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Policies and Practices Regarding Transgender Students According to Arkansas School Administrators

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POLICIES AND PRACTICES REGARDING TRANSGENDER STUDENTS ACCORDING TO ARKANSAS SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

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I would also like to acknowledge the subjects of this research. Transgender students are more than an issue for policy-making or scholarly research. They are a group of human beings with varying experiences and undeniable value.

My doctoral degree is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Julia Sue Hook (1939-2016), the epitome of a lifelong learner.

Abstract

Arkansas schools have received changing and conflicting guidance for accommodating transgender students, and policies and practices within schools can critically impact this population. This mixed-methods, exploratory study investigated what official policies and unofficial but established practices exist in Arkansas high schools regarding transgender students' use of preferred names and pronouns as well as their access to sex-separated facilities and activities. The study also examined the frequency of such policies and practices within various school demographic categories including school size, community type, socioeconomic status, and geographic location.

The researcher analyzed survey results from 55 secondary principals in Arkansas. Few schools had formal policies regarding transgender students in the aforementioned areas. In established but unofficial practice, the use of students' preferred names and gender was more common in the classroom than on official records. For sex-separated facilities, schools often provided a private or unisex option or required students to use the restrooms corresponding to their sex on official records. Regarding sex-separated activities, schools generally decided on a case-by-case basis instead of an established procedure. Over a third of principals did not report having a transgender student within the past three years, and a chi-square test showed none of the four demographic variables appear to affect the frequencies or types of policies and procedures regarding transgender students. In a qualitative analysis of the open-response questions, three themes arose: the importance of respecting student needs, the favored flexibility in not having a formal policy, and the mixed reactions from varied stakeholders. Recommendations for practice and future research are included.

Keywords: transgender students, Arkansas, school, policy

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Chapter One: Introduction

Background of the Study

Transgender students are a population at risk. In studies of both transgender students and adults, transgender people have displayed considerable depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts (Clark et al., 2013; Clements-Nolle, Marx, & Katz, 2008; Goldblum et al., 2012; Grant et al., 2011; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2011; Veale, Watson, Peter, & Saewyc, 2017; Virupaksha, Muralidhar, & Ramakrishna, 2016). Transgender students endure gender-based harassment, bullying, and feelings of being unsafe in school (Day, Perez-Brumer, & Russell, 2018; Goldblum et al., 2012; Grant et al., 2011; Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010; Markow & Dancewicz, 2008; Sausa, 2005; Wernick, Kulick, & Chin, 2017). These students also have high rates of negative educational outcomes such as low grades, absenteeism, suspension, and dropping out (Day et al., 2018; Grant et al., 2011; Greytak et al., 2009; McGuire et al., 2010; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Wernick et al., 2017).

Supportive school structures can be valuable for transgender students. Staff and structural supports can help LGBT students (Kosciw, Greytak, Zongrone, Clark, & Truong, 2018; Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013; Markow & Dancewicz, 2008; Poteat, Sinclair, DiGovanni, Koenig, & Russell, 2013) as well as transgender students in particular (McGuire et al., 2010; Mangin, 2018; Mangin, 2019; Porta et al., 2017; Sausa, 2005). School policies can also help transgender students (Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2013; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; McGuire et al., 2010; McKibben, 2016; Mangin, 2018; Meyer & Keenan, 2018).

Facility use and identity recognition are common barriers for transgender students. According to a survey conducted by Kosciw et al. (2018), over 40% of transgender and gender-nonconforming students reported not being allowed to use their preferred name or pronoun as well as being required to use the bathroom and locker room that corresponded to their legal sex. Preferred name and pronoun use help transgender people (Factor & Rothblum, 2008; Russell, Pollitt, Li, & Grossman, 2018). In a study by Factor and Rothblum (2008), more than 30% of transgender people reported feeling at least some discomfort with having to choose a gendered bathroom. Interviews with LGBTQ youth found that many prefer gender-neutral bathroom options (Porta et al., 2017), and bathroom and locker room privacy is a central concern for parents, students, and community members (Kurt & Chenault, 2017).

Public schools in Arkansas have received conflicting information in recent years regarding access and accommodation for transgender and gender-nonconforming students. Under the Obama Administration, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice issued a Dear Colleague letter that recommended schools recognize students by the gender they or their parents asserted even if it differed from their birth certificate (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016). These departments reminded schools that discrimination based on gender violated Title IX law and could exclude them from receiving federal funding (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016). Specifically, schools were informed that they should provide a non-discriminatory environment, recognize the students' preferred names and pronouns, allow students access to sex-separated facilities and events based on their preferred identity, and protect student privacy (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016). The document explicitly asked schools to honor transgender student identities in

locker rooms, restrooms, athletics, and housing for overnight trips (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016). These recommendations aligned closely with the *Schools in Transition: A Guide for Supporting Transgender Students in K-12 Schools* published the previous year by the American Civil Liberties Union, Gender Spectrum, Human Rights Campaign Foundation, National Center for Lesbian Rights, and National Education Association (Orr et al., 2015).

Shortly thereafter, many Arkansas political leaders spoke out against the letter (ArkansasOnline Staff and Wire Reports, 2016). Arkansas governor Asa Hutchinson referred to the letter as simply guidance rather than a legally binding document and suggested the federal government was overreaching into local control (ArkansasOnline Staff and Wire Reports, 2016). Leaders also indicated that the letter was pushing a social agenda by addressing issues that were not relevant in Arkansas (ArkansasOnline Staff and Wire Reports, 2016).

The following year, the United States Department of Justice and the United States Department of Civil Rights under the new Trump administration issued a new Dear Colleague letter that essentially rescinded the previous Obama-era letter (Battle & Wheeler, 2017). While the new letter referred to continued protections against bullying and harassment, it also overturned the application of Title IX's sex discrimination protections for transgender students outlined in the previous federal guidance and deferred to state and local control of schools (Battle & Wheeler, 2017).

Recent Supreme Court decisions and guidance from advocacy groups support the application of Title IX and the Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment for transgender students (GLSEN, 2019; Meyer & Keenan, 2018; Orr et al., 2015; Stern et al., 2018;

Williams, 2019). On the contrary, the U.S. Department of Education has stated it will no longer hear Title IX discrimination claims based on gender identity instead of biological sex (Turner & Kamentez, 2018). Policies and procedures vary significantly among states (Mattingly, 2020; Meyer & Keenan, 2018; National, 2020). Shortly after this research study was conducted, newly-inaugurated President Biden issued an executive order to prohibit discrimination based on gender identity, and this document specifically mentioned students being able to learn without fearing their access to restrooms, locker rooms, or athletics (Biden, 2021).

Problem Statement

Transgender students are a group at risk, and policies and practices within schools can either help this population or exacerbate their problems (Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2013; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; McGuire et al., 2010; McKibben, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2014). Arkansas schools have received changing and conflicting guidance from the federal government, state government, advocacy groups, and the U.S. Supreme Court about accommodating transgender students regarding names, pronouns, facilities, and activities (ArkansasOnline Staff and Wire Reports, 2016; Battle & Wheeler, 2017; Biden, 2021; Ferg-Cadima, 2015; GLSEN, 2019; Lhamon & Gupta, 2016; Meyer & Keenan, 2018; Orr et al., 2015; Stern et al., 2018; Turner & Kamentez, 2018; Williams, 2019). The governor of Arkansas and the recent Trump administration have both indicated this is a state or local decision (ArkansasOnline Staff and Wire Reports, 2016; Battle & Wheeler, 2017); however, newly-inaugurated President Biden has issued an executive order in favor of accommodating transgender students. There has not been any attempt to

examine what practices were taking place regarding transgender students in Arkansas high schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory study was threefold: (a) to determine what formal policies exist in Arkansas high schools regarding transgender students' use of preferred names and pronouns as well as their access to sex-separated facilities and activities, (b) to determine what unofficial but established practices exist in Arkansas high schools regarding transgender students' use of preferred names and pronouns as well as their access to sex-separated facilities and activities, and (c) to examine the frequency of such policies and practices within various school demographic categories.

Research Questions

This study was guided by three questions:

1) According to high school building principals, what formal policies exist in Arkansas secondary schools regarding transgender students' preferred identity usage in class and on student records, access to sex-separated facilities, and placement in sex-separated activities?
2) According to high school building principals, what unofficial but established practices exist in Arkansas secondary schools regarding the use of transgender students' preferred identity usage in class and on student records, access to sex-separated facilities, and placement in sex-separated activities?
3) Are the frequencies of such policies and practices equally represented among various school demographic indicators, such as school size, community type, free and reduced lunch participation, and geographic location?

Significance of the Study

Though transgender students and bathrooms have been a controversial topic in recent years, there has been little information published about how schools in Arkansas are accommodating the unique needs of these students. This study can inform state or district policy development. It can also help school administrators who are grappling with the important decision of how to best meet the needs of all students. State policymakers and local administrators can benefit from this study as they seek to understand how to best serve transgender students. Students and families can potentially benefit from the findings of this study through more equitable policies and practices. Also, other researchers who seek to examine transgender policies in Arkansas schools can find this information helpful.

Definition of Terms

For this study, the key terms below were defined as follows:

- **Cisgender:** This term is used for people whose gender identity fits the sex assigned at birth (Orr et al., 2015).
- **Gender:** This term refers to the relationship between one's physical traits, gender identity, and gender expression (Orr et al., 2015).
- **Gender expression:** This term refers to the outward presentation and behavior that are indicative of someone's gender (Orr et al., 2015).
- **Gender identity:** This term refers to one's internal sense of being male, female, both, or neither (Orr et al., 2015).

- **Gender nonconforming:** This term applies to a person whose gender expression or behaviors fall outside of what is considered typical for their assigned sex (Orr et al., 2015).
- **Sex:** The assignment of male or female sex is made at birth based on physical characteristics; this term is sometimes used as an umbrella term that includes gender and gender identity (Orr et al., 2015).
- **Transgender:** Rands (2009) summarized various definitions of transgender into someone whose "gender assignment does not match their gender identity" (p. 421).

Also, this study used the umbrella term LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning) at times; however, when citing or describing another study, this study utilized the terminology from the original source.

Assumptions

This research study assumed the following:

1. All participants will answer honestly about their experiences.
2. High school principals are knowledgeable about the policies and practices regarding transgender students in their buildings.

Delimitations

One delimitation of this study was the participant selection. The survey focused on secondary building principals as managers of school policy and did not include counselors, teachers, superintendents, or students. Also, the study was not longitudinal and only captured the policies and practices of public Arkansas secondary schools during the time of the survey. The study did not include private schools, as these institutions

have different oversight and governance. Only schools with at least a ninth-grade were included.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged regarding this study. The number of respondents was small and should not be considered representative of all Arkansas schools. Although the researcher attempted to reach every public high school principal in the state, there is no way to know if the e-mail arrived or if it was opened. The data only included building principals who chose to respond, which itself could bias the results. This population did not include middle schools, elementary schools, or private schools.

Another limitation involved the assumption that principals responded honestly. Self-reporting is a limitation, and despite the promise of confidentiality, many potential respondents may fear perception or retaliation due to the controversial nature of the inquiry.

Summary

Transgender students are a population at risk, and Arkansas schools have received changing and conflicting guidance from the federal government, state government, advocacy groups, and the U.S. Supreme Court about accommodating these students concerning names, pronouns, facilities, and activities. The purpose of this exploratory study was threefold: (a) to determine what formal policies exist in Arkansas high schools regarding transgender students' use of preferred names and pronouns as well as their access to sex-separated facilities and activities, (b) to determine what unofficial but established practices exist in Arkansas high schools regarding transgender students' use of preferred names and pronouns as well as their access to sex-separated facilities and

activities, and (c) to examine the frequency of such policies and practices within various school demographic categories.

Chapter 2 describes information related to transgender students in K-12 schools. The theoretical underpinning of the study is addressed along with and a brief overview of transgender people. Next, the literature review addresses unique challenges transgender students face such as family rejection, mental health struggles, safety concerns, and negative educational outcomes. Then, it focuses on transgender student needs at school such as structural supports, identity recognition, facility usage, and participation in sex-separated events and activities. Finally, the literature review describes relevant national policy issues including federal and state guidance, advocacy group recommendations, notable court cases, and variance among states.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this exploratory study was threefold: (a) to determine what formal policies exist in Arkansas high schools regarding transgender students' use of preferred names and pronouns as well as their access to sex-separated facilities and activities, (b) to determine what unofficial but established practices exist in Arkansas high schools regarding transgender students' use of preferred names and pronouns as well as their access to sex-separated facilities and activities, (c) to examine the frequency of such policies and practices within various school demographic categories.

This literature review attempts to describe relevant information related to transgender students in K-12 schools. Specifically, it explains the theoretical underpinning of the study and a brief overview of transgender people. Next, the literature review addresses unique challenges transgender students face such as family rejection, mental health struggles, safety concerns, and negative educational outcomes. Then, it focuses on transgender student needs at school such as structural supports, identity recognition, facility usage, and participation in sex-separated events and activities. Finally, the literature review describes relevant national policy issues including federal and state guidance, advocacy group recommendations, notable court cases, and variance among states.

Theoretical Perspective

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is studied in a variety of disciplines and fields, and it is a standard in educational psychology textbooks (Wininger & Norman, 2010). In a theory that is often oversimplified, Maslow contended that humans are motivated through a hierarchy of needs in which basic needs must be mostly met before higher needs can be met (Wininger & Norman, 2010). He also connected the deficiency of various needs with

examples of mental illnesses (Maslow, 1943). This theory is relevant to the education field because of its emphasis on possible deterrents to learning and motivation as well as its applicability to motivating students (Wininger & Norman, 2010). This widely cited theory first appeared in a 1943 Psychological Review article titled "A Theory of Human Motivation" and was modified and clarified over the years by its original author (Wininger & Norman, 2010).

In its original form, Maslow's hierarchy described five categories of human needs: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Maslow emphasized that the order of this hierarchy and the degrees of satisfaction were not necessarily rigid since many unique situations arise when considering motivation. He also acknowledged preconditions, such as justice and freedom to express one's self, for basic need satisfaction while also addressing the importance of cognitive needs.

The first level—physiological needs such as hunger, thirst, sex, and sleep—is the most powerful motivator (Maslow, 1943). After the physiological needs are more or less satisfied, people can focus on their safety needs. This second tier includes elements such as the organization, the absence of danger, financial stability, and familiarity After safety, the third level includes love, affection, social relationships, and belongingness. The next level is esteem needs, which include esteem for self and others, confidence, the desire of strength, desire of achievement, and desire of prestige. The final tier in Maslow's original hierarchy is self-actualization, the desire to become everything one is capable of becoming. Maslow contended that even after the previous needs were satisfied, people continue to yearn for self-fulfillment, and few people in society have achieved actual self-actualization.

Maslow also emphasized that one does not have to satisfy a tier completely before beginning the next; in fact, many people are partially satisfied and unsatisfied at different levels (Maslow, 1943). The hierarchy is best viewed with degrees of satisfaction getting lower as levels go up. He summarized that inability to satisfy the earlier levels will dominate a person's motivation, and they will not focus on the later goals until those precursory needs are mostly satisfied.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a staple in educational psychology because of its implications for student motivation and deterrents toward learning (Wininger & Norman, 2010). School leaders are expected to provide a safe and equitable environment for all students to achieve, and this can be done through school policy (Kurt & Chenault, 2017). When applying Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to school rules, leaders can use official policies and unofficial practices to provide and safeguard these basic needs. Students are then able to address the higher levels of motivation that are needed for success in school.

