience of Iowa youth. Overall, discussion led to consensus that little is known regarding the experience of Iowa's LGBTQ youth because data regarding this population is not collected through validated survey instruments and sampling methods.

During this conference session, the students and adults in attendance were engaged in discussion regard the data presented and were asked to make recommendations specific to how we can better develop an understanding of LGBTQ youth in Iowa Schools. The group identified the Iowa Youth Survey and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey as sources of high quality data; which provide outcomes specific to student experience and behavior regarding, substance use, connection with school and community, bullying, and suicide, and allow for comparison of results between identified student populations¹. However, the demographic information collected on these surveys, in Iowa, is not specific to sexual orientation or gender identity. Therefore analysis specific to LGBTQ students cannot be conducted.

Attendees identified the following actions as priorities to increase understanding of the experience of LGBTQ Youth in Iowa Schools:

- **Improve survey instruments and reporting.** Ensure that the Iowa Youth Survey and Youth Risk Behavior Survey include opportunity for high school students to identify their sexual identity and gender in a manner that is inclusive of the LGBTQ population. This includes developing an understanding for how survey questions are added to the Iowa Youth Survey. Furthermore, work should be done at the state and local level to ensure that an accurate number of bullying incidents are reported from each school district to the state.
- **Take legislative action to support quality data collection.** Legislative action may require school participation in statewide surveys of youth and could provide consistent funding to ensure surveys are administered and managed. Participants questioned how legislative action may improve the quality of data reported on surveys and in regard to bullying incidents. Furthermore, participants recommended surveying legislators to better understand why requirements and funding were not currently incorporated into Iowa law.

¹ Currently the Iowa Youth Survey allows for students to identify themselves in the following ways: grade, age, gender (male or female), race/ethnicity, who the student lives with, and whether the student has a parent in the military.

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- **Access to results.** A number of participants indicated that they were unaware of Iowa Youth Survey results for their school district, and were greatly interested in the results. Individual district survey results are not available on the Iowa Youth Survey website², however participants hoped that results would be shared with students and adults in their community.
- **Utilize results to identify needs.** As survey participants, students have a right to review survey results for their school district. The engagement of students and community members in reviewing results will help to identify needed school supports for the district and/or specific student populations. Such utilization of survey data may ultimately result in positive changes in districts and communities.

However, these recommendations are not actionable without answers to the following questions, identified by session participants:

1. What is the process for adding a question(s) to the Iowa Youth Survey?
2. Why don't policymakers currently fund and require participation in the Iowa Youth Survey?
3. What is the process for individuals to access their local (district level) Iowa Youth Survey data?

Overall, this session served to expand understanding regarding the data specific to youth experience in the state of Iowa, as well as the lack of data specific to the experience of LGBTQ youth in Iowa. Analysis of national data suggests that LGBTQ youth are at higher risk for bullying, substance use/abuse and death than students who do not identify themselves as LGBTQ. Given this, it is imperative to the safety of Iowa's youth that we understand the experience of LGBTQ youth, and how that experience compares to other students in the state and nation.

² www.iowayouthsurvey.iowa.gov provides access to state and county level data.