The following conversation took place between a six-year-old elementary school student and his father:

Daddy, do you know what a “faggot” is?  
Why do you ask?  
[My friend] called me one at recess.1

This is but one striking example of the epidemic of anti-LGBT harassment and violence in American schools. Numerous studies have documented pervasive harassment and violence perpetrated by students, and even some school faculty and staff, against students from elementary school through senior high. This little boy’s question illustrates that the violence and harassment is about more than sexual orientation.

Students routinely use terms such as *fag, sissy, fairy, queer,* or *gay* to tease and berate peers who do not conform to gender-role stereotypes, as well as to express disgust and disdain for something they simply do not like.2 The exclamation “That’s so gay!” is used by children around the United States to connote negativity. A study in Iowa found that high school students on average heard twenty-five antigay remarks per day, with teachers who hear such slurs failing to respond 97 percent of the time.3 In a study of 528 LGB youth in New York City, 72 percent reported that the first time they were verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation occurred in school.4 GLSEN’s 2007 National School Climate Survey reported that over 73 percent of LGBT youth across the nation heard antigay slurs from other students “frequently” or “often” and that 63 percent heard those slurs from faculty or school staff.5

Verbal harassment is not harmless behavior. “It’s not just name calling,” stressed one student interviewed for a study conducted by Human Rights Watch in 2001, “I don’t know how schools can isolate it like that. When are they going to see it as a problem? When we’re bloody on the ground in front of them?”6 Sadly, it may not stop even then. A 1993
Massachusetts study of high school students found that gay teens are twice as likely as their straight peers to be threatened or injured with a weapon at school. GLSEN’s 2007 survey found that over 40 percent of LGBT youth were shoved, pushed, or otherwise physically harassed because of their real or perceived sexual orientation and that over 30 percent were physically harassed because of their gender expression. Another study found that school was the most frequently reported location where LGB youth were physically assaulted.

A five-year study conducted by the Safe Schools Coalition of Washington State documented 111 incidents of anti-LGBT violence in seventy-three different schools, including thirty-eight cases of ongoing verbal harassment, seventeen incidents of physical harassment, and eight gang rapes in which a total of eleven students were molested, including two sixth-graders. Most of these incidents occurred in a classroom or in school hallways, and more than one-third of the cases involved female offenders. As a result of this violence, ten students dropped out of school, ten students attempted suicide, and two students successfully completed suicide.

**Anti-LGBT Harassment and Violence in Elementary and Middle Schools**

Jamal was in third grade when he wrote the first of the following letters to his mother and in seventh grade when he wrote the second letter to teachers at his school:

Dear Mom,
Bobby hit me on the bus. I did not do anything. What he did was put his earphones on my ear, and then I moved it away and he said, “Don’t hit me, you little fagite [sic].” Then he hit me real hard. I wanted to cry. Then he said, “I’ll hit you so hard you will want to cry forever.” Why does everyone pick on me? Why? I think I am ugly like people say. I don’t think I look nice at all.
Bye bye,
Jamal

I have been called gay, faggot and a girl most of my life. I have recently had a new name added . . . “gay prick.” I have reached out for help so many times it’s unbelievable. Nothing much has hap-
pened except a phone call home. I am still being teased and embarrassed in front of people and also my friends. . . . I have been putting up with this since elementary school. And let me tell you this—the longer you let this continue, the worse it will get. And it will be twice as hard to deal with it.11

When people think of violence and harassment against LGBT students, they think of incidents occurring in high school and maybe middle school. The experiences of elementary students like Jamal are often anecdotal and tolerated as immature childhood behavior. Because people mistakenly believe that it does not happen, there is little documentation of anti-LGBT harassment in elementary schools. But because violence is targeted at youth who do not conform to stereotypical gender roles, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, this victimization can begin at very young ages. Through observing adults or their older brothers and sisters, elementary students know that it is bad to call someone a “fag,” even if they do not understand what it means. Consequently, interventions at the high school level come too late for many children who are teased, bullied, and tormented from the very first day they set foot in elementary school.

A five-year study by the Safe Schools Coalition of Washington State documented numerous anti-LGBT incidents in elementary schools. For example:

• After hearing taunts like “Get away, gay boy!” from his peers over a four-month period, a second grader, upset that no one would play with him and afraid to go to school, finally reported the incidents to his mother. The school intervened by teaching the class that name-calling would not be tolerated. According to the boy’s mom, “[It’s made me] more aware that [the teasing] starts younger than I would have thought. These are second-grade kids. I don’t know how aware they are of sexual orientation at that age.”