The more pre-conditional and lower-level needs are satisfied—such as freedom to express one's self, justice, safety, and belongingness—the more students can work on higher-level needs such as self-esteem, desire for achievement, and self-actualization. Transgender students encounter a unique set of risks and dilemmas at school (Kurt & Chenault, 2017). Because educators and schools often fail to provide a safe environment for transgender youth, these students may experience more developmental challenges (Meyer, 2014). Students who are denied space to be themselves and express themselves can become isolated, lose self-esteem, and be more susceptible to harassment and bullying (Meyer, 2014). Policies and practices regarding identity and facility usage can

help satisfy these basic motivations and allow transgender students to satisfy higher levels in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Transgender Population

As an evolving term under which a variety of people identify, "transgender" is defined in many ways. Rands (2009) summarized various definitions of transgender into someone whose "gender assignment does not match their gender identity" (p. 421). In a publication by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, researchers included a similar definition and subsequently noted that transgender is an umbrella term for someone whose gender expression is considered inconsistent with their assigned gender or sex, including those who do not fit traditional ideas about gender expression (Greytak et al., 2009). Transgender people may or may not be undergoing social transitioning which can include name, pronoun, and appearance changes as well as medical transitioning which can involve hormone treatment and gender-affirming surgery (Orr et al., 2015).

To estimate the population of transgender people in the United States, Meerwijk and Sevelius (2017) analyzed data from five national surveys, and they determined that about 1 in every 250 American adults—about 1 million people—identified as transgender. The researchers noted that this number is more representative of younger adults and had been growing substantially each year (Meerwijk & Sevelius, 2017). The researchers also noted that not everyone who might be categorically labeled as transgender prefers to identify as such. In a separate report that year, researchers for the Williams Institute estimated that 1.4 million adults and 150,000 youth in the United States identified as transgender (Herman, Flores, Brown, Wilson, & Conron, 2017).

Researchers noted that the highest proportion of transgender youth was between ages 15-17, and they also estimated that 1,450 Arkansans between the ages of 13 to 17, 0.75%, were transgender (Herman et al., 2017).

Challenges for Transgender Students

Many transgender people report problems with family rejection and mistreatment (Clark et al., 2013; Factor & Rothblum, 2008; Grant et al., 2011; Koken, Bimbi, & Parsons, 2009; Nadal, Skolnik, & Wong, 2012). In studies of both transgender students and adults, transgender people have displayed considerable depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts (Clark et al., 2013; Clements-Nolle et al., 2008; Goldblum et al., 2012; Grant et al., 2011; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Russell et al., 2011; Veale et al., 2017; Virupaksha et al., 2016). Transgender students endure gender-based harassment, bullying, and feeling unsafe at school (Clark et al., 2013; Clements-Nolle et al., 2008; Day et al., 2018; Goldblum et al., 2012; Grant et al., 2011; Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018; McGuire et al., 2010; Russell et al., 2011; Sausa, 2005; Wernick et al., 2017). Transgender students also have high rates of negative educational outcomes such as low grades (Day et al., 2018; Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2013; Wernick et al. 2017), high absenteeism (Day et al., 2018; Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2011), leaving school through transferring or dropping out (Grant et al., 2011; Kosciw et al., 2018; McGuire et al., 2010), low post-secondary aspirations (Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018), and feelings of not belonging at school (Day et al., 2018; Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018; Robinson & Espelage, 2011).

Family rejection. One challenge facing many transgender people is rejection from family (Clark et al., 2013; Factor & Rothblum, 2008; Grant et al., 2011; Koken et al., 2009; Nadal, Skolnik, & Wong, 2012). This issue is important to the theoretical underpinning of this study as such rejection could impact lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy—belongingness, freedom to express oneself, and even safety. This lack of acceptance at home underscores the importance of equitable treatment at school.

Many studies describe transgender people encountering substantial conflicts with their families. In a qualitative study of 20 transgender adult women of color, 40% described experiences of hostility-aggression from families, 40% described indifference-neglect from families, and 55% experienced undifferentiated rejection (Koken et al., 2009). In 2011, the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force released *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*, which used the survey responses of 6,456 transgender and gender-nonconforming adult respondents to highlight concerns about education, employment, health, family life, housing, public accommodations, identification documents, police, and incarceration (Grant et al., 2011). Concerning family life, 57% reported family rejection, 45% reported that family relationships were as strong as before they came out, and 19% reported experiencing domestic violence from a family member based on their gender identity. Family acceptance was highly connected to positive outcomes while family rejection was highly connected to more negative outcomes.

Another example of family conflict is found in a national health and well-being survey of 8,166 high school students in New Zealand wherein 96 respondents reported

being transgender students (Clark et al., 2013). Of the transgender respondents, 76.1% reported having at least one parent who cares a lot about them compared to 93.6% of non-transgender respondents, and 63.9% of transgender students reported that their family gets along compared to 81.5% of non-transgender respondents. In other words, transgender students were more likely to come from homes where there were feelings of conflict and rejection.

Outright rejection and hostility are not the only concerns within families of transgender students. In a qualitative study featuring focus groups with nine transgender adults ages 21-44, researchers identified 12 common microaggressions faced by participants (Nadal et al., 2012). Some participants reported hostility and rejection from family, but a common theme was also microaggressions from family members and also extended family members even when close members were supportive. In a study by Factor and Rothblum (2008), researchers surveying 166 transgender adults found that preferred name use was more common among friends, fellow students, and teachers than by parents. Respondents were also more likely to have first revealed their gender identity to a partner or friend than to their parents or siblings. This suggests that students may sometimes be more comfortable with their transgender identity at school than at home.

Suicide and mental health. Although all transgender people should not be categorized as mentally ill or suicidal, this population is at risk for such conditions (Clark et al., 2013; Clements-Nolle et al., 2008; Goldblum et al., 2012; Grant et al., 2011; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Russell et al., 2011; Veale et al., 2017; Virupaksha et al., 2016). This awareness is critical to understanding the application of Maslow's Hierarchy

of Needs as well as developing school policies and procedures relating to transgender students.

Suicide-related behavior is found in several studies regarding transgender youth and adults. In an analysis of 21 studies across five countries, Virupaksha et al. (2016) found the rate of suicide attempts for transgender people varied from 32% to 51%. Much of their research regarding support focused on transgender youth. In a study of 290 transgender adults in Virginia, researchers analyzed gender-based violence toward transgender people during school along with suicide attempts (Goldblum et al., 2012). Of the respondents, 32.5% reported having made a least one suicide attempt; however, this study does not compare these results to the rate of suicide attempts for cisgender people. While the data used included only adults, questions were asked about previous school experiences. Respondents who reported gender-based victimization in school were four times more likely to report suicide attempts. This connection is relevant to policy-making for transgender students. In interviews with 515 transgender persons, Clements-Nolle et al. (2008) determined the percentage of suicide attempts in those less than 25 years old was 47% compared to 30% of those 25 or older.

In the previously cited survey of 6,456 transgender and gender nonconforming adults, 41% of respondents reported having attempted suicide in their lifetime compared to 1.6% of the estimated general American population (Clark et al., 2013). Suicide attempt rates for those with no high school diploma (48%), only a high school diploma (49%), or some college (48%) were notably higher than those with college degrees (33%). Those who had survived violence based on their transgender or gender-nonconforming identity reported high rates of suicide attempts: 61% of physical assault

survivors and 64% of sexual assault survivors. Respondents who reported being bullied, harassed, assaulted, or expelled because of their gender identity in school were 10% more likely to attempt suicide than the rest of the sample. The percentages of respondents who attempted suicide were especially high when they had been victimized by a teacher: 59% when harassed or bullied, 69% when sexually assaulted, and 76% when physically assaulted by a teacher. Veale et al. (2017) analyzed the data of 923 transgender people living in Canada and compared the results to questions taken from the British Columbia Adolescent Health Survey for ages 14-18 and the Canadian Community Health Survey for ages 19-25. In the past year, 65.2% of transgender youth had considered suicide compared to 13.0% of the general survey respondents; furthermore, 36.1% reported attempting suicide compared to 6.5% of the general survey respondents.

Utilizing data from 13,218 students attending grades 7-12 in Dane County, Wisconsin, Robinson and Espelage (2011) found that 74.1% of LGBTQ-identified students were not considering suicide compared to 91.9% of straight-identified students, 23.1% of LGBTQ-identified students had considered it rarely or some of the time in the previous 30 days compared to 7.7% of straight-identified students, and 2.8% of LGBTQ-identified students had considered it almost all of the time during the previous 30 days compared to 0.4% of the straight-identified students. In the same study, 6.2% of LGBTQ-identified students reported one suicide attempt in the previous year compared to 1.8% of straight-identified students, and 3.0% of LGBTQ-identified students reported multiple attempts compared to 0.6% of straight-identified students. While LGBTQ-identified students as a whole generally had more negative reported outcomes, it is notable that the sub-population of transgender students reported not considering and not attempting

suicide at a rate comparable to straight-identified students. In other words, the transgender respondents were more closely aligned with the straight students than the LGBTQ students in these two categories.

Suicide attempts are not the only mental health concern for transgender people. In the previously mentioned study by Veale et al. (2017), transgender students between ages 14-18 reported higher rates of feeling stress/strain/pressure as well as feeling discouraged or hopeless in the past month. Also in the previous year, 74.9% of transgender youth reported self-harm compared to 16.5% of the general survey respondents. In the aforementioned research by Clements-Nolle et al. (2008), researchers found that 60% of transgender respondents were classified as depressed, 28% had been in drug or alcohol treatment, and 32% had attempted suicide. Low self-esteem was also common.

Researchers surveying 245 LGBT adults in California between the ages of 21 and 25 found that LGBT-related victimization at school during their teenage years was highly linked to mental health concerns in young adulthood as well as risk for sexually transmitted diseases and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (Russell et al., 2011). Depression and suicidal ideation in males was linked to their rates of LGBT victimization in school. Although this survey did not separate transgender students from the rest of the respondents, it did acknowledge that 8.6% of participants were transgender people.

In the aforementioned survey analysis of 8,166 high school students in New Zealand, 41.3% of transgender students reported significant depressive symptoms, compared to 11.8% of non-transgender students; 39.2% of transgender students reported being unable to access health care, compared to 17.8% of non-transgender students; 45.5% of transgender students reported self-harming in the past 12 months, compared to

23.4% of non-transgender students; and 19.8% of transgender students reported attempting suicide in the past 12 months, compared to 4.1% of non-transgender students (Clark et al., 2013). It should be noted that many students in these categories also selected "not sure" and "don't understand the question".

In a study of 245 LGBT adults aged 21-25 that included 21 transgender participants, Russell et al. (2014) considered the effects of being out versus hiding one's LGBT status in high school on their mental health later. They determined that being out in high school was associated with stronger psychosocial factors such as depression, self-esteem, and life satisfaction in young adulthood.

Bullying and safety. Numerous studies find that transgender students often experience bullying, harassment, and violence; indeed, the statistics can be alarming (Clark et al., 2013; Clements-Nolle et al., 2008; Day et al., 2018; Goldblum et al., 2012; Grant et al., 2011; Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018; McGuire et al., 2010; Markow & Dancewicz, 2008; Russell et al., 2011; Sausa, 2005; Wernick et al., 2017). In an online survey completed by a nationally representative sample of 1,580 K-12 public school principals, 24% of secondary principals reported that a transgender student would feel safe in their school, compared to 64% for religious minorities and 76% for a minority racial/ethnic group (Markow & Dancewicz, 2008). These experiences have obvious implications for Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs concerning safety and belongingness, and these issues extend to school policy beyond just anti-bullying statements.

In *Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Youth in Our Nation's School*, published by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), researchers surveyed 6,209 LGBT students including 295 transgender youth between

ages 13 and 20 (Greytak et al., 2009). Though aged, this report remains perhaps the most detailed account of transgender student experiences in schools. Of the transgender respondents, 90% reported hearing homophobic remarks, 90% reported hearing negative remarks about a person's gender expression, 32% reported hearing homophobic remarks from staff, 39% reported hearing sexist remarks from staff, and 39% reported hearing negative remarks about someone's gender expression from staff in the previous 12 months. Transgender students reported staff intervention during these times was low: 16% said staff intervened most of the time or always for homophobic language and 11% for negative remarks about gender expression.

In the same study, 69% of transgender students reported feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation and 65% because of their gender expression (Greytak et al., 2009). Transgender students reported higher levels of harassment and assault than general LGBT respondents: 89% of transgender students reported being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation, 87% reported being verbally harassed because of their gender expression, 55% reported being physically harassed because of their sexual orientation, 53% reported being physically harassed because of their gender expression, 28% were physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation, and 26% were physically assaulted because of their gender expression. Only 54% of students reported victimization incidents to school officials, and only 33% of those felt it was handled effectively.

In the aforementioned survey of 6,456 transgender and gender-nonconforming adults by the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 78% who identified as such in K-12 reported harassment, 35% reported

physical assault, and 12% reported sexual violence (Grant et al., 2011). Often K-12 teachers and staff members were responsible: 31% reported harassment by school employees, 5% reported physical assault by school employees, and 3% reported sexual assault by school employees. Of the six regions where respondents reported mistreatment at school, the South was the highest at 65% and the Mid-Atlantic was the lowest at 58%. The mistreatment in school aligned with several other reported negative outcomes such as unemployment, homelessness, smoking, drugs, alcohol, HIV, and suicide. In a qualitative study of 24 transgender youth in Philadelphia, 96% of the participants reported verbal harassment, 83% reported physical harassment, and 75% did not feel safe at school (Sausa, 2005).

In *The 2017 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth in Our Nation's Schools*, research published by GLSEN included a sample of 23,001 LGBTQ youth in grades 6-12 in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming (Kosciw et al., 2018). While this survey does not compare LGBTQ students with a non-LGBTQ sample, it does provide significant insight into the reported sexual and gender minority students. Although many of the results are not broken down by gender, 46% of the sample identified as transgender, genderqueer, another nonbinary identity, or questioning/unsure; therefore, one can reasonably infer that many of the numbers in this survey represent the experiences of students who fall under the transgender umbrella. Of the total respondents, 44.6% reported feeling unsafe because of their gender expression.

Of the respondents in the same study, 45.6% reported hearing negative remarks about transgender students often or frequently, and over two-thirds of the students had

heard staff members make negative comments regarding student gender expression (Kosciw et al., 2018). In the previous year, 82% of respondents reported experiencing verbal harassment, and 37.4% of students reported experiencing high frequencies of harassment. Gender expression was reported as the reason for harassment in 53.2% of responses, and 19.2% of students reporting this type of harassment identified these occurrences as often or frequent. In reviewing data from the same survey in previous years, researchers found that negative remarks about transgender students had risen from 2013 to 2017, and negative staff remarks about gender expression had also risen during that time.

Regarding physical harassment in the past year, 24.4% of respondents in the same study reported this experience based on gender identity, 22.8% based on gender, and 28.9% based on sexual orientation (Kosciw et al., 2018). Regarding physical assault, 12.4% occurred because of sexual orientation, 11.2% because of gender expression, and 10.0% because of gender. The study also indicated that 57.3% of respondents were sexually harassed at school, 89.2% experienced being excluded, 76.5% had heard mean rumors or lies about themselves, 48.7% experienced cyberbullying, and 39.1% experienced property damage or theft.