• An eleven-year-old boy was attacked by a large group of classmates after his diary, in which he described feeling like a girl inside and wondered if he were a lesbian, was stolen. The classmates sold his diary for ten dollars per page and, when they attacked him, took some of his clothes off and tried to force him to wear girl’s clothes. This youth, who eventually identified as transgender, waited until age sixteen before talking to school administrators about these experiences.
• A twelve-year-old sixth grader was attacked and repeatedly gang-raped by four other sixth graders and two high school students at a camp sponsored by an elementary school. One of the attackers vomited on him and threatened to kill him if he told anyone about the incident.

Incidents of violence and harassment were more pervasive in middle and junior high schools:

• Since the beginning of the school year, a seventh grader was repeatedly teased and harassed by students in the hallways. The students called him “flute boy” because he played flute in the school symphony. One demanded, “How come you look so gay? Are you gay?” The boy’s family reported that he cried nearly every day and no longer wanted to go to school. But when the boy’s mother reported these incidents to a school counselor she trusted, the counselor was hesitant to intervene because she did not want the harassment to get worse.

• After her seventh-grade son was harassed daily at school by being called a “faggot” and a “pervert” and told, “Queers burn in hell,” the boy’s mother complained to the school principal, who assured her that the staff would get sensitivity training, even though it was the students who were doing the harassing. Later in the year, after a game of “smear the queer,” the boy started a fight with two other students after a classmate told him that standing up for himself would end the teasing. When the fight was over, the boy was sent to the nurse’s office with cuts, bruises, a lump on his neck from being hit by a soda bottle, a sprained ankle, and a broken arm. He was reprimanded by school administrators for starting the fight and was suspended for the rest of the day.12

None of the largest population-based studies cited in this book collected information from students below the sixth-grade level. These horrific accounts of violence and harassment, though specific to just one state, clearly underscore the need for more research and intervention on behalf of elementary and middle school students nationwide.

Unchecked harassment against young children in elementary school predictably escalates into violence as they grow older, especially in smaller school systems in which the student population remains fairly
consistent. A nineteen-year-old high school senior who had been har- 
rassed since first grade explains,

> It was horrible. At first they made fun of me because I was differ-
> ent. Then it was because I was gay. They’d call me things like “fag” and “cocksucker.” It went on through middle school and got really 
> bad in high school. After I came out it was like I had a death wish or something. I was pushed around, thrown into lockers. I can see it all in my head. It was just constant. Everybody was always har-
> rassing me.13

The 626 LGBT students in middle school who participated in 
GLSEN’s 2007 School Climate Survey were more likely than those in 
high school to experience verbal and physical harassment and physical 
assault. For example, over 80 percent of LGBT middle school students 
heard homophobic remarks from other students at school, compared to just over 70 percent of LGBT high school students. Nearly 60 per-
cent of LGBT middle school students experienced physical harass-
ment, compared to just over 40 percent of LGBT high school students. LGBT students in middle school were also twice as likely to be physically assaulted at school (e.g., punched, kicked, or injured with a 
weapon) than their peers in high school (39 percent vs. 20 percent, re-
spectively).14

GLSEN also found that LGBT middle school students who were vic-
timized at school were unlikely to receive help and support from teach-
ers and school administrators.

Many middle school students who were harassed or assaulted in 
school never reported the incident to adult authorities—57% never told school staff and 50% never told a parent or other fam-
ily member. Among middle school students who did tell school 
authorities about an incident, less than a third (29%) said that re-
porting resulted in effective intervention by school staff.15

LGBT students in middle school were also less likely than those in high 
school to have access to support programs like gay-straight alliances and LGBT-inclusive curricular resources.