In the same report, researchers found that 55.3% of respondents never reported their victimization to school staff, and the most frequent (68%) reason given was that the students did not think the staff would do anything about it (Kosciw et al., 2018). When the incidents were reported, 60.4% of the students indicated the staff did nothing or told them to ignore it. Students with higher rates of victimization based on their gender

expression or sexual orientation reported lower levels of self-esteem and higher rates of depression than those with less victimization.

In the previously mentioned survey analysis of 8,166 high school students in New Zealand, 53.5% of transgender respondents reported being afraid someone at school would hurt or bother them, compared to 39.8% of non-transgender students; 17.6% of transgender students reported being bullied weekly, compared to 5.8% of non-transgender students; 49.9% of transgender students reported being hit or physically harmed by another person, compared to 32.5% of non-transgender students; and 24.1% of transgender students reported being in a serious physical fight, compared to 13.3% of non-transgender students (Clark et al., 2013). It should be noted that many students in these categories also selected "not sure" and "don't understand the question."

In a mixed-methods study, researchers compared the results of 2,560 middle and high school students taking the *Preventing School Harassment* survey with the 68 students who identified as transgender, queer, or questioning as to their gender identity, and they also held focus groups with 36 transgender youth in Western United States cities (McGuire et al., 2010). In the survey, 82% of transgender respondents reported hearing negative comments based on gender presentation from students sometimes or often while only 60% of the full sample reported this. In the full sample, 45% of respondents reported teacher intervention was common while only 25% of transgender respondents did so, and 31% of transgender respondents reported hearing negative comments from the school staff. In the focus group portion of the study, harassment and physical violence were commonly reported; however, researchers pointed out that this was often described second-hand, perhaps because so many of the sample were males. According to

researchers, participants also downplayed the importance and the frequency of harassment. Only a few participants reported harassment by staff, but most reported little or no intervention from staff during harassment.

In the aforementioned study comparing gender-based violence in school with suicide attempts among 290 transgender Virginians, 44.8% reported hostility or insensitivity from students, teachers, or administrators because of the student's gender identity or expression (Goldblum et al., 2012). Specifically, 60.5% of transgender men, 38.8% of transgender women, 71.4% of multiracial respondents, 53.1% of African-American respondents, 50% classified as other race, and 38.2% of white respondents reported gender-based violence at school.

Day et al. (2018) analyzed survey data from 31,896 middle and high school students in California to examine the size of gender-identity-related disparities in student experiences. Transgender students had higher rates of general victimization, more negative views of their school's climate, a six times greater chance of missing school for feelings of unsafety or substance use, a six times higher rate of gender-based bullying, and an eight times greater chance of homophobic bullying. In a survey of 5,730 LGBT youth who attended secondary schools across the United States that included 314 transgender and 223 "other gender identity" students, researchers measured how victimization at school related to lower self-esteem and academic performance (Kosciw et al., 2013).

In a study of 1,046 students attending grades 9-12 in southeast Michigan, 9.2% of respondents were transgender students, and this group reported significantly lower rates of feeling safe in facilities such as bathrooms and locker rooms than cisgender

respondents (Wernick et al., 2017). Students who identified as a marginalized sexual orientation also felt less safe than those who reported as heterosexual. In the previously mentioned study of 13,218 students attending grades 7-12 in Dane County, Wisconsin, transgender students reported levels of cyberbullying and composite bullying (race, appearance, and sexual orientation) similar to straight-identified students (Robinson & Espelage, 2011). These rates were considerably lower than other LGBTQ subgroups.

The mistreatment of transgender people and its effects are not just relevant in childhood. In the previously mentioned focus groups with nine transgender adults, Nadal et al. (2012) found verbal harassment, physical violence, and the lingering threat of violence to be common among all participants. Denial of bodily privacy was another theme from the study, and participants reported how comfortable others felt discussing and objectifying the bodies of transgender people. In the aforementioned study of 245 LGBT adults aged 21-25 that included 21 transgender participants, Russell, Toomey, Ryan, and Diaz (2014) determined that being out in high school was associated with more victimization but also with more long-term psychosocial benefits.

Clements-Nolle et al. (2008) found that of the 515 transgender persons interviewed, 62% had experienced gender discrimination, 83% had experienced verbal gender victimization, 36% reported physical gender victimization, and 59% had been forced into sex. Victims of forced sex were 22% higher on suicide attempts than those who were not, victims of gender discrimination were 16% higher than those who were not, victims of verbal gender discrimination were 13% higher than those who were not, and victims of physical gender victimization were 27% higher than those who were not.

Educational outcomes. Transgender students are also susceptible to negative educational outcomes. Researchers have found transgender students are at risk for low grades (Day et al., 2018; Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2013; Wernick et al., 2017), high absenteeism (Day et al., 2018; Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2013; Robinson & Espelage, 2011), leaving school (Grant et al., 2011; Kosciw et al., 2018; McGuire et al., 2010; Sausa, 2005), low post-secondary aspirations (Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018), and feelings of not belonging at school (Day et al., 2018; Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018; Robinson & Espelage, 2011).

Low grades. Several studies have considered the academic performance of transgender students as measured by grades. In the aforementioned analysis of survey responses from 31,896 California youth, including 398 transgender students, transgender students reported lower grades than non-transgender youth in the full, non-weighted sample (Day et al., 2018). In the previously-described *2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming, higher rates of victimization based on gender expression related to lower grade point averages (Kosciw et al., 2018). The same relationship was found in the aforementioned *Harsh Realities* that included survey responses from 6,209 LGBT students, including 295 transgender youth between ages 13 and 20; therein, researchers described how grade point averages were lower for transgender students who were frequently harassed for gender expression, gender, or sexual orientation (Greytak et al., 2009).

In the previously described survey of 1,046 southeast Michigan high school students, 9.2% of which were transgender youth, transgender identity was associated with significantly lower grades than non-transgender girls, but bathroom safety had a moderating effect on the relationship between transgender identity and self-reported grades (Wernick et al., 2017). In the aforementioned survey of 5,730 LGBT youth who attended secondary schools across the United States that included 314 transgender and 223 "other gender identity" students, researchers showed how having supportive educators and an LGBT-inclusive curriculum helped moderate low-grade point averages (Kosciw et al., 2013). Self-esteem was also positively associated with grade point average.

High absenteeism. Researchers have also focused on absenteeism when analyzing educational outcomes for transgender students. In the previously-mentioned study of 13,218 students attending grades 7-12 in Dane County, Wisconsin, researchers noted that while LGBTQ-identified students reported having more unexcused absences in high school than straight-identified students, the difference was considerably more pronounced at the middle school level (Robinson & Espelage, 2011).

In the previously described *2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming, researchers reported that students who experienced high levels of victimization based on gender expression or sexual orientation were three times more likely to miss school (Kosciw et al., 2018). LGBTQ students were also three times more likely to miss school for feeling unsafe or uncomfortable if they had experienced discrimination at school. In the aforementioned *Harsh Realities*, which included survey responses from 6,209 LGBT

students including 295 transgender youth between ages 13 and 20, researchers concluded that transgender students who received high levels of harassment related to gender expression, gender, or sexual orientation were more likely to miss school than those who did not (Greytak et al., 2009). In the previously mentioned survey of 5,730 LGBT youth who attended secondary schools across the United States that included 314 transgender and 223 "other gender identity" students, researchers concluded that self-esteem was negatively associated with missed school while victimization was positively associated with missed school (Kosciw et al., 2013). They also concluded that having a gay-straight alliance on campus as well as having supportive staff members limited the number of missed days.

Attendance is also impacted by discipline, as evidenced by 10.9% of respondents in *The 2017 National School Climate Survey* receiving in-school suspension and 5.8% receiving out-of-school suspension (Kosciw et al., 2018). In the previously discussed analysis of survey responses from 31,896 California youth, including 398 transgender students, transgender students were almost twice as likely to be truant from school, often from depression or suspension, and were six times more likely to miss because of feeling unsafe or because of substance use (Day et al., 2018). Transgender respondents did not differ from non-transgender respondents concerning missing school for depression or suspension in some sample models.

Leaving school. Another area of concern researchers have identified regarding education outcomes for transgender students is leaving school whether through dropping out, transferring to another school, or being expelled. Many transgender students drop out of school for a variety of reasons. In the afore-described survey responses of 6,456

transgender and gender-nonconforming adult respondents, researchers reported that 15% of respondents left educational settings in grades K-12 or higher education due to harassment (Grant et al., 2011). Of those who left school for harassment, 48% reported experiencing homelessness and 5.14% reported being HIV-positive, over eight times the rate of the general population. Regarding higher education, 15% reported leaving school because of financial reasons related to their transition, 5% reported being denied campus housing altogether, and 11% reported losing or not getting financial aid because they were transgender or gender nonconforming. The percentage of age 18-24 respondents who were attending school was 37% compared to 45% of the general population, but the percentage of older populations was two to three times higher than the general population. Researchers concluded that transgender people were returning to school later in life because of interruptions related to their gender identity and the need for better employment due to discrimination.

In the previously mentioned qualitative study of 24 transgender youth in Philadelphia, 75% reported having dropped out of school (Sausa, 2005). In the previously described *2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming, 3.8% reported being unsure if they will graduate high school or were not planning to graduate high school (Kosciw et al., 2018). Students could select multiple reasons for considering dropping out: 92.6% cited mental health concerns; 70.1% cited academic concerns, such as poor grades and absences; and 59.8% cited a hostile school environment, such as lack of support, harassment, and gendered school policies and practices. Notably, the sample only

included students who were enrolled at some point during the 2016-17 school year, so those who dropped out previously were not represented in this data.

Transgender students often change schools. In the aforementioned *2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming, 18% of respondents reported having changed schools due to feeling unsafe or uncomfortable (Kosciw et al., 2018). In the previously mentioned mixed-methods study that included focus groups with 36 transgender youth in the Western United States, researchers identified transferring schools as a theme (McGuire et al., 2010). Many participants believed alternative or charter schools were better options, and some seemed to feel safer in alternative environments outside of mainstream education.

Sometimes transgender students are removed from school against their will. In the aforementioned survey of 6,456 transgender and gender-nonconforming adult respondents, 6% of respondents reported being expelled from a K-12 setting due to their gender identity/expression (Grant et al., 2011). In the previously discussed *2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming, one percent reported being expelled from school (Kosciw et al., 2018).

Low post-secondary aspirations. Researchers have also explored whether or not transgender students are at risk for low post-secondary educational aspirations. In the aforementioned *Harsh Realities* which included survey responses from 6,209 LGBT students, including 295 transgender youth between ages 13 and 20, researchers found that transgender students who were frequently harassed for their gender, gender expression, or

sexual orientation were less likely to plan to attend college (Greytak et al., 2009). For example, 49% of transgender students who received frequent harassment based on their gender did not plan to attend college compared to 32% who did not receive high levels of harassment.

Despite these concerns, some research indicates a high number of transgender students with college aspirations as well as those who completed college. In the previously-described *2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming, only 6.3% of respondents reported not planning to pursue any type of post-secondary education (Kosciw et al., 2018). In the previously cited survey of 6,456 transgender and gender nonconforming adult respondents, 47% reported having a college degree or graduate degree, which is well above the national average of 27% (Grant et al., 2011). This high number is also remarkable considering the reported barriers transgender students faced regarding financial aid, housing, and harassment in post-secondary education. Despite this persistence, researchers noted that this high educational attainment often did not correspond to higher income for respondents.

Feelings of not belonging at school. Another area of concern in the literature is the lack of belonging transgender students often feel at school. In the aforementioned *Harsh Realities*, which included survey responses from 6,209 LGBT students, including 295 transgender youth between ages 13 and 20, transgender students had a lower sense of school belongingness than non-transgender LGB students (Greytak et al., 2009) In the previously described *2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming, students who experienced

higher levels of victimization based on gender expression or sexual orientation, those who experienced anti-LGBTQ policies, and those who experienced school-based discrimination were more likely to report lower levels of school belongingness (Kosciw et al., 2018). In the previously mentioned study of 13,218 students attending grades 7-12 in Dane County, Wisconsin, the difference in reported feelings of school belongingness between straight-identified and LGBTQ-identified students was much greater than the difference of school belongingness between middle and high school students (Robinson & Espelage, 2011). In the previously discussed analysis of survey responses from 31,896 California youth, including 398 transgender students, transgender students had a more negative view of school climate than non-transgender students for the following indicators: school connectedness, caring relationships with adults, and high teacher expectations for students (Day et al., 2018).

Not all studies demonstrate transgender students feeling unhappy and disconnected at school. In the afore-described national health and well-being survey of 8,166 high school students in New Zealand wherein 96 respondents reported being transgender students, about three-quarters of transgender respondents reported liking school or thinking it was okay (Clark et al., 2013).

Transgender Student Needs at School

Transgender students have a set of unique needs at school, and any discussion of policy and procedure should include these areas. Researchers have focused on transgender students' need for structural supports such as inclusive curriculum (Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2013; McGuire et al., 2010; Mangin, 2019), LGBTQ student associations (Albritton, Huffman, & McClellan, 2017; Greytak et

al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2013; McGuire et al., 2010; Porta et al., 2017; Poteat et al., 2013), supportive staff (Grant et al., 2011; Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2013; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; McGuire et al., 2010; Mangin, 2018; Mangin, 2019; Markow & Dancewicz, 2008; Porta et al., 2017), supportive leadership (Albritton et al., 2017; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; McGuire et al., 2010; Mangin, 2018; Mangin, 2019; Payne & Smith, 2018; Porta et al., 2017), and school policies (Day et al., 2018; Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2013; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; McGuire et al., 2010; Mangin, 2018; Mangin, 2019; Markow & Dancewicz, 2008; Meyer & Keenan, 2018; Payne & Smith, 2014; Porta et al., 2017; Russell et al., 2018). Transgender students also have unique needs regarding identity recognition such as names and pronouns (Factor & Rothblum, 2008; Kosciw et al., 2018; McGuire et al., 2010; McKibben, 2016; Nadal et al., 2012; Russell et al., 2018; Sausa, 2005), facility usages such as bathrooms and locker rooms (Factor & Rothblum, 2008; Grant et al., 2011; Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; McGuire et al., 2010; McKibben, 2016; Mangin, 2019; Nadal et al., 2012; Platt & Milam, 2018; Porta et al., 2017; Sausa, 2005; Stern et al., 2018; Wernick et al., 2017), and other sex-separated activities and events (Acklin, 2017; Albritton et al., 2017; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; Lenzi, 2018; Mahoney, Dodds, & Polasek, 2015).

Structural supports. The needs of transgender students at school can best be met by having structural supports in place. Such supports are especially relevant for this current study regarding transgender students in Arkansas, as researchers analyzing the *2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students—in which 46.3% were

transgender or gender nonconforming—reported that LGBTQ students in the South and Midwest regions of the United States faced more negative school climates and less access to LGBTQ supports and resources than their peers in the Northeast and the West (Kosciw et al., 2018). In summarizing literature regarding the effectiveness of school policies in promoting safer school climates for LGBT students, Russell et al. (2011) identified five critical components: (a) clear and enforced anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies that include LGBT and gender expression, (b) resources and support available for LGBT students, (c) staff who regularly intervene against bias-driven harassment, (d) gay-straight alliances and other diversity organizations, and (e) a curriculum integrated with LGBT issues. The current literature review directly addresses four of these components as well as the role of supportive leadership. The support structures that follow include curriculum, LGBTQ student associations, staff support, leadership support, and policies.