The Middle School Safety Study, a survey of over fifteen hundred 
middle school students in California, found that LGB students (54 per-
cent) were significantly more likely than straight students (33 percent) to experience social bullying (having mean rumors or sexual jokes told about them or bias-based bullying, including being bullied or harassed based on sex, perceived sexual orientation, disability, body size, or looks). LGB students (39 percent) were also more likely than straight students (25 percent) to experience physical bullying (being pushed, shoved, hit, or threatened or injured with a weapon; being in a physical fight; or having property damaged or stolen). As a result, the LGB students reported that they did not feel as safe as straight students in school, particularly in unsupervised places.16

“You’re So Gay”

A Profile of Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover

Eleven-year-old Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover completed suicide after frequent teasing and bullying by other kids at school, who called him “girlie,” “gay,” and “fag.” A student at New Leadership Charter School in Springfield, Massachusetts, Carl did not identify as gay. He would have celebrated his twelfth birthday on April 17, 2009. Carl was a Boy Scout, and he played on the 5A football team, the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center basketball team, and the soccer team of his parish, Holy Name Church. He loved to learn and was active in his church, playing a wise man in the Christmas play.17

According to Carl’s mother, Sirdeaner, he just happened to be someone his peers targeted. After complaining to his mother about being bullied so much, she decided to take action. She spoke to his principal, teachers, and guidance counselor, and she became more active in the school’s parent-teacher organization. However, the teasing and threats continued, and Carl started acting out in school, becoming increasingly fearful and feeling even more alienated. On April 6, 2009, Sirdeaner found her son with an extension cord wrapped around his neck, hanging from the third floor rafter of their home. In the letter left behind for his mother, Carl explained that he simply could not take it anymore. He apologized, expressing his love for his family and that he wanted his little brother to have his Pokémon card collection.18
Anti-LGBT Harassment and Violence in High Schools

There is far more information about the experiences of LGBT high school students—in part because many become aware of their attractions or begin to self-identify during their high school years—allowing for a much clearer picture of experiences of secondary school students. A study from the United Kingdom published in 2001 found that although 93 percent of openly gay and bisexual students in British high schools experienced verbal harassment and bullying, only 6 percent of schools had a nondiscrimination policy that included sexual orientation. The lack of attention and intervention on behalf of these students led one researcher to claim that this institutional neglect is “nothing less than state-sanctioned child abuse.” The high school environment in the United States is no better.

Analysis of data from the 1996 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, which included more than 12,000 students in U.S. high schools, revealed that LGB youth were more likely then heterosexual youth to have been in a fight that resulted in the need for medical attention and more likely to have witnessed violence. Bisexual youth were also more likely to be jumped and violently attacked. This study also found that gay youth were more likely to perpetrate violence against their peers. This was accounted for by the fear and need to defend themselves they feel because of the violence and harassment they regularly endure.

Gay Student Sues School and Wins $900K Settlement

A Profile of Jamie Nabozny

The story of Jamie Nabozny, a student from Wisconsin, is a tragic example of how verbal harassment can escalate into life-threatening violence in high school. In elementary school, although shy and quiet, Jamie was a good student and enjoyed going to school. In seventh grade, however, Jamie realized that he was gay. When other students at Ashland Middle School in Wisconsin learned of his sexuality, the torment began. What started as name-calling and spitting quickly turned to more violent attacks. In a science lab, for example, Jamie was the victim of a “mock rape” by two boys who told him he should enjoy it, while twenty other students looked on and laughed. In response to the attack, the middle school principal told Jamie and his parents that “boys will be boys” and that if
Jamie “was going to be so openly gay, he had to expect this kind of stuff to happen.”22 This “kind of stuff” continued throughout middle school and escalated in high school, when he was attacked several times in the bathroom and urinated on. On the school bus, he was routinely pelted with objects, including steel nuts and bolts. But the most serious assault occurred in eleventh grade, when Jamie was surrounded by eight students and kicked in the stomach repeatedly while other students stood by. A few weeks later, Jamie collapsed due to internal bleeding caused by the attack and was rushed to the hospital.23

Despite frequent meetings with school officials, the identification of his attackers, and the intervention of his parents, the school took no meaningful disciplinary action against Jamie’s abusers.24 Throughout his time at Ashland High School, Jamie tried to kill himself several times. He dropped out of school twice and eventually decided to leave for good: “In December of my eleventh-grade year, we had a meeting with my parents and guidance counselor at school, and we decided the best thing for me to do was to leave. [The guidance counselor] said, ‘I’ve tried to help you through this whole thing and nobody’s willing to do anything.’” Jamie left Ashland, moved to Minneapolis, and earned a GED. He also began to get involved in the local LGBT community, working for a while with District 200, a community center for LGBT youth.25

While in Minneapolis, Jamie was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder related to his experiences in middle and high school. Jamie initially just wanted to put the Ashland experiences behind him and move on. However, a trip to the Gay and Lesbian Community Action Center in Minneapolis changed his mind. Having moved out of his parents’ home at seventeen, Jamie had gone to the center in search of foster parents. It was there that a crime victims’ advocate told Jamie that what had happened to him was illegal and that the school should be held responsible. Jamie remembers his thoughts at the time: “I didn’t realize what was being done to me was illegal or wrong. I just thought it’s a small town; they’re very prejudiced, homophobic. I almost felt it was OK what they did to me—that they could get away with it. I knew it wasn’t right, but I didn’t know that it was illegal.” The crime victims’ advocate secured a lawyer for Jamie, and a suit was filed within a few days. Unfortunately, the lawyer turned out to be
“quite homophobic and did not want to be labeled as a gay rights advocate. She didn’t want this to be a gay case.” 26 The federal district judge presiding over Jamie’s lawsuit ruled that Jamie’s school could not be held liable for the actions of its students, and the case was dismissed. 27

However, Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund offered to represent Jamie on appeal, arguing, “Jamie’s rights to equal protection and due process were violated when the school refused to protect him from antigay abuse.” In July 1996, in a precedent-setting decision, the federal appellate court ruled that public schools have a constitutional obligation to prevent the abuse of lesbian and gay students. Then, in November 1996, a jury unanimously found Jamie’s middle and high school principals liable for failing to protect him during four years of brutal antigay abuse, and he was awarded more than nine hundred thousand dollars in damages. 28

The case succeeded in bringing national attention to violence and harassment against LGBT students in public schools. As for Jamie’s personal message, he said, “It really had become much more about everyone else and less about me. . . . I’m going to go on, and I’m going to be OK . . . But there’s a lot of people who aren’t, some people don’t make it out of high school because they kill themselves. . . . It’s very important to me that [LGBT students] know they don’t have to take the abuse. They don’t have to go through this stuff.” 29 Jamie Nabozny’s victory was the first in a series of court rulings that have held school districts responsible for failing to protect LGBT students from discrimination, violence, and harassment.

According to a summary of fifteen lawsuits written by GLSEN and the National Center for Lesbian Rights, school districts paid between forty thousand and almost one million dollars in damages between 1996 and 2002 due to discrimination, violence, and harassment against LGBT students. The lawsuits have occurred throughout the United States, from California to Kentucky, even in states that do not have legislation or department of education regulations specifically protecting students on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Unfortunately, the threat of an expensive lawsuit has not translated into a safer environment for many LGBT students. GLSEN’s 2007 National School Climate
Survey of 6,209 students in fifty states and the District of Columbia found that violence and harassment is still pervasive:

- more than 73 percent of LGBT students heard insults like “faggot” or “dyke” frequently or often from other students at school;
- 23 percent heard homophobic remarks from faculty at least some of the time;
- nine out of ten students heard “gay” used in a negative way often or frequently at school;
- nearly half had been verbally harassed at school often or frequently because of their sexual orientation;
- 17 percent had been physically harassed often or frequently because of their sexual orientation;
- over 10 percent of the students were often or frequently physically harassed because of their gender expression;
- more than two-thirds of LGBT students said that they felt unsafe in school because of a personal characteristic, such as their sexual orientation or gender expression.30

A study of 350 LGB youth, supported in part by the National Institute of Mental Health, had similar findings:

More than half (59%) experienced verbal abuse in high school, 24% were threatened with violence, 11% had objects thrown at them, 11% had been physically attacked, 2% were threatened with weapons, 5% were sexually assaulted, and 20% had been threatened with the disclosure of their sexual orientation. Over half (54%) experienced three or more instances of verbal abuse in high school. Males reported significantly more verbal attacks, threats of violence, and objects being thrown at them. Males were also physically attacked more often: 15% of males and 7% of females had been assaulted. Few youths were threatened with weapons (2%) or sexually assaulted (5%); however, 20% were threatened with the disclosure of their sexual orientation.31

Cyberbullying and LGBT Youth

New research on cyberbullying, “an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic form of contact,
repeatedly and over time,” indicates that it may disproportionately impact LGBT youth. A 2008 CDC study found that up to 35 percent of youth report being victims of cyberbullying. In comparison, a 2010 study by researchers at the University of Iowa found that 54 percent of youth who identify as or are perceived to be LGBT report being bullied online within the last thirty days.