Curriculum. Researchers have identified an inclusive curriculum as one way to create a supportive environment for LGBTQ students. In the previously discussed study that included a quantitative survey of 2,560 middle and high school students—with the 68 students identified as transgender, queer, or questioning as to their gender identity—as well as qualitative focus groups with 36 transgender youth in the Western United States, researchers considered the role of an LGBT-inclusive curriculum as a protective factor for transgender students (McGuire et al., 2010). Researchers concluded that when LGBT issues were represented in the curriculum, transgender students felt safer and reported a safer environment for gender-nonconforming students. While describing interviews with 20 transgender-supportive elementary principals across six states, Mangin (2019)

reported that schools with strong social-emotional programs easily found ways to incorporate gender diversity into the curriculum.

In the *2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming, nearly two-thirds of respondents reported LGBT issues not being in the curriculum, and 18.6% of the full sample reported LGBT issues being covered negatively compared to 19.9% positive (Kosciw et al., 2018). The authors noted that including LGBTQ issues in the curriculum in a positive manner may enhance the importance of diversity to students, make LGBTQ students feel more valued, and lead to a more positive school climate. Only 6.7% reported receiving LGBTQ-inclusive sex education courses, and this number was lower in rural, Southern, and religious schools. Researchers expressed concern that the vast majority of LGBTQ students are not only being left without vital health information but also are receiving negative information about LGBTQ topics in sex-education courses. In the aforementioned *Harsh Realities*, which included survey responses from 6,209 LGBT students, including 295 transgender youth between ages 13 and 20, only 46% reported being able to find information regarding LGBT people, history, or events in the school library, and only 31% reported being able to access such information on school internet (Greytak et al., 2009). Regarding transgender students specifically, 16% reported that LGBT-related topics were in their textbooks or readings, and 11% experienced a curriculum with positive representations of LGBT people, history, and events. The authors recommended the inclusion of curricular resources to improve school experiences for LGBT students.

In the previously mentioned survey of 5,730 LGBT youth who attended secondary schools across the United States that included 314 transgender and 223 "other gender identity" students, researchers considered the effects of having an LGBT-inclusive curriculum that included positive representations of LGBT history, people, and events (Kosciw et al., 2013). Survey respondents who experienced an inclusive curriculum as such reported less victimization and higher grade point averages; however, the inclusive curriculum did not relate to missed days or self-esteem.

LGBTQ student associations. Research has also focused on the role of pro-LGBTQ student associations, sometimes called Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) or Gender-Sexuality Alliances (GSA), in supporting LGBTQ students at school. When analyzing data from 15,965 students in 45 Wisconsin schools, researchers found that students in schools with a GSA reported less truancy, smoking, drinking, suicide attempts, and sex with casual partners than students in schools without a GSA, and the difference was greater for LGBTQ youth than heterosexual youth (Poteat et al., 2013). The differences in GSA effects were not significant for victimization, grades, and school belonging.

In the previously mentioned survey of 5,730 LGBT youth who attended secondary schools across the United States that included 314 transgender and 223 "other gender identity" students, researchers considered the effects of having a GSA along with other LGBT-related school supports on student outcomes (Kosciw et al., 2013). The presence of a GSA highly correlated with having supporting educators on campus and was related to decreased anti-LGBT victimization. The presence of a GSA was not directly related to self-esteem, grade point averages, or attendance; although, the presence of a GSA might have resulted in fewer missed school days for those who experienced

less victimization. While the study did not measure actual participation in the GSA, the writers noted that the mere existence of a GSA on campus may help students find a supportive staff member and that having a GSA made a unique and positive contribution to the LGBT students.

In the *2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming, 53.3% of respondents reported having a GSA at school, 36.3% reported never attending, and 31.1% reported frequently attending (Kosciw et al., 2018). The writers touted GSAs as safe spaces, opportunities for advocacy, and contributors to awareness, and the survey results included several apparent benefits for LGBTQ students attending schools with a GSA. Some benefits included hearing anti-LGBTQ remarks less frequently than those without one, being less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and experiencing less severe victimization. These students were less likely to miss school for feeling unsafe or uncomfortable, were more likely to feel connected to a staff member, and had higher rates of staff intervention in anti-LGBT remarks. The LGBTQ students in the survey who attended schools with a GSA had higher rates of participation in awareness events, felt higher levels of belonging at school, experienced lower levels of depression, and had higher levels of self-esteem.

In the previously discussed study that included a quantitative survey of 2,560 middle and high school students with the 68 students identified as transgender, queer, or questioning as to their gender identity, researchers considered the role of GSA involvement as a protective factor for transgender students (McGuire et al., 2010). The same research also included qualitative focus groups with 36 transgender youth in the

Western United States, and researchers identified GSA and related student alliances as protective factors. Participants seemed to believe the presence of a GSA improved school climate, and these LGBT spaces were considered a safe place and a context in which to explore one's identity. Participants spoke of the value of a positive GSA, and some reported even changing schools for such an organization. The authors noted that although GSAs have been established as a valuable resource for LGBT students, only about half of the survey respondents were involved. They concluded that the value of a GSA for transgender students specifically may be variable among schools.

In the aforementioned *Harsh Realities*, which included survey responses from 6,209 LGBT students, including 295 transgender youth between ages 13 and 20, 44% of transgender respondents reported having an LGBT club at school (Greytak et al., 2009). Of those who did have such a group, 68% reported attending meetings often or frequently. Compared to non-transgender gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, transgender students were less likely to report having a club but more like to report attending when one existed despite not being more likely to attend non-LGBT clubs. The authors concluded that schools should work to provide resources such as LGBT-supportive clubs due to their positive impact. In qualitative interviews involving 25 LGBTQ participants ages 14-19 in the United States and Canada regarding bathroom access, multiple participants described the varying levels of success their GSAs had in advocacy efforts such as restroom use (Porta et al., 2017). The authors noted that GSAs provide peer and adult support along with a method for LGBTQ youth to advocate for policy and structural changes. In an analysis of 1,882 digitized high school newspapers, researchers noted that

students who did not have access to such clubs often knew of their existence and longed for their support (Stern et al., 2018).

All schools may not be eager to have such organizations. In interviews with six principals who identified themselves as social justice leaders from high-poverty schools in a southern state, at least one principal raised concerns about community perception of an LGBTQ student organization (Albritton et al., 2017). Researchers summarized that the principals generally preferred LGBTQ students to keep quiet about LGBTQ-related issues.

Staff support. Research studies have also considered the importance of supportive staff members for transgender students. In the previously mentioned qualitative study of 24 transgender youth in Philadelphia, the need for staff training for advocacy and support was a common theme among participants (Sausa, 2005).

In the aforementioned *Harsh Realities*, which included survey responses from 6,209 LGBT students, including 295 transgender youth between ages 13 and 20, teachers and school-based mental health professionals were the staff members with which transgender respondents felt most comfortable discussing LGBT issues, and the most common adults at school with whom they discussed LGBT issues were teachers at 66% (Greytak et al., 2009). Students who were able to talk to staff members about LGBT issues or felt comfortable bringing up these topics in class were more likely to report feeling like a part of their school. Additionally, 83% of transgender students could identify at least one staff member they believed was supportive of LGBT students, but only 36% could identify six or more staff members as such.

In the previously mentioned survey of 5,730 LGBT youth who attended secondary schools across the United States that included 314 transgender and 223 "other gender identity" students, 68.8% of respondents reported being out to at least one staff member compared to 63.6% to at least one parent/guardian and 94.6% to at least one peer (Kosciw et al., 2013). Researchers concluded that supportive adults at school might be the most significant of the support factors in the study. Participants were asked how many LGBT-supportive staff members were at school, and the greater numbers were related to a decrease in the incidence of victimization, an increase in self-esteem, higher grade point averages, and fewer missed school days. The connection to missed days was especially relevant for those who had high rates of victimization. In the previously discussed study that included a quantitative survey of 2,560 middle and high school students with the 68 students identified as transgender, queer, or questioning as to their gender identity, connectedness to adults at school was positively correlated to negative school factors and negatively correlated with negative comments from staff (McGuire et al., 2010). The same study included qualitative focus groups with 36 transgender youth in the Western United States; only a few participants reported harassment from staff or staff intervention during peer harassment, and many participants were optimistic about the role teachers could play in improving climate through intervention. The focus groups also brought out the importance of adult advocates at school. These teachers, nurses, and principals helped protect student privacy and safety.

In *The 2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming, 96.6% of respondents could identify at least one staff member supportive of LGBTQ students, and 61% could identify six or

more (Kosciw et al., 2018). When asked which of seven types of staff members they would be somewhat or very comfortable talking to about LGBTQ issues, school-based mental health professionals were the top choice at 52.8% with teachers second at 42.3%. Students who saw visible symbols of support such as a sticker or poster had more positive views of their school and were also more likely to talk to teachers and school-based mental health professionals about LGBTQ issues. The presence of staff members supportive of LGBTQ students was related to feeling safer, missing fewer days, planning to finish high school, planning to pursue post-secondary education, earning a higher grade point average, experiencing a higher level of belonging at school, having higher self-esteem, and experiencing less depression. Students with more educators who intervened in anti-LGBTQ remarks felt safer, missed fewer days, and experienced lower levels of victimization based on sexual orientation or gender expression.

In qualitative interviews involving 25 LGBTQ participants ages 14-19 in the United States and Canada regarding bathroom access, participants described the important role of supportive adults in advocacy efforts for gender-neutral bathrooms (Porta et al., 2017). The authors commented on the importance of LGBTQ youth having at least one supportive adult at school for accessibility, safety, and advocacy; furthermore, the researchers recommended schools designate a liaison between LGBTQ youth and school administrators to help support the needs of these students. In qualitative interviews with three superintendents and one middle school principal in the Midwest, participants reported that faculty members were mostly supportive and offered little resistance for accommodating transgender students (Kurt & Chenault, 2017). One interviewee explicitly mentioned the role of staff in supporting all students, making sure

everyone is safe and creating a positive environment. In qualitative interviews with 20 transgender-supportive elementary principals across six states in the Northeast United States, Mangin (2019) found that school leaders used workshops, presentations, panels, and question-and-answer sessions to increase staff knowledge of transgender student needs. Sometimes professional development about gender was required, and most training sessions were only one session. After surveying 70 educators from 20 elementary schools across six states, Mangin (2018) identified a theme of teachers promoting a sense of belonging. This belongingness was cultivated through the creation of gender-inclusive classrooms that used gender-neutral terms, avoided gender-based procedures, and addressed gender through the curriculum both directly and indirectly.

Some research focused on a lack of support from staff members. In the previously cited survey of 6,456 transgender and gender-nonconforming adults, 31% of respondents reported harassment by K-12 school employees, 5% reported physical assault by K-12 school employees, and 3% reported sexual assault by K-12 school employees (Grant et al., 2011). Respondents from the South had the highest rate of harassment by a K-12 teacher or staff member at 36%. Of those who were physically assaulted by teachers and staff, 76% had also attempted suicide. The researchers recommended developing policies to help transgender students remain in school; investigating all reports of harassment and violence while enforcing policies against such actions; and creating a supportive, affirming environment for transgender and gender-nonconforming students.

Leadership support. Researchers have also explored the effects of supportive school leadership on transgender students. Some research offered insight into the perception of administrative support from transgender students. In *The 2017 National*

School Climate Survey of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming, only 25.9% of respondents said they would be somewhat or very comfortable talking to principals about LGBTQ issues (Kosciw et al., 2018). When asked how supportive their school's administration was of LGBTQ students, 25.9% were degrees of unsupportive, 34.3% were neutral, and 39.8% were degrees of supportive. In the aforementioned qualitative focus groups with 36 transgender youth in the Western United States, some participants reported that their principals had kept their original name and prior gender unknown to teachers and students, even changing it in official databases (McGuire et al., 2010). In qualitative interviews involving 25 LGBTQ participants ages 14-19 in the United States and Canada regarding bathroom access, one participant appreciatively described the importance of administrator support in understanding and advocating for a gender-neutral bathroom in their school (Porta et al., 2017).

Other research considered the experiences of the leaders themselves. In qualitative interviews with three superintendents and one middle school principal in the Midwest, researchers show the important role of school leaders in supporting transgender students (Kurt & Chenault, 2017). Most participants preferred democratic and localized decision-making rather than top-down directives. Participants described students and faculty members as mostly accepting of transgender students, noting that most pushbacks came from parents or community members. Participants emphasized the importance of providing a safe, protective environment for transgender students through supports and anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies. These leaders compared their obligation to meet the needs of transgender students to that of any other diverse population on campus,

and the interviews emphasized facilities and privacy as two important accommodations. Researchers in this study also indicated that school leaders should find a middle ground between having a clear policy and allowing local administrators to be adaptable. After surveying 70 educators from 20 elementary schools across six states, Mangin (2018) declared that principals were at the core of creating a supportive school culture for transgender students. These supportive leaders sought out learning opportunities regarding transgender people for themselves and others, and they found that all students benefitted from the implementation of new supports such as bathroom stalls, less restrictive language, and new information. None of the 20 principals included reported significant backlash; in fact, each reportedly only averaged one to two concerned parents.

In the aforementioned qualitative interviews with 20 transgender-supportive elementary principals across six states in the Northeast United States, Mangin (2019) explored how elementary principals support transgender students. Participants utilized a child-centered approach that included attending to the student's social and emotional needs, respecting and communicating with transgender students' families, and providing the necessary supports. These supportive leaders also focused on educating themselves, their staff, students, and sometimes the larger community. The principals described the meaningful growth they experienced when working with this population. The author concluded that supportive leaders sought the child's best interest even before policy concerns; preparation programs are needed to prepare administrators to handle gender-related issues in school, and the principals' experiences working with transgender students were overwhelmingly positive. The author acknowledged that while leaders

worked to support individual students, they did not emphasize disrupting binary gender norms to change overall school culture.

Not all studies found principals sensitive to the needs of LGBTQ students. In the aforementioned survey of 1,580 K-12 public school principals, only 4% reported having staff training on LGBT issues the previous school year, but 69% of respondents believed professional development would be the most helpful method of reducing bullying and harassment of LGBT students (Markow & Dancewicz, 2008). In interviews with six principals who identified themselves as social justice leaders from high-poverty schools in a southern state, each participant indicated that strong, negative feelings about LGBTQ students exist in their community and school, and only one participant stated that she had support from the community for LGBTQ students (Albritton et al., 2017). Despite self-identifying as socially just leaders, the principals tended to avoid LGBTQ students and their needs. The researchers concluded that the leaders were failing to use their influence to advocate for marginalized students and were instead contributing to the problematic culture; furthermore, the researchers indicated these principals were also failing to meet their professional standards regarding equity and cultural responsiveness.

Payne and Smith (2018) examined the reasons school leaders resist LGBTQ-related professional development for staff. Common themes that emerged included a belief that such training was not relevant, fear of community backlash, disapproval from school boards, and disinterest from staff. Some leaders took an interest in LGBTQ-related training regarding safety and bullying, but the authors warn that only addressing safety rather than inclusivity paints LGBTQ youth as simply victims. Because administrators did not seem to understand the relevance or benefits of LGBTQ-related professional

development, the authors recommended prioritizing the training of school leaders. Administrators must learn the basic terminology; see the connections to academic and social outcomes; examine their school systems; and recognize the relevance of LGBTQ students and families, seen and unseen, in the school community.

Policies. Research has also explored the role of school policies in supporting the needs of transgender students. The discussion often included ideas about where the policies should originate, how flexible policies should be, what these policies should cover, and the effects of such policies.