The advent of cyberbullying is linked to the increased use of online social media by youth. A 2010 study found that 84 percent of homes in the United States have a computer with Internet access and that 53 percent of teens ages fifteen to nineteen have an account on a social networking site like Facebook or MySpace that they use for at least one hour per day. One-third of teens have a computer in their room, and 85 percent have their own cell phone, allowing significant autonomy when accessing the Internet and receiving or sending text and video messages.

When researchers at GLSEN specifically analyzed responses from the 295 students in the 2007 School Climate Survey who identified as transgender, they found even more frequent incidence of harassment and assault:

- 90 percent of transgender students heard derogatory remarks, such as “dyke” or “faggot,” sometimes, often, or frequently in school.
- 90 percent of transgender students heard negative remarks about someone’s gender expression sometimes, often, or frequently in school.
- A third of transgender students heard school staff make homophobic remarks, sexist remarks, and negative comments about someone’s gender expression sometimes, often, or frequently in the past year.
- Almost all transgender students had been verbally harassed (e.g., called names or threatened) in the past year at school because of their sexual orientation (89 percent) and their gender expression (87 percent).
- Over half of all transgender students had been physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) in school in the past year because of their sexual orientation (55 percent) and their gender expression (53 percent).
- Over a quarter (26 percent) of transgender students had been phys-
ically assaulted (e.g., punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon) in school in the past year because of their gender expression.

As was the case with LGB students in GLSEN’s survey, the majority of transgender youth (54 percent) who were victimized did not report it to school officials, and of those who did, only 33 percent believed that those officials handled the situation effectively.37

**Sexual Harassment in Public Schools**

Much of the verbal harassment directed at LGBT or gender-nonconforming youth can actually be classified as sexual harassment. Seventy-two percent of the students surveyed by GLSEN reported being sexually harassed at school at least once within the past year.38 Another nationwide study found that 63 percent of students experienced sexual harassment by a peer of the same sex, including:

- Sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks;
- Sexual messages or graffiti on bathroom walls and in locker rooms;
- Sexual rumors;
- Being shown sexual pictures, photographs, illustrations, messages, or notes;
- Being identified as gay or lesbian through the use of derogatory terms like “fag” or “dyke”;
- Being touched, pinched, or grabbed in a sexual way;
- Being blocked or cornered in a sexual way;
- Being forced to kiss or forced to endure other unwelcome sexual behavior.39

While sexual harassment by a member of the opposite sex is more commonly reported in the workplace, members of the same sex often perpetrate peer-to-peer harassment in schools.40 This creates a hostile environment regardless of the sexual orientation or gender identity of the students being victimized. In a study conducted by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation in 1993, 86 percent of all students who were sexually harassed claimed that being labeled gay or lesbian, regardless of their true sexual orientation, was more distressing than physical abuse, especially for boys.41 A study of Midwestern high school students found that male and female adolescents were dis-
tressed more about being harassed by same-sex peers than about harassment by peers of the opposite sex.\textsuperscript{42}

Students who openly identify as LGBT experience more sexual harassment (much of which is based on gender nonconformity) than their heterosexual peers.\textsuperscript{43} Young gay and bisexual girls are more likely to be sexually harassed, called sexually offensive names, and touched or grabbed in a sexual way.\textsuperscript{44} “People would grab my breast area,” recalled one lesbian high school student. “They’d come up and grab my waist, put their arm around me.” Gay and bisexual male students are also victims of sexually suggestive remarks or gestures. “Guys will grab themselves, or they’ll make kissing noises,” reported another high school student. “They mimic homoerotic acts. They’ll mimic anal sex, oral sex.”\textsuperscript{45}

Attention to and the prevalence of sexual harassment in schools has been increasing. In 1991, the U.S. Department of Education reported only eleven same-sex sexual harassment claims by elementary and secondary school students. In 1999 and 2000, the combined number increased to 274 for elementary and secondary education schools, and there were 111 claims concerning postsecondary educational institutions.\textsuperscript{46} Despite the increased reporting, efforts to protect students who are sexually harassed have been largely unsuccessful. For example, in Utah, a same-sex harassment lawsuit filed by a high school football player against his teammates was dismissed by a court “on the grounds that the boy failed to prove that he had been a victim of any discriminatory effort.”\textsuperscript{47} His teammates taped his genitals (he was naked) to a towel rack and then exposed him to a girl brought into the locker room against her will. School administrators called the incident “hazing” and did not feel that the behavior of his teammates was abnormal.\textsuperscript{48}

Efforts to curtail sexual harassment in public schools have been hampered by the belief that sexual harassment in school is a normal adolescent behavior. This view ignores both the cruelty inherent to many instances of harassment and the mental health effects of that cruelty on its victims. These effects can include loss of appetite, loss of interest in school, nightmares or disturbed sleep, feelings of isolation from family and friends, and feeling sad, nervous, threatened, and angry.\textsuperscript{49}

As a result of these symptoms, the school performance of students who are sexually harassed often declines. They are more likely to cut class or be absent or truant, to have lower grades, and to lose friends. Students who are forced to endure long-term harassment may also be more likely to retaliate out of anger and self-defense. This can lead to physically threatening situations and even make the victim appear to be a perpetrator.\textsuperscript{50}
The Impact of Anti-LGBT Harassment and Violence

The threat of violence and harassment makes school an unsettling and unsafe place for LGBT students. Some find it difficult to concentrate in class and focus on schoolwork. Many, fearing discovery of their sexual orientation or gender identity, hesitate to participate in school activities. As a result, they distance themselves from the school environment both emotionally and physically, becoming truants or dropping out altogether. This has a lasting, negative impact on LGBT youth, inhibiting their development and their successful transitions to adulthood.

A number of studies highlight the problem of chronic truancy among LGBT students. According to GLSEN, 33 percent of LGBT youth reported missing at least one entire day of school in the previous month because they felt unsafe, compared to just 5 percent of students surveyed in a national sample of secondary school students. Transgender youth were even more likely to skip school than their LGB peers. Students reporting same-sex behavior in the 1993 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey were more than three times as likely as their heterosexual peers to skip school because they felt unsafe. In 1995, the same survey indicated that self-identified LGB students were almost five times as likely as heterosexual students to have missed school because of fears about safety. In 1999, 20 percent of Massachusetts students who described themselves as LGB reported that they had skipped school in the previous month because of feeling unsafe at or en route to school, compared with only 6 percent of other students. The 2001–2 California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) of nearly 240,000 seventh, ninth, and eleventh graders found that those who were harassed because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation were over three times more likely to report missing school because they felt unsafe than students who were not harassed (27 percent vs. 7 percent).

In addition to the impact that missing school has on LGBT students’ academic achievement, it costs school districts millions of dollars per year in unrealized income. Analysis of CHKS data found that over one hundred thousand school absences per year in middle and high schools in California can be attributed to harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation.

Based on the state’s school expenditures over a nine-month school calendar year, the cumulative cost to school districts in the State of California is an estimated minimum of $39.9 million each
year due to school absences when students feel unsafe to attend
school due to fear of being bullied based on their actual or per-
ceived sexual orientation.\textsuperscript{59}

Given that LGBT students have higher truancy rates, it is not surpris-
ing that some also score lower on other indicators of school performance
National Adolescent Health Survey, was among the first to analyze the
differences in several school outcome measures between students who
identified as being attracted to members of the same sex or both sexes
and students who were only attracted to the opposite sex.\textsuperscript{60} Female stu-
dents who identified as being attracted to both sexes (i.e., with a bisexual
sexual orientation) were significantly more likely to report that they had
trouble getting along with other students, difficulty paying attention in
class, and difficulty getting their homework done than their heterosexual
peers. They also had lower grade point averages (GPAs).

Bisexual females had more negative school attitudes, did not feel like a
part of their school community, and had significantly more negative feel-
ings about their teachers than heterosexual female students. Females with
only same-sex attractions also had more negative school attitudes and
lower GPAs than heterosexual female students. Surprisingly, the same
study found that adolescent boys who reported same-sex attraction ex-
clusively did not significantly differ from their heterosexual peers in
school outcomes, including GPA. The results of this study call for more
research focusing on why male and female students who were attracted to
both sexes reported more problems at school than those who were only
attracted to the same sex or the opposite sex and why female students
tended to have more negative experiences and outcomes overall.\textsuperscript{61}