In the previously described qualitative interviews with three superintendents and one middle school principal in the Midwest, some respondents preferred allowing policy decisions to be made at the building level on a case-by-case basis while others advocated for district-wide procedures (Kurt & Chenault, 2017). Clearly defined policies can be reference points for fending off controversy and guaranteeing certain services and accommodation, but the majority of participants favored an adaptable approach with accountability measures included. The conversation included recognizing legal guidelines such as Title IX rules that prohibit discrimination based on sex, gender, or orientation and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act that would protect transgender student privacy while also acknowledging pressure from community members regarding restrooms. In the previously described survey of 70 educators from 20 elementary schools across six states, the researcher emphasized the role of the district in creating policies to address student privacy, name, and pronoun use, dress codes, sex-separated facilities and activities, harassment, and bullying (Mangin, 2018). One specific district in the study provided training for all district employees and assembled a task force to

collaboratively design policies based on those of other districts. In the aforementioned qualitative interviews with 20 transgender-supportive elementary principals across six states in the Northeast United States, Mangin (2019) noted that leaders addressed related issues with a student-centered approach rather than defaulting to policy and minimum guidelines. These leaders were informed about policy and law, but their primary strategy was to follow the lead of the transgender student and family.

In the previously discussed study that included focus groups with 36 transgender youth in the Western United States, researchers noted that participants were aware of relevant policies and were able to make productive suggestions for policy change; therefore, the writers recommended allowing transgender students to be included on committees that draft policy changes (McGuire et al., 2010). In an analysis of qualitative interviews involving 25 LGBTQ participants ages 14-19 in the United States and Canada, the authors discussed the role of Gay-Straight Alliances in providing a voice for adults and students to advocate for supportive bathroom policies (Porta et al., 2017). In qualitative interviews with 12 educators, researchers identified a lack of policy and procedure as a common theme (Payne & Smith, 2014). Educators wanted protocols in place to support transgender students as well as provide security to staff members.

In an online survey completed by a nationally representative sample of 1,580 K-12 public school principals, 96% of respondents reported having a safer school or anti-harassment policy, but only 21% reported having worked to create a safe environment for LGBT students specifically (Markow & Dancewicz, 2008). Only 39% reported an anti-bullying or anti-harassment policy covering gender identity or expression. In the aforementioned *Harsh Realities* that included survey responses from 6,209 LGBT

students, including 295 transgender youth between ages 13 and 20, 46% of respondents when asked if their school had a harassment or assault policy that explicitly included sexual orientation and gender identity or expression reported that they did not know or that their school did not have one (Greytak et al., 2009). Many reported having a generic policy that did not enumerate various categories of harassment, and only 12% reported their school has a policy that mentioned gender expression or identities. While analyzing the survey responses of 31,896 California youth, including 398 transgender students in consideration of gender-identity, truancy, victimization, bullying, grades, and school climate, researchers recommended implementing policies and practices that specifically provide support for the students most at risk for victimization (Day et al., 2018).

In the previously mentioned survey of 5,730 LGBT youth who attended secondary schools across the United States that included 314 transgender and 223 "other gender identity" students, researchers considered the impact of a comprehensive anti-bullying and anti-harassment policy that included protections for sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression (Kosciw et al., 2013). Having a comprehensive policy in school was predictive of higher self-esteem but not truancy or grades. The authors noted that while other research had shown comprehensive policies to be related to less hostile school climates for LGBT students, their research did not demonstrate a significant relationship between comprehensive policy and victimization. Notably, the data for school policies in this study was reported by students; in other words, it includes their perception of school policy. In discussing their study of 129 transgender and gender-nonconforming youth from three American cities, researchers encouraged policies that promoted gender affirmation for transgender youth (Russell et al., 2018). The authors

contended that allowing students to use their preferred names or have access to restrooms consistent with their gender identity would likely increase safety for transgender students and reduce physical and mental disparities.

In *The 2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming, 62.2% of respondents reported that they had experienced LGBTQ-related discriminatory policies and practices such as those that restricted LGBTQ expression in school, limited LGBTQ inclusion in extracurricular activities, and enforced adherence to traditional gender norms (Kosciw et al., 2018). Of those students who reported discriminatory policies, 44% reported experiencing some disciplinary action compared to 26.5% who did not report discriminatory policies. Regarding policies or guidelines regarding transgender or gender nonconforming students, only 10.6% of respondents reported that their school had such a policy. The most common policies reported for transgender and gender-nonconforming students involved name and pronoun use and school bathrooms, and fewer reported policies addressing housing during field trips or boarding, confidentiality, or community education.

Concerning bullying, harassment, and assault policies in the same study, 20.8% reported not having or not knowing if their school had such policies, 57.3% reported generic policies that did not specify sexual orientation or gender identity and expression, and 12.9% reported having a comprehensive policy that addressed both sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (Kosciw et al., 2018). Students in schools with comprehensive policies were less likely to hear anti-LGBTQ language at school, and more likely to report victimization to staff. Students with any type of anti-bullying policy

were less likely to experience victimization related to sexual orientation or gender expression. Students in schools with supportive transgender or gender-nonconforming policies were less likely to experience gender-based discrimination in areas such as facility use, gender expression, or identity use. The authors concluded that supportive and inclusive school policies play a critical role in creating safe and inclusive schools, but that the mere existence of the policy is not enough.

Identity recognition. In addition to structural supports, transgender students also have unique needs and accommodations regarding identity recognition at school. These identity needs especially refer to name and pronoun use at school and on student records.

The use of pronouns is so critical that in a qualitative study of nine transgender adults, each participant reported the misuse of their pronouns as a common microaggression, and most had been in situations where someone publicly challenged or demanded an explanation about their identity (Nadal et al., 2012). McKibben (2016) recommended asking transgender students about their chosen names and pronouns and then working to make sure this identity is always used at school to affirm the student. In the previously mentioned qualitative study of 24 transgender youth in Philadelphia, participants voiced the need for policies and procedures to support confidentiality, name use, and pronoun use (Sausa, 2005).

In the aforementioned study of 166 transgender adults, the majority of respondents had been asked to be called by their new name, had teachers and fellow students refer to them by this name, and felt very or extremely comfortable with their preferred pronouns (Factor & Rothblum, 2008). In a study of 129 transgender and gender-nonconforming youth from three American cities, the use of a chosen name

predicted fewer depressive symptoms, less suicidal ideation, and less suicidal behavior (Russell et al., 2018). These numbers were at their lowest when the chosen name was used in all four contexts: home, school, work, and friends. An increase of chosen-name use in one context could predict a 5.37-unit decrease in depressive symptoms, a 29% decrease in suicidal ideation, and a 56% decrease in suicidal behavior (Russell et al., 2018). The authors suggest that institutions such as schools could allow transgender youth to use their chosen names in records and interactions as gender-affirming policies will likely enhance safety and reduce physical and mental disparities for this group.

In *The 2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming, 42.1% of transgender and gender-nonconforming students, and 26.6% of total respondents reported being prevented from using their chosen name or pronouns (Kosciw et al., 2018). For the 11.5% of transgender and gender-nonconforming students who reported that their school had transgender and gender-nonconforming policies, name and pronoun use was the most popular topic at 82.7%. In the total sample, only 9.4% of transgender and gender-nonconforming students reported that their school had a policy for transgender and gender-nonconforming student names and pronouns. Students in schools with transgender and gender-nonconforming policies were half as likely to experience name and pronoun discrimination as those without such policies. Statistically, the specific inclusion of name and pronoun policies did not matter much beyond the presence of general transgender and gender-nonconforming policy.

In the previously discussed study that included focus groups with 36 transgender youth in the Western United States, some participants commented on the importance of

having their birth name changed in the school database to protect their privacy (McGuire et al., 2010). In *The 2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming, 6.3% of transgender and gender-nonconforming respondents reported having a school policy about changing official school records to reflect gender and name (Kosciw et al., 2018). Of schools that had any transgender and gender nonconforming policies, 55.1% included names and gender in student records.

Facility usage. Another unique challenge transgender students face involves access to sex-separated facilities such as restrooms and locker rooms (Greytak et al., 2009). So paramount is this issue that in *The 2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming, 42.7% of respondents reported avoiding bathrooms and 40.6% reported avoiding locker rooms because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (Kosciw et al., 2018). Some common topics relating to transgender student bathroom needs include policies, experiences, and effects; additionally, disagreement regarding gender-neutral bathrooms is a common theme in research.

In the previously described qualitative interviews with three superintendents and one middle school principal in the Midwest, all participants identified bathroom and locker room privacy as the central concern of parents, students, and community members; furthermore, they expressed a dilemma in balancing the needs of transgender students with the fears of others (Kurt & Chenault, 2017). Some respondents described how misinformation and a lack of understanding led to pushback regarding transgender students' use of facilities. For the most part, participants advocated for student choice in

restroom use whether a private bathroom, the bathroom that corresponded with the students' identified gender, or one that correlated with their biological sex. Participants struggled to balance Title IX regulations that bar discrimination based on sex or gender with community pressure regarding restroom access. Some mentioned private changing areas or bathrooms as a less than ideal but valid solution, and one superintendent foresaw facilities moving away from gender lines.

In *The 2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming, 31.1% of respondents reported being required to use the bathroom that corresponded to their legal sex and 29.6% reported being required to use the locker room that corresponded to their legal sex (Kosciw et al., 2018). Regarding school policies, 72.8% of those with policies specific to transgender students had a policy that allowed them access to the bathroom that matched their gender, 62.2% had a policy that provided access to a gender-neutral bathroom, and 45.9% reported a policy that gave access to a locker room matching their gender identity. While these numbers appear high, they are only 8.3%, 7.1%, and 5.2% of the total sample. Students with policies allowing transgender and gender-nonconforming students access to bathrooms and locker rooms that corresponded to their gender identity were less likely to report not being allowed to use the bathroom that corresponded with their identity; however, having a policy that provided a gender-neutral bathroom did not show a significant effect on bathroom-related discrimination. The study did show that gender-neutral bathrooms related to less bathroom discrimination for nonbinary students—students who identify outside of the traditional gender binary such as genderfluid or

bigender— but not so for binary students, such as cisgender or some transgender students.

In the aforementioned qualitative interviews with 20 transgender-supportive elementary principals across six states in the Northeast United States, Mangin (2019) shared an example of a principal suggesting a gender-neutral bathroom to a parent who was worried about their child being in the same bathroom as a transgender child. The author praised this response as child-centered and supportive of the transgender youth. McKibben (2016) noted that the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights has defended transgender students' rights to use the bathrooms and locker rooms that match their gender identity. Using a gender-neutral or nurse's bathroom can be stigmatizing and should not be a long-term solution.

In an experimental study of 400 participants, Platt and Milam (2018) described several findings that all pointed to a common theme: the general public tends to prefer bathroom use consistent with someone's gender appearance, even if they are known to be transgender. The authors warned that people are more uncomfortable if the person appears to be of a different gender; therefore, policies requiring transgender people to use the bathroom based on their birth certificate sex could be quite problematic.

Much research has focused on the experiences of transgender people and bathrooms. In a qualitative study featuring focus groups with nine transgender adults, Nadal et al. (2012) described examples of the challenges transgender people face when selecting a public restroom. Transgender people often must choose between being seen as a predator or a target in restrooms as they try to determine the least dangerous and offensive option. Transgender people endure intimidation and humiliation in public

bathrooms, and they often choose not to use public restrooms despite the numerous physical and psychological consequences of not going when needed. In the aforementioned study surveying 166 transgender and gender nonconforming adults, the majority of respondents reported at least a little discomfort in having to choose a gendered bathroom (Factor & Rothblum, 2008). When asked about the degree of discomfort in choosing a gendered bathroom, 25.5% of male-to-female respondents, 30.8% of female-to-male, and 42.2% of gender-nonconforming respondents chose very or extremely uncomfortable.

In the previously cited survey of 6,456 transgender and gender-nonconforming adults, 26% reported being denied access to gender-appropriate bathrooms in schools, and 22% reported being denied appropriate restroom facilities at work (Grant et al., 2011). In the aforementioned qualitative focus groups with 36 transgender youth in the Western United States, many participants spoke of supportive staff that facilitated access to private bathrooms and changing rooms to protect student privacy and safety (McGuire et al., 2010). In the previously mentioned qualitative study of 24 transgender youth in Philadelphia, many participants reported avoiding bathrooms and locker rooms altogether (Sausa, 2005).

In qualitative interviews involving 25 LGBTQ participants ages 14-19 in the United States and Canada regarding bathroom access, researchers identified three major themes (Porta et al., 2017). First, the respondents overwhelmingly praised and advocated for gender-neutral bathrooms. Also, respondents consistently demonstrated that gendered bathrooms created struggles from discomfort to fear for safety. Finally, many respondents described ways in which they had advocated for gender-neutral bathrooms at school and

in the broader community. The authors also described the importance of making such bathrooms easily accessible and available to all students to reduce stigmatization.

In the previously described study of 1,046 students attending grades 9-12 in southeast Michigan, transgender students reported significantly fewer feelings of safety in restrooms and locker rooms than cisgender students (Wernick et al., 2017). The effect of transgender identity on overall feelings of school safety was reduced when students felt safer in bathrooms, and bathroom safety also impacted transgender students' self-esteem compared to cisgender boys. The negative effect of transgender identity on grades was buffered by feelings of safety in bathrooms; furthermore, the models suggested that without gendered disparities in bathroom safety and self-esteem, transgender students in the sample would have higher grades than cisgender students. The authors concluded that ensuring safe access to bathrooms and other school facilities was a vital component of addressing educational inequity.

In an analysis of 1,882 digitized high school newspapers, researchers noted students often looked negatively upon some legislative bathroom bills and lamented the struggle of transgender students choosing a restroom (Stern et al., 2018). Numerous students wrote of the need for bathroom policies to accommodate transgender and non-binary students, and some saw this issue as representative of the general prejudice toward transgender people.

Sex-separated events and activities. Researchers have also explored the needs of transgender students regarding sex-separated events and activities. Some examples of traditionally gendered aspects of school include dances, school pictures, overnight accommodations, physical education classes, and sports.

In *The 2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming, 11.7% of respondents reported being prevented from attending a school dance with someone of the same gender (Kosciw et al., 2018). In interviews with six principals who identified themselves as social justice leaders from high-poverty schools in a southern state, one participant reported having a rule that only boy-girl couples could attend prom, one anticipated some pushback regarding LGBTQ couples attending, and only one respondent reported that it was common to have same-sex couples at prom (Albritton et al., 2017). The same sample also made multiple comments implying that LGBTQ students should be private about their identity. While these comments were about LGBTQ people in general, the relevance toward transgender and gender-nonconforming students is clear.

In the previously described qualitative interviews with three superintendents and one middle school principal in the Midwest, researchers noted that many school activities, such as sports participation, dances, or overnight field trips, had been gendered, and some participants discussed the importance of changing this emphasis (Kurt & Chenault, 2017). In *The 2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender-nonconforming, respondents also reported many gendered aspects of school life (Kosciw et al., 2018). For example, 48.6% reported gender-specific homecoming court or dance honors, 31.1% reported gender-specific graduation attire, 28.3% were required to wear gender-specific attire for a school picture, and 25.6% had been prevented from wearing clothes considered inappropriate for their legal sex. This focus on the traditional binary has obvious implications for transgender and gender-nonconforming students.

In *The 2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students in which 46.3% were transgender or gender nonconforming, 39.3% of respondents reported feeling uncomfortable or unsafe in physical education or gym class, 24.7% reported feeling uncomfortable or unsafe in school athletic fields or facilities, and 11.3% reported being discouraged from joining sports by school staff (Kosciw et al., 2018). Transgender and gender-nonconforming students were less likely to participate in sports when required to use locker rooms corresponding to their legal sex.

In *The 2017 National School Climate Survey* of 23,001 LGBTQ students, only 11.5% of transgender and gender-nonconforming students reported having specific school policies regarding their group (Kosciw et al., 2018). Of those with policies for transgender and gender-nonconforming students, 51.9% allowed students to participate in non-sports extracurricular activities that match their gender identity, 48.4% allowed attire that matched the students' gender identity, 42.4% allowed students to participate in sports based on their gender identity, and 25.5% allowed the student to stay in dormitories or field trip housing to match their gender identity. While these numbers may appear substantial, they represent only 5.9%, 5.5%, 4.8%, and 2.9% of the total sample, respectively.

Transgender students' challenges regarding athletic participation have received much attention. Interscholastic sports play a key role in child development while offering a safe haven for transgender students to express their identity (Acklin, 2017). Not only can sports teach important skills and promote physical health, but student-athletes often have high rates of attendance, higher grades, and lower rates of depression and anxiety (Lenzi, 2018). California was the first state to allow high school students to compete

based on their gender identity (Mahoney et al., 2015). Opponents of transgender student participation are concerned about unfair competitive advantages, although little research has been done to demonstrate this advantage. According to a website that provided resources and information regarding transgender athletic participation, 18 states and the District of Columbia now have inclusive policies that allow transgender high school athletes to compete with surgery or hormone requirements; 16 states allow transgender students to participate based on gender identity but with stipulations, such as medical intervention or subjective case-by-case decisions; 10 states require students to participate based on their birth gender assignment or surgery; and six states have no formal policy (TRANSATHLETE.com, 2020). In May 2020, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights informed Connecticut that their transgender-inclusive policy was discriminatory against cisgender girls and thus violated Title IX's protection of equal educational opportunities for women (Eaton-Robb, 2020).

The International Olympic Committee allows transgender men to compete without restriction, but transgender women are required to undergo hormone therapy to maintain suppressed testosterone for 12 months before a competition (Lenzi, 2018). The National Collegiate Athletic Association allows a transgender man to compete on a men's team and also allows him to compete on a women's team if he has not undergone testosterone treatment; however, a transgender woman must undergo hormone treatment to compete on a women's team but may compete on a men's team with no restriction. *Schools in Transition: A Guide for Supporting Transgender Students in K-12 Schools* disapproves of requiring medical transitioning for athletic participation as it is not available to all students and is also a private decision (Orr et al., 2015). Requiring

medical changes to participate is impractical and insufficient (Acklin, 2017). The Arkansas Activities Association, which governs sports and other competitions between Arkansas schools, bases a participant's gender eligibility solely on their birth certificate designation, including any amendments to the certificate (Arkansas Activities Association, 2019). In January 2021, newly-inaugurated President Biden issued an executive order to prohibit discrimination based on gender identity, and this document specifically mentioned students being able to learn without fearing their access to restrooms, locker rooms, or athletics (Biden, 2021).

National Polices

Arkansas schools have received guidance from a variety of sources such as federal agencies, state governments, advocacy organizations, and court rulings. Information regarding the application of Title IX and the Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment for transgender students has been changing and conflicting (ArkansasOnline Staff and Wire Reports, 2016; Battle & Wheeler, 2017; Biden, 2021; Ferg-Cadima, 2015; GLSEN, 2019; Lhamon & Gupta, 2016; Meyer & Keenan, 2018; Orr et al., 2015; Stern et al., 2018; Turner & Kamentez, 2018; Williams, 2019), and policies and procedures vary significantly among states (Mattingly, 2020; Meyer & Keenan, 2018; National, 2020).

Federal guidance. School leaders in Arkansas schools have received guidelines from various departments of the federal government. Some key documents include the 2015 Emily Prince Letter, the 2016 Dear Colleague Letter, the 2017 Dear Colleague Letter, the 2018 Department of Education Announcement, the 2020 Department of Education sports ruling, and the 2021 Executive Order.

2015 Emily Prince Letter. In a letter from January 2015, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Liberties published a response regarding an inquiry about transgender student access to restrooms and other facilities and the relevance of Title IX anti-discrimination protections (Ferg-Cadima, 2015). Backed with multiple citations and references to case law, this letter to Emily Prince confirmed that Title IX permits schools to have sex-segregated facilities, teams, and classes and that when schools allow such segregation, they should generally treat transgender students consistently with their gender identity. The letter also encouraged gender-neutral and individual facility options for students who do not want to use a sex-segregated facility. The letter concluded with references to two recent investigations in which the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Liberties concluded that policies must be revised to ensure transgender students receive restroom access consistent with their gender identity.

Dear Colleague Letter 2016. Under the Obama Administration, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice issued a Dear Colleague letter that recommended schools recognize students by the gender they or their parents asserted even if it differed from their birth certificate (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016). Released in May 2016, the body of the document was about five pages and included 35 citations. These departments reminded schools that discrimination based on gender violated Title IX law and could exclude them from receiving federal funding. Specifically, schools were informed that they should provide a non-discriminatory environment, recognize the students' preferred names and pronouns, allow students access to sex-separated facilities and events based on their preferred identity, and protect student privacy. The document

explicitly asked schools to honor transgender student identities in locker rooms, restrooms, athletics, and housing for overnight trips.

Shortly thereafter, many Arkansas political leaders spoke out against the letter (ArkansasOnline Staff and Wire Reports, 2016). Arkansas governor Asa Hutchinson referred to the letter as simply guidance rather than a legally binding document and suggested the federal government was overreaching into local control. Leaders also indicated that the letter was pushing a social agenda by addressing issues that were not relevant in Arkansas.

The guidelines met opposition from outside of Arkansas as well (Meyer & Keenan, 2018). Less than two weeks after publication, 11 states filed a lawsuit challenging the federal guidance, and 10 more states, including Arkansas, joined in July 2016. The plaintiffs argued that sex in Title IX meant only biological and anatomical sex as determined at birth, not gender identity. The following month, U.S. District Judge Reed O'Connor of Texas agreed that Title IX should not include gender identity and granted a preliminary national injunction meaning the guidance was not enforceable. Since the definition of sex under Title IX is still debated, transgender youth often do not get the full support and protection needed at school.

Dear Colleague Letter 2017. In February 2017, under the new Trump administration, the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Civil Rights issued an alternative Dear Colleague letter that rescinded the 2015 Emily Prince letter and the 2016 Dear Colleague letter (Battle & Wheeler, 2017). While the new letter referred to continued protections against bullying and harassment, it overturned the previous federal guidance by citing court cases that challenged the application of the term

"sex" from Title IX to apply to gender identity. This new letter also deferred to states and local districts on educational policy.

2018 Department of Education announcement. In February of 2018, the U.S. Department of Education announced it would no longer hear complaints or take action on discrimination cases regarding gender identity and bathroom use (Turner & Kamentez, 2018). During the month prior, the Education Department dismissed several of such cases. Liz Hill, the department's spokesperson, contended that Title IX protection only applied to sex and not gender identity; therefore, bathroom access based on gender identity would not qualify as discrimination. She confirmed that Title IX's sex discrimination protections still applied when students were penalized or harassed for failing to conform to sex-based stereotypes. Eliza Byard, executive director of the advocacy group GLSEN, noted that this new stance contradicted a previous court ruling that denying transgender students appropriate bathroom use is a Title IX violation.

2020 Department of Education sports ruling. In May 2020, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights issued a ruling that Connecticut's transgender-inclusive policy violated Title IX's guarantee of equal educational opportunities for women (Eaton-Robb, 2020). Responding to a complaint from track athletes, the Department concluded that by allowing transgender girls to run track against cisgender girls, the state was discriminating against cisgender girls' access to athletic benefits and opportunities. The letter also threatened to withhold federal funding to the athletic conference and school districts involved or refer the case to the U.S. Department of Justice. The current policy is in accordance with the state law of Connecticut, one of 18 states to have transgender-inclusive high school athletics.

2021 Executive order. In January 2021, newly-inaugurated President Biden issued an executive order to prohibit discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation (Biden, 2021). This document specifically mentioned students being able to learn without fearing their access to restrooms, locker rooms, or athletics.

Guidance from other organizations. Beyond the federal government, schools have also received guidance from various advocacy groups. Such resources include *Schools in Transition: a Guide for Supporting Transgender Students in K-12 Schools* from the American Civil Liberties Union, Gender Spectrum, Human Rights Campaign, National Center for Lesbian Rights, and the National Education Association (Orr et al., 2015) as well as GLSEN's *Model District Policy on Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Student*s (GLSEN, 2019).

Schools in Transition: A Guide for Supporting Transgender Students in K-12 Schools. In 2015, the American Civil Liberties Union, Gender Spectrum, Human Rights Campaign, National Center for Lesbian Rights, and the National Education Association published *Schools in Transition: A Guide for Supporting Transgender Students in K-12 Schools* (Orr et al., 2015). This 62-page document aimed to guide schools to meet the needs of transgender students while creating a safe and supportive environment to benefit all students. The document included some information on key terms, important talking points, legality, age, privacy, and transitioning while providing specific guidance on student records, identity, dress codes, sex-separated facilities and activities, discrimination, harassment, and bullying.

The document gave guidelines for protecting student privacy and preventing potential breeches regarding transgender students' birth names and sex assignments in the

school's information system (Orr et al., 2015). The authors also encouraged schools to consistently use transgender student's chosen names and pronouns when interacting with students, including students who prefer gender-neutral pronouns. Students should be allowed to dress according to their gender identity under the school's dress code regardless of the gender designated on their birth certificate.

The guide also devoted considerable emphasis on sex-separated facilities, activities, and programs, as these tend to be more controversial by challenging traditional ideas about gender (Orr et al., 2015). Regarding restrooms and locker rooms, the authors noted six states and many individual districts across the nation affirm transgender students by allowing them to use the restroom and locker rooms. They also attempted to dispel fears of misbehavior and reminded readers of the importance of student privacy. Regarding competitive sports teams, the guide noted 15 states allowed transgender students to participate based on their gender identity and described some reasons not to require medical transitioning to participate. The authors provided strategies to base overnight field trips, physical education classes, homecoming, and prom on gender identity rather than the sex assigned at birth. The guide also emphasized the importance of not only having policies against discrimination, harassment, and bullying but also avoiding zero-tolerance policies that disproportionately affect a specific population. The authors also included strategies for working with unsupportive parents.

GLSEN Model District Policy on Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students. On their advocacy website, GLSEN provides the *Model District Policy on Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Student*s to outline best practices to ensure that all students are safe (GLSEN, 2019). This policy recommends allowing students to use

the restrooms and locker rooms that correspond with their gender identity. Any students who are uncomfortable for any reason should be allowed a safe and non-stigmatizing alternative. All gender-based activities, such as school pictures or ceremonies, should be based on gender identity. The organization recommends gender-neutral dress codes but maintains that any policy based on gender should be consistent with the student's gender identity and expression. The model policy recommends meeting with parents regarding the student's transition needs, safety, and resources. The policy explicitly notes that parent approval is not a prerequisite for respecting a student's gender identity. The site also provides information on staff training, anti-discrimination, and school climate.

Notable court cases. Several recent court cases have affirmed transgender student rights and protections. Some particular cases include *Whitaker v. Kenosha Unified School District*, *Evancho v. Pine-Richland School District*, and *G.G. v. Gloucester County School Board* (Meyer & Keenan, 2018; Stern et al., 2018).

Whitaker v. Kenosha Unified School District. In 2017, the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals issued a unanimous decision in *Whitaker v. Kenosha Unified School District* stating the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment and Title IX both protected the transgender plaintiff's use of a bathroom at school corresponding with his gender identity (Meyer & Keenan, 2018). The court found that the district engaged in sex discrimination by treating a transgender student differently for not complying with sex stereotypes associated with his gender assigned at birth (Stern et al., 2018). While this ruling primarily affects students in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana, it established a legal basis for other courts to apply Title IX and Equal Protection more expansively (Meyer & Keenan, 2018).

Evancho v. Pine-Richland School District Also in 2017, *Evancho v. Pine-Richland School District* involved a plaintiff bringing allegation that a district's anti-transgender bathroom policy violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment as well as the sexual discrimination elements of Title IX (Stern et al., 2018). The federal court agreed with the Equal Protection claim and noted that transgender discrimination is essentially discrimination based on gender nonconformity; however, the court did not agree with the Title IX claim, citing uncertainty surrounding a similar case, *G.G. v. Gloucester County School Board*.

G.G. v. Gloucester County School Board. Gavin Grimm, a transgender student in Virginia, filed suit against the local school board for not allowing him to use a male bathroom (Stern et al., 2018). The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia ruled against Grimm, but a three-judge panel in the Fourth Circuit's Court of Appeals reversed the ruling based on the Department of Education's reasonable interpretation of ambiguous Title IX guidelines. The Supreme Court originally upheld the Fourth Circuit's ruling until the Trump administration reversed transgender bathroom guidance for schools, thus eliminating the basis for the ruling. In March 2017, the Supreme Court vacated the *G.G. v. Gloucester County School Board* decision, which therefore left up to the states the question of how to best support transgender students (Meyer & Keenan, 2018).

2019 U.S. Supreme Court refusal to hear. On May 2019, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear a suit in which students claimed allowing transgender students in bathrooms that matched their gender identity was a violation of the plaintiffs' right to bodily privacy and equal educational opportunity (Williams, 2019). The school district

contended that any student was welcome to use the single-user restrooms as well as shower stalls with curtains, and the case became about who should be forced to use the private facility. This was the second time in two years the issue had been avoided by the Supreme Court, as it upheld the lower court's ruling that the policy served in protecting transgender students from discrimination.

Other states. Policies and procedures for a transgender student at schools vary from state to state (National, 2020). According to the National Center for Transgender Equality's website, 17 states and the District of Columbia have some level of state law protections for transgender students at school (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2020). Between 2011 and 2015, California passed three major laws to address transgender student concerns, such as identity, accessibility, and safety at school; however, researchers found that not all schools are reflecting each element of these laws in their school policies and warned that policies, though helpful, have significant limitations (Meyer & Keenan, 2018). Virginia, which recently passed a law requiring the Virginia Department of Education to create model transgender student policies for districts to use, is an example of a state beginning to develop uniform policies and procedures to make schools more inclusive of transgender students (Mattingly, 2020).

Summary

Transgender students are a population at risk, and school policies and procedures can help support these students (Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2013; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; McGuire et al., 2010; McKibben, 2016; Mangin, 2018; Meyer & Keenan, 2018). Arkansas schools have received guidance from a variety of sources such as federal agencies, state governments, court rulings, and advocacy organizations.

Information regarding the application of Title IX and the Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment for transgender students has been changing and conflicting (ArkansasOnline Staff and Wire Reports, 2016; Battle & Wheeler, 2017; Biden, 2021; Ferg-Cadima, 2015; GLSEN, 2019; Lhamon & Gupta, 2016; Meyer & Keenan, 2018; Orr et al., 2015; Stern et al., 2018; Turner & Kamentez, 2018; Williams, 2019), and policies and procedures vary significantly among states (Mattingly, 2020; Meyer & Keenan, 2018; National, 2020).

Chapter 3 details the methodology for this mixed-methods, exploratory study. A survey was sent to Arkansas principals with at least a ninth grade, and the instrument included questions about policies and practices relating to transgender students and pronoun use, name use, sex-separated facilities, and sex-separated activities. Descriptive statistics from survey responses provided information relevant to answering the first two research questions. For the third research question, the results of demographics questions, such as school size, community type, free and reduced lunch participation, and geographic location, were compared with the policies and procedure responses using a nonparametric chi-square test. Some open-ended questions allowed respondents to provide more detail about the implementation and effectiveness of these policies and practices, and qualitative analysis was performed in search of codes and themes.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This exploratory study considered the policies and general practices that exist in Arkansas schools regarding transgender students, as reported by high school principals. Specific areas of focus included student identity such as name and pronoun, facility usage such as bathrooms and locker rooms, and sex-separated activities. This methods chapter describes how the study was conducted and how the data were analyzed. Specific topics include research questions, hypotheses, the rationale for the research design, the purpose of the study, research design and methodology, population, instrumentation, procedures, statistical analysis, and research ethics.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was threefold: (a) to determine what formal policies exist in Arkansas high schools regarding transgender students' use of preferred names and pronouns as well as their access to sex-separated facilities and activities, (b) to determine what unofficial but established practices exist in Arkansas high schools regarding transgender students' use of preferred names and pronouns as well as their access to sex-separated facilities and activities, and (c) to examine the frequency of such policies and practices within various school demographic categories.

Research Questions

This study was guided by three questions:

1) According to high school building principals, what formal policies exist in Arkansas secondary schools regarding transgender students' preferred identity usage in class and on student records, access to sex-separated facilities, and placement in sex-separated activities?

2) According to high school building principals, what unofficial but established practices exist in Arkansas secondary schools regarding the use of transgender students' preferred identity usage in class and on student records, access to sex-separated facilities, and placement in sex-separated activities?
3) Are the frequencies of such policies and practices equally represented among various school demographic indicators such as school size, community type, free and reduced lunch participation, and geographic location?

Research Context

Arkansas schools have received changing and conflicting guidance from the federal government, state government, advocacy groups, and the U.S. Supreme Court about accommodating transgender students regarding names, pronouns, facilities, and activities (ArkansasOnline Staff and Wire Reports, 2016; Battle & Wheeler, 2017; Biden, 2021; Ferg-Cadima, 2015; GLSEN, 2019; Lhamon & Gupta, 2016; Meyer & Keenan, 2018; Orr et al., 2015; Stern et al., 2018; Turner & Kamentez, 2018; Williams, 2019). Because the state has no formal policies regarding this issue, each district or school may have its own policies or practices. The lack of readily available information could reflect the perceived controversial nature of this topic, and a survey of high school principals could be an avenue to reveal not only what school leaders are doing but also what led to these policies and practices.

Research Design and Methods

This mixed-method exploratory study attempted to tell what policies and practices exist in Arkansas secondary schools relating to transgender students' pronouns, names, use of sex-separated facilities, and participation in sex-separated activities. Participants responded to an online survey using *QuestionPro*©. This survey included questions about policies and practices relating to transgender students and pronoun use, name use, sex-separated facilities, and sex-separated activities. Some questions included follow-up questions based on the user's response. Some open-ended questions allowed respondents to provide more detail about the implementation and effectiveness of these policies and practices.

Rationale for the Research Design

A survey design "provides a quantitative description of trends, attitudes, and opinions of a population, or tests for associations among variables of a population, by studying a sample of that population" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 147). This non-experimental design provided information to answer descriptive questions about relationships between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, the survey design was an appropriate option as it served to quantify the policies and practices occurring around transgender students in Arkansas high schools and demonstrate any possible relationships and trends therein. The completed survey data provided insight into how these Arkansas schools address and accommodate transgender students.

The analysis of the survey's multiple-choice and open-response questions included both quantitative and qualitative investigation. This mixed-methods approach involved integrating the two types of data with distinct designs to produce insight beyond

what just quantitative or qualitative analysis alone would produce (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This allowed the researcher to explore not only what policies and practices existed in Arkansas schools but also the rationale behind these decisions.

Population

The population for this study was the building principals of the 342 Arkansas public schools that contain a ninth grade or higher. To focus the study on high schools, the survey only solicited feedback from campuses that include a ninth grade or higher. On July 9, 2020, the researcher received confirmation from the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators (AAEA) that the instrument could be sent out from their organization to their body, which includes most, if not all, Arkansas secondary administrators. To prevent duplicate responses from multiple administrators within a school, the instructions specified that the survey is only intended for building principals. The actual number of participants was represented by those principals who responded to the survey.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study was a survey developed by the researcher. Before the survey was administered to participants, it was presented to a panel of experts consisting of educational leaders in Arkansas public schools. The purpose of this peer review was to ensure that the questions were clear and unambiguous and best expressed the intent of the researcher. The members of the peer review panel were not to be part of the surveyed participants. Specifically, the panel included five licensed Arkansas educators from various regions of the state: Harry Alvis, an assistant superintendent with Rivercrest School District; Prentice Dupins, Jr., a middle school teacher with Nemo Vista

School District; Felicia Florez, a secondary special education supervisor with Fort Smith Public Schools; Heather Hooks, a secondary dean of students with Bentonville School District, and Brenda Poole, the superintendent of Brinkley Public Schools. Any modifications resulting from the peer review were made before the survey was administered. The questions are included in Appendix A.

Procedures, Data Collection, and Statistical Analysis

The researcher inputted the survey items into *QuestionPro*©. Questions #1-9 were multiple-choice, questions #6-9 included branching options, and questions #10-13 were open-ended. The questions appear in Appendix A. After the survey was set up in *QuestionPro*©, the researcher submitted the link on October 7, 2020, to the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators (AAEA), which had agreed to send it to all the high school principals in the state of Arkansas through the email list of their subgroup, the Arkansas Association of Secondary School Principals. This organization sent out the survey on October 12, 2020, with a message (Appendix B) including instructions to these principals regarding consent, an assurance of anonymity, and the human subjects' rights and protections. The email and survey instructions included the following script:

> The purpose of this study is to describe official policies and unofficial but established practices regarding transgender students in Arkansas secondary schools. It is intended to be completed only by the building principal of any Arkansas public school that includes 9th grade or higher as participation from anyone else could lead to duplicate responses from the same building. The survey is anonymous, includes no foreseeable risks or costs, and should take about five minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary and you may exit the survey at any

time if you decide not to continue. The data will be collected by researcher Matthew White and eventually destroyed. By submitting the survey, you consent to have your anonymous responses used in this study by investigator Matthew White for his dissertation research as approved by the Institutional Review Board at Arkansas Tech University. If you have questions about this study, you may contact Matthew White at mwhite9@atu.edu. Thank you for your participation.

On October 24, 2020, after receiving only 16 responses, the researcher sent out a second request directly to the email addresses of principals from Arkansas schools with a grade nine or higher as found on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's online contact list. The message (Appendix C) included a slightly different greeting with the same formal scripting as the first email and actual survey. On October 31, the researcher closed the survey.

Some of the basic data analysis was available from *QuestionPro*©, and the rest was calculated by uploading the data sets into the Statistical Product and Service Solutions software licensed through Arkansas Tech University. The researcher used descriptive statistics to report the frequencies and percentages of schools that have policies and the varying approaches used for issues relating to name and pronoun use, sex-separated facilities, and sex-separated activities. The results of each multiple-choice question were quantified, and the data analysis consisted of descriptive statistics from survey responses and provided information relevant to answering the first two research questions. For the third research question, the results of demographics questions, such as school size, community type, free and reduced lunch participation, and geographic location, were compared with the policies and procedure responses using a nonparametric

chi-square test. Researchers use chi-square tests to determine if a frequency distribution is based on chance, and a chi-square test based on one variable is often referred to as a goodness of fit test (Salkind, 2017). The researcher applied qualitative techniques to determine codes and themes for the open-ended questions (Patton, 2002).

Research Ethics

The researcher did not collect any data until approval was received from the Arkansas Tech University Institutional Review Board (Appendix D). Participants were briefed about the purpose of the study. The online survey made users aware of their anonymity, and no identifying data will be collected. Participation was voluntary; furthermore, respondents were able to exit the survey at any time. No deception was used, and the results were published as part of this dissertation at Arkansas Tech University.

Summary

The researcher disseminated a survey to all Arkansas high school principals to determine what set policies and unofficial practices exist in Arkansas public schools regarding transgender student name and pronoun use, access to sex-separated facilities, and participation in sex-separated events, as well as to describe how these policies and practices may vary in different schools. The survey was designed in *QuestionPro*©, revised through a pilot study, distributed by the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators, and analyzed through statistical software. Results would undergo quantitative data analysis through descriptive statistics, and open-ended questions were subject to qualitative investigation of codes and themes. All work was subject to the Arkansas Tech University Institutional Review Board and relevant ethical standards.

Chapter 4 includes the data collection, sample, and findings of the study. The findings address the three research questions regarding official policies for transgender students, unofficial but established practices for transgender students, and the frequency of such policies and practices for various school demographic indicators. The findings also include other related information regarding the presence of transgender students and qualitative analysis of the open-response survey questions.

Chapter Four: Research Results and Findings

Transgender students are a group at risk, and policies and practices within schools can either help this population or exacerbate their problems (Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2013; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; McGuire et al., 2010; McKibben, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2014). Arkansas schools have received changing and conflicting guidance from the federal government, state government, advocacy groups, and the U.S. Supreme Court about accommodating transgender students regarding names, pronouns, facilities, and activities (ArkansasOnline Staff and Wire Reports, 2016; Battle & Wheeler, 2017; Biden, 2021; Ferg-Cadima, 2015; GLSEN, 2019; Lhamon & Gupta, 2016; Meyer & Keenan, 2018; Orr et al., 2015; Stern et al., 2018; Turner & Kamentez, 2018; Williams, 2019). The governor of Arkansas and the recent Trump administration have both indicated this is a state or local decision (ArkansasOnline Staff and Wire Reports, 2016; Battle & Wheeler, 2017); however, newly-inaugurated President Biden has issued an executive order in favor of accommodating transgender students. There has not been any attempt to examine what practices were taking place regarding transgender students in Arkansas high schools.

The purpose of this exploratory study was threefold: (a) to determine what formal policies exist in Arkansas high schools regarding transgender students' use of preferred names and pronouns as well as their access to sex-separated facilities and activities, (b) to determine what unofficial but established practices exist in Arkansas high schools regarding transgender students' use of preferred names and pronouns as well as their access to sex-separated facilities and activities, and (c) to examine the frequency of such

policies and practices within various school demographic categories. Three research questions guided the study:

1) According to high school building principals, what formal policies exist in Arkansas secondary schools regarding transgender students' preferred identity usage in class and on student records, access to sex-separated facilities, and placement in sex-separated activities?
2) According to high school building principals, what unofficial but established practices exist in Arkansas secondary schools regarding the use of transgender students' preferred identity usage in class and on student records, access to sex-separated facilities, and placement in sex-separated activities?
3) Are the frequencies of such policies and practices equally represented among various school demographic indicators such as school size, community type, free and reduced lunch participation, and geographic location?

This chapter includes the data collection, sample, and findings of the study. The findings address the three research questions regarding official policies for transgender students, unofficial but established practices for transgender students, and the frequency of such policies and practices for various school demographic indicators. The findings also include other related information regarding the presence of transgender students and qualitative analysis of the open-response survey questions.

Data Collection

The researcher inputted 13 survey items into *QuestionPro*© and submitted the link on October 7, 2020, to the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators (AAEA), which had agreed to send it to all the high school principals in the state of Arkansas through the email list of their subgroup, the Arkansas Association of Secondary School Principals. The organization sent out the survey on October 12, 2020, and after receiving only 16 responses, the researcher sent out a second request on October 24, 2020, directly to the email addresses of principals from Arkansas schools with a grade 9 or higher as found on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's online contact list. On October 31, 2020, the researcher closed the survey with 55 complete responses. While many individual questions included 56 responses, *QuestionPro*© reported the survey itself had 55 complete responses, so this number is used when describing participation.

Sample

The 55 survey responses represented 16.08% of the target population, 342 Arkansas public school principals with at least a ninth-grade on their campus. The survey had 79 respondents begin, and the 55 completers left a 69.62% completion rate for those who started.

The survey began with four school demographic questions regarding school size according to Arkansas Activities Association (AAA) basketball classification, community type, percentage of the student body on free or reduced lunch, and geographic region within the state. These demographics were particularly important for Research Question #3, and Table 1 provides the breakdown of each response. Each of the six AAA

Table 1

Respondents' School Demographic Data

		f (%)
School Size	6A	9 (16.1%)
	5A	8 (14.3%)
	4A	8 (14.3%)
	3A	11 (19.6%)
	2A	9 (16.1%)
	1A	11 (19.6%)
	Total	56 (100%)
Community Type	Rural	23 (42.6%)
	Small Town	15 (27.8%)
	Suburban	6 (11.1%)
	Urban	10 (18.5%)
	Total	54 (100%)
Free/Reduced Lunch	0-25%	1 (1.8%)
	26-50%	11 (19.6%)
	51-75%	24 (42.9%)
	76-100%	20 (35.7%)
	Total	56 (100%)
Region	Northwest	18 (32.1%)
	Northeast	9 (16.1%)
	Central	15 (26.8%)
	Southwest	8 (14.3%)
	Southeast	6 (10.7%)
	Total	56 (100%)

basketball classifications were represented fairly evenly. Around 70% of the respondents considered their school rural or small town rather than urban or suburban. Of the 56 respondents for the income question, 44 indicated at least half of their students qualified for free or reduced lunch. Several principals from each of the five geographic regions responded, with the highest numbers coming from Northwest and Central Arkansas.

Results and Findings

The survey data provided insight into each research question as well as some additional findings. Specifically, the findings addressed official policies related to transgender students' preferred identity usage in class and on student records, access to sex-separated facilities, and placement in sex-separated activities in Arkansas schools (Research Question 1) and unofficial but established practices in these same areas (Research Question 2). The findings also addressed the frequencies of such policies and practices represented among various school demographic indicators such as school size, community type, free and reduced lunch participation, and geographic location (Research Question 3), and some issues related to the three research questions arose in the open-response questions.

Official policies. The survey instrument asked multiple questions to determine what formal policies exist in Arkansas secondary schools regarding transgender students (Research Question 1). When asked if their school had an official policy regarding the use of students' preferred names and pronouns in the classroom, six of the 56 respondents (10.7%) for this question reported having such a policy. Of those six who had a policy, five (83.3%) reported using a student's preferred name and pronouns while one had a

policy for using the name and identity on the student's official record. No respondent selected options for case-by-case determination or leaving the decision up to the individual teacher or staff member. Table 2 includes these results.

Table 2

Policies and Practices on Use of Nouns and Pronouns in the Classroom

	Official Policy *f* (%)	Unofficial Practice *f* (%)
Use student's preferred name/pronouns	5 (83.3%)	19 (38.0%)
Use name/identity on official records	1 (16.7%)	10 (20.0%)
Determined on a case-by-case basis		4 (8.0%)
Up to individual teacher/staff		3 (6.0%)
No established practice/procedure		14 (28.0%)
Totals	6 (100%)	50 (100%)

The survey also asked principals if their school had an official policy regarding transgender students' names on student records. Of the 13 respondents (23.2%) who reported having an official policy, 11 (84.6%) reported using students' birth certificate name and gender on official records, one used students' preferred name and gender, and one reported determining on a case-by-case basis. These results appear in Table 3.

Regarding transgender student use of sex-separated facilities such as restrooms and locker rooms, eight respondents (14.3%) indicated having an official policy. As indicated in Table 4, three of those eight reported basing this facility usage on the birth certificate or official record, three reported providing unisex or private options, one reported using the students' preferred gender identity, and one reported making this determination on a case-by-case basis.

Table 3

Policies and Practices on Use of Nouns and Pronouns on Student Records

	Official Policy *f* (%)	Unofficial Practice *f* (%)
Use student's preferred name/gender	1 (7.7%)	3 (7.0%)
Use birth name/gender on official records	11 (84.6%)	27 (62.8%)
Determined on a case-by-case basis	1 (7.7%)	2 (4.6%)
No established practice/procedure	n/a	11 (25.6%)
Totals	13 (100%)	43 (100%)

Table 4

Policies and Practices on Use of Sex-Separated Facilities

	f (%)	f (%)
Use restroom/locker room based on the birth certificate/ official record	3 (37.5%)	6 (12.5%)
Use restroom/locker room based on preferred gender identity	1 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)
Determine on a case-by-case basis	1 (12.5%)	9 (18.8%)
Provide unisex or private option	3 (37.5%)	19 (39.6%)
No established procedure or practice	n/a	14 (29.1%)
Totals	8 (100%)	48 (100%)

When asked about transgender student participation in sex-separated activities such as physical education classes, homecoming royalty, or overnight field trip accommodations, two (3.6%) of the 56 respondents reported having an official policy. As shown in Table 5, both respondents indicated their official policies base placement in

these activities on the birth certificate and official record rather than the student's preferred name/gender or a case-by-case basis.

Table 5

Policies and Practices on Participation in Sex-Separated Activities

	f (%)	*f* (%)
Base placement on the birth certificate/official record gender	2 (100.0%)	8 (14.8%)
Base placement on student's preferred name/gender	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.7%)
Determined on a case-by-case basis	0 (0.0%)	15 (27.8%)
No established procedure or practice	n/a	29 (53.7%)
Totals	2 (100%)	54 (100%)

Established practices. The survey asked several questions to determine what established practices existed in Arkansas schools in the absence of official policies (Research Question 2). Of 56 responses, 50 (89.3%) of principals reported not having an official policy regarding the use of transgender student names and pronouns in the classroom. As shown in Table 2, 19 (38%) reported using the student's preferred name and pronouns in the classroom when asked about their general practices and procedures in place of an official policy, 14 (28%) reported having no established procedure or practice, 10 (20%) reported using the student's name and identity from the official record, four (8%) reported determining on a case-by-case basis, and three (6%) reported leaving it up to the individual staff member.

As shown in Table 3, 43 (76.8%) of respondents reported not having an official policy concerning student name and pronoun use on student records. When asked about

their general practices and procedures in place instead of an official policy, 27 (62.8%) reported using students' birth certificate name and gender, 11 (25.6%) reported having no established policy or practice, three (7.0%) reported using the students' preferred name and gender, and two (4.7%) reported determining this on a case-by-case basis.

Regarding transgender students' use of sex-separated facilities such as restrooms and locker rooms, 48 (85.7%) of the 56 principals indicated having no official policy. When asked about their general practices and procedures in place of an official policy, 19 (39.6%) reported providing a unisex or private option, 14 (29.2%) reported having no established procedure or practice, nine (18.8%) reported determining on a case-by-case basis, six (12.5%) reported using the facilities that correspond with the birth certificate or official record, and none reported allowing students to use the facilities associated with their preferred gender identity. Table 4 describes these results.

Of the 56 principals, 54 (96.4%) indicated having no official policy regarding transgender student participation in sex-separated activities such as physical education classes, homecoming royalty, or overnight field trip accommodations. As shown in Table 5, 29 respondents (53.7%) had no established practice or procedure when asked about their general practices and procedures in place instead of an official policy, 15 (27.8%) reported determining this on a case-by-case basis, eight (14.8%) reported basing placement on the gender from the birth certificate or official record, and two (3.7%) reported basing placement on the student's preferred name and gender.

Frequencies by demographic. A chi-square analysis was performed comparing frequencies between the demographic variables and the other multiple-choice questions (Research Question 3). These variables included information of school size, community

type, socioeconomic level, and geographic region. No significant difference was found in how each demographic category answered the questions regarding transgender students, official policies, and unofficial practices.

Other findings. One multiple-choice question asked if principals had any student who identified as transgender in the past three years. Of the 56 responses, 35 (62.5%) indicated they had and 21 (37.5%) indicated they had not.

Four open-response questions asked principals what led to the establishment of official policies, why established practices were kept from becoming official policy, how stakeholders have reacted to official policies and unofficial practices, and if there was anything else respondents wanted to say about this topic. The researcher used qualitative analysis by searching for codes and themes in the four open-response questions (Patton, 2002). Three themes emerged: the importance of meeting student needs, the flexibility of making decisions on a case-by-case basis, and the varied reactions among school stakeholders.

Student needs. Several respondents commented on the needs of transgender students. They mentioned the importance of acceptance, safety, personhood, dignity, rights, personal wishes, and accommodations. One principal (84475209) wrote, “I hope that we can get to a place where each student’s dignity can be upheld.” Another principal (86170614) responded, “The district attempts to respect the rights of each student by accommodating the students in a professional manner by a case by case basis.” A third response (86006808) emphasized respect and love: “At my school, we treat all people with the respect that they have earned and deserve – regardless of demographic. I would classify our community as very conservative, but also very respectful and loving of all

our students." One response (86140309) unknowingly tied the importance of meeting student needs into the theoretical underpinnings of this study:

> According to Maslow, it is necessary for an individual to feel loved and accepted before they are able to attain personal enlightenment and truly learn. It should be every educator's quest to make sure that every student feels safe and seen as who they believe they are. Denying a person's stated reality is not acceptance, it is rejection and refusing to talk about the topic equally denies their reality.

Flexibility. Multiple respondents commented on the importance of flexibility and being able to make decisions for students on a case-by-case basis. One principal (86203781) wrote, "We are able to handle each case individually with very little issue." Another principal (86069032) explained, "Situations are different. There doesn't seem to be a one-size policy for every student in the district." A third respondent (84475209) addressed each of the three themes that were later identified:

> While we have had multiple students identify as transgender, we have not adopted formal policies to navigate them, instead using case-by-case to determine needs and desires of student and family. We live in a pretty progressive and accepting area, so I feel like we have navigated well and honor and uphold students' personhood and dignity.

Stakeholder reactions. Both directly and indirectly, respondents identified the reactions of various stakeholders to the policies and practices regarding transgender students as well as to the transgender students themselves. These comments identified reactions from parents, students, teachers, the community, and the principals themselves.

Many principals reported a positive response from stakeholders supportive of transgender students, policies, and practices. One principal (86151588) responded, “We have a good supportive community without issues.” Another respondent (84471454) explained, “our school works with all students and we have not had any issues so far that have not been able to be resolved.” A third principal (86069032) described the stakeholder reaction: “Very positively. We treat and respect every student as a valued individual.” Regarding the parents of transgender students, one principal (84482246) noted, “No negative reactions from the public and positive comments from the parents of the transgender students.”

Many respondents also indicated that there had not been any feedback at all. One principal (86691405) wrote, “It’s currently a non-issue. 99% most likely don’t know that we had one that identified.” Another principal (86006088) described the lack of reaction: “We have not had any negative feedback from stakeholder, but haven’t had any real positive feedback either. It has been a non-issue.” One respondent (86170614) provided insight into the lack of reaction: “no reaction. Most would not like to acknowledge its existence.” Another principal (84406601) responded, “We have been supported in our efforts to make our school a safe and welcoming space to students of all genders, including transgender students.”

Some responses also suggested negative responses to transgender students, formal policies, and the lack of formal policies. One principal (86140309) explained that the policies were necessary to combat the lack of parental support: “We have a large number of students who identify as transgender, some of whom have parents that would disown them for doing so. It was necessary to develop policies that make students feel accepted

and safe." Some negativity in the stakeholder reaction is also noted by another respondent (86140309): "The teachers want official policies to protect them and protect students, students appreciate when teachers use their preferred names and pronouns, some parents have been very supportive others have been adamant that we do not need transgender policies." A third respondent (86076135) describes the lack of support for LGBTQ students:

> We are a rural school who has had many students identify with the LGBTQ. These views are not something that is accepted in our general populations. As an administrator, I leave my personal opinions out of any decisions that must be made in these areas. These decisions, and all other decisions, will be made in a way that protects and respects my students.

Some stakeholder responses indicated negativity from school leadership toward the transgender students themselves. One principal (86140309) writes, "The former superintendent did not want an official policy for transgender students because she did not want us further identified as a 'gay school'. The new superintendent is in the process of creating those policies." Two respondents displayed their own disfavor of transgender identity. One principal (86004981) wrote, "Personally, I don't believe in the science of this issue, but I will defend the right of this student to receive an education." The other principal (86139584) voiced concerns:

> Having an official policy or even unofficial practices regarding transgender students puts schools in an almost unwinnable position. We are required to ensure the safety of all students and the access to a free education to all students. We are required to teach biology and biology proves that we are either born male or

female. The idea and current push to allow students to identify as something other than how they were born and expect schools to make concessions for those choices is putting good, solid, well intentioned school people out of this profession. Yes, we all have the freedom to make our own choices but why does the choice to "identify" as something other than how you were born have to dictate to schools how they will operate. Why can't students who choose to indentify as transgender just deal with the consequences of that choice? What if the next Michael Jordan decides he wants to identify as a female and play on the girl's basketball team and go into the girl's locker room? That is not going to be ok with the girls and their parents and to expect the school to allow that is ridiculous, in my opinion.

Summary

The survey received responses from a variety of each of the four school demographic categories. Few schools had formal policies regarding student identity in the classroom, on official records, in sex-separated facilities, or in sex-separated activities. In established but unofficial practice, the use of students' preferred names and gender was more common in the classroom than on official records. For sex-separated facilities, schools often provided a private or unisex option or required students to use the restrooms corresponding to their sex on official records; concerning sex-separated activities, schools generally had no established procedure and determined on a case-by-case basis. Many principals did not report having a transgender student within the past three years, and demographic variables of school size, community type, socioeconomic rates, and geographic region of each school did not appear to affect the frequencies or

types of policies and procedures regarding transgender students. In a qualitative analysis of the open-response questions, three themes arose: the importance of respecting student needs, the favored flexibility in not having a formal policy, and the mixed reactions from varied stakeholders.

Chapter 5 includes a summary of the findings, conclusions, recommendations for practice, and suggestions for future research. The conclusions address each research question as well as some other related findings.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

Transgender students are a group at risk, and policies and practices within schools can either help this population or exacerbate their problems (Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2013; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; McGuire et al., 2010; McKibben, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2014). Arkansas schools have received changing and conflicting guidance from the federal government, state government, advocacy groups, and the U.S. Supreme Court about accommodating transgender students regarding names, pronouns, facilities, and activities (ArkansasOnline Staff and Wire Reports, 2016; Battle & Wheeler, 2017; Biden, 2021; Ferg-Cadima, 2015; GLSEN, 2019; Lhamon & Gupta, 2016; Meyer & Keenan, 2018; Orr et al., 2015; Stern et al., 2018; Turner & Kamentez, 2018; Williams, 2019). The governor of Arkansas and the recent Trump administration have both indicated this is a state or local decision (ArkansasOnline Staff and Wire Reports, 2016; Battle & Wheeler, 2017); however, newly-inaugurated President Biden has issued an executive order in favor of accommodating transgender students. There has not been any attempt to examine what practices were taking place regarding transgender students in Arkansas high schools.

The purpose of this mixed-method, exploratory study was threefold: (a) to determine what formal policies exist in Arkansas high schools regarding transgender students' use of preferred names and pronouns as well as their access to sex-separated facilities and activities, (b) to determine what unofficial but established practices exist in Arkansas high schools regarding transgender students' use of preferred names and pronouns as well as their access to sex-separated facilities and activities, and (c) to examine the frequency of such policies and practices within various school demographic

categories. The researcher designed a survey and disseminated the instrument to all Arkansas high school principals to determine what set policies and unofficial practices exist in Arkansas public schools regarding transgender student name and pronoun use, access to sex-separated facilities, and participation in sex-separated events, as well as to describe how these policies and practices may vary in different schools. This chapter includes a summary of the findings, conclusions for each research question, practice recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

Summary of Results and Findings

The survey yielded 55 complete responses, which represented 16.1% of the target population: 342 Arkansas public school principals with at least a ninth-grade on their campus. Of these respondents, 62.5% reported having a transgender student within the past three years. Few schools had formal policies regarding student identity in the classroom (10.7%), identity on official records (23.2%), use of sex-separated facilities (14.3%), or participation in sex-separated activities (3.6%). In schools with no official policy regarding the use of students' preferred name and gender in the classroom, 38% used the students' preference, 28% had no established procedure, 20% went by the official record, 8% determined on a case-by-case basis, and 6% left this up to the individual staff member. For schools with no official policy regarding transgender students' name and gender on official records, 62.8% used the students' birth certificate name and gender (for schools with an official policy, 84.6% chose this option), 25.6% had no established procedure,7.0% used the student's preferred identity, and 4.7% determined this on a case-by-case basis.

For sex-separated facility usage, schools with no official policy often provided private or unisex options (39.6%), had no established procedure (29.2%), determined on a case-by-case basis (18.8%), or used the student's sex from the official record (12.5%). None of these 48 respondents with unofficial procedures allowed transgender students to use sex-separated facilities that corresponded with their preferred gender identity; however, one of the eight respondents with an official policy chose this option. Concerning sex-separated activities, such as physical education classes, homecoming royalty, or overnight accommodations, 54 of 56 respondents reported having no official policies. Of those 54, 53.7% had no established practice or procedure, 27.8% determined on a case-by-case basis. 14.8% used the student's official record, and 3.7% based placement on the students' preferred gender.

The demographic variables of school size, community type, socioeconomic rates, and geographic region of each school did not appear to affect the frequencies or types of policies and procedures regarding transgender students. In a qualitative analysis of the open-response questions, three themes arose: the importance of respecting student needs, the favored flexibility in not having a formal policy, and the mixed reactions from varied stakeholders.

Conclusions

Guided by previous findings cataloged in the literature review, the researcher analyzed and interpreted the results of this study. These conclusions appear below organized by the corresponding research questions.

RQ 1: Official policies. Few principals reported that their schools had formal policies regarding transgender students' identity in the classroom (10.7%) and on official

records (23.2%), use of sex-separated facilities (14.3%), and participation in sex-separated activities (3.6%). These official policies supported the students' preferred identity in the classroom (83.3%) but deferred to the identity on official records or birth certificates on activity placement (100%), student records (84.6%), and facility use (37.5%). Having policies based on the student's preferred gender is congruent with the federal government's 2015 *Emily Prince Letter* and *Dear Colleague Letter* of 2016, court decisions such as *Whitaker v. Kenosha Unified School District*, *Evancho v. Pine-Richland School District*, and *G.G. v. Gloucester County School Board,* recommendations from advocacy groups (Ferg-Cadima, 2015; GLSEN, 2019; Lhamon & Gupta, 2016; Orr et al., 2015; Stern et al., 2018), and the executive order that came shortly after the study was conducted (Biden, 2021). Using the students' preferred name and pronouns is critical (Factor & Rothblum, 2008; Kosciw et al., 2018; McGuire et al., 2010; McKibben, 2016; Nadal et al., 2012; Russell et al., 2018; Sausa, 2005), and Arkansas schools with this policy could see a decrease