A 2002 report from the New York State Department of Education
identified the torment experienced by many LGBT youth as one of the
leading causes for their dropping out of school.\textsuperscript{62} It proposed that ad-
ministrators be flexible in accommodating individual student situations,
including the sexual orientation or gender identity of students who are
LGBT, in order to reduce the student dropout rate. It also recommended
training teachers and staff about cultural differences. The most effective
programs in the New York study attempted to generate and sustain a
welcoming community within the school and sought to involve the par-
ents of the children the school served. Collaborating with neighborhood
communities may be particularly crucial in addressing the needs of
LGBT students of color, who may also be coping with issues of alienation
beyond the schoolyard that impact their ability to participate and learn at school.

The key findings of research conducted by GLSEN on the academic achievement and educational aspirations of LGBT students include the following:

- LGBT students were twice as likely not to plan to pursue any type of postsecondary education than a national sample of students, yet LGBT students were also more likely than a national sample of students to plan to pursue an advanced degree (Master’s, PhD, JD).
- Students who experienced higher frequencies of physical harassment because of their sexual orientation or gender expression were less likely to say they would go on to college.
- Students who were frequently physically harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression reported lower grades than other students.63

Victims of severe physical harassment (occurring often or frequently) because of their sexual orientation or gender expression reported GPAs almost half a grade lower than those who were targeted less often (2.8 vs. 2.4). The frequency of physical assault also correlated with higher percentages of students reporting that they missed at least one day of school in the past month because they did not feel safe.64

According to the 1995 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Study, LGB youth were more than four times as likely to have been threatened with a weapon on school property than their heterosexual peers (33 percent and 7 percent, respectively).65 In the most extreme cases, the combination of violence and powerlessness experienced by LGBT youth may also lead them to bring weapons onto school property. Based on the results of the 1995 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Study, some researchers have argued that male youth with multiple same-sex sexual partners were more likely to be victims of violence at school and therefore more likely to carry weapons both in and out of school.66 Analysis of the 1996 National Adolescent Health Study found that youth who indicated same-sex romantic attraction were more likely than their peers to perpetrate extreme forms of violence against others, such as pulling a gun or knife or shooting or stabbing someone. While previous findings have indicated that LGB youth are more likely to carry weapons, this study is the first to suggest that these same students are willing to use them. The authors of the analysis suggest that the use of weapons
results primarily from fear of being a victim of violence and from the need for self-defense.67

The harassment and violence that LGBT students experience has a negative impact on their mental and physical health in indirect ways as well. Recent research supported by the National Institute of Mental Health found statistically significant relationships between verbal, physical, and sexual harassment and assault (referred to by the researchers as sexual orientation violence, or SOV) of gender atypical LGB youth and negative mental health outcomes, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

More cases of PTSD were found among those who were gender atypical in childhood than among those who were not. PTSD was associated with increased physical SOV, in particular, and with the upset experienced at the first verbal SOV. Thus, youth who are gender atypical in childhood and who are victimized may have elevated mental health and trauma symptoms, and some may have PTSD.68

A 2002 study indicated that LGB youth who experienced three or more incidents of harassment within the preceding year engaged in behaviors putting their health at risk at a higher rate than their heterosexual peers who were similarly harassed.69 Substance abuse by LGBT youth is linked to being marginalized by society, seeking relief from depression and isolation, and attempting to alleviate the stress associated with stigma.70 Students reporting same-sex behavior on the 1993 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Study were nine times more likely to report using alcohol on each of the thirty days preceding the survey, and 10 to 15 percent of LGB youth appeared to abuse alcohol and/or use marijuana regularly, compared to 1 to 4 percent of students reporting only heterosexual attraction and behavior.71 In a 2002 study of data for Massachusetts and Vermont from the 1995 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, gay, bisexual, and questioning male students reported significantly higher marijuana and cocaine use than did lesbian, bisexual, and questioning females.72 Another study, analyzing 1996 National Adolescent Health Study data, indicated that youth attracted to both males and females were at a somewhat higher risk for substance use and abuse than were heterosexual youth.73 More recent analysis of data from a longitudinal study of over thirteen thousand youth confirms that LGB youth are
more likely to begin drinking at earlier ages than their heterosexual peers and are at higher risk of binge drinking.\textsuperscript{74}

LGBT youth, faced with the stress caused by victimization and isolation and often lacking positive sources of peer support and socialization, may engage in unprotected sex or other risky sexual behaviors, which increases their risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.\textsuperscript{75} A Minnesota study of gay and bisexual males between the ages of thirteen and twenty-one conducted from 1989 to 1991 found that nearly one-quarter had had a sexually transmitted disease.\textsuperscript{76} A San Francisco study found that almost one-third of gay and bisexual young men reported contracting at least one sexually transmitted disease.\textsuperscript{77} A study of 334 homeless and runaway adolescents and young adults in San Francisco found that 33 percent of the gay and bisexual males and 3 percent of the lesbian and bisexual females were HIV-positive, as opposed to 1 percent of the heterosexual males and none of the heterosexual females in the study.\textsuperscript{78}

Given the health and other long-term impacts of anti-LGBT harassment and violence in schools, it is not surprising that LGB youth are at higher risk for suicide. This increased risk is not due to being gay but, rather, because of psychosocial stressors associated with being gay, including gender nonconformity, victimization at home and in school, lack of social support, homelessness, and substance abuse.\textsuperscript{79} A controversial 1989 U.S. government study, which found that gay and lesbian youth were almost three times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers, was among the first to bring national attention to this issue.\textsuperscript{80} These findings have been supported by numerous additional studies. Analysis of data from the 1995 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey confirmed that students who self-identify as LGB or who are unsure of their sexual orientation were over three times more likely to report attempted suicide in the previous year.\textsuperscript{81} Data from the same survey four years later showed that nearly half of LGB students had considered suicide during the previous year.\textsuperscript{82}

More recent studies that include larger, representative samples of youth continue to confirm higher suicide risk. In 2007, the \textit{American Journal of Public Health} published the results of a study of over fourteen thousand youth ages eighteen to twenty-six who participated in the federal National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Nearly 5 percent of youth who identified as LGB in the study reported attempting suicide, compared to 1.6 percent of non-LGB youth.\textsuperscript{83} LGB youth who attempt
suicide are at higher risk for long-term psychological distress, including depression and anxiety, reenforcing the need for support systems at home and in school.84

A few researchers have questioned whether the magnitude of difference between LGB and non-LGB youth suicide risk is inflated due to problems in research design. Dr. Ritch C. Savin-Williams at Cornell University hypothesized that LGB youth who participate in studies through their connection to programs at LGBT community centers or who are willing to identify as LGB on a government survey may be at higher risk for suicide than the population of LGB youth as a whole. Additionally, many of the surveys used to assess suicide risk do not ask questions that differentiate between reported and more serious suicide attempts, such as those that are life-threatening and require medical attention. In 2001, Savin-Williams published the results of a study of 226 youth ages 17 to 25 recruited from introductory college courses in human development and sexuality. While he did find that the LGB men and women in his study were more likely to report suicide attempts, the magnitude of difference decreased significantly when only “true” and “life-threatening” attempts were considered. For example, lesbian or bisexual and heterosexual women reported the same incidence of life-threatening attempts (3 percent). However, gay or bisexual men were still significantly more likely to report a life-threatening attempt (6 percent) than heterosexual men (0 percent).85

In 2005, a study of 528 LGB youth in the New York City metropolitan area incorporated the critiques of Savin-Williams and other researchers concerned about the impact of research design. While nearly 33 percent of the LGB youth in that study reported a past suicide attempt, 15 percent were “serious” attempts, about half of which required medical attention. The researchers compared their findings to comparable epidemiological data from New York City, which showed that approximately 11 percent of high school students reported planning suicide. They concluded that, when making a reasonable assumption that many of the attempts reported in the epidemiological data were not serious, their findings again confirmed that LGB youth attempt suicide at higher rates than heterosexual youth.86

The impact and prevalence of anti-LGBT violence in public schools is a national tragedy. It affects all youth, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, because they experience or are forced to witness harassment and violence against their peers on a daily basis. Whether they identify as LGBT or simply do not specifically conform to what Ameri-
can society deems appropriate for male and female behavior, LGBT youth are publicly demeaned and demoralized while many teachers and administrators turn a blind eye. Though there is a continued need for more nationwide, population-based research, the preponderance of evidence shows that anti-LGBT violence is harmful to childhood and adolescent development and well-being and is also life-threatening. Efforts to curtail this harassment and mediate its effects on students are critical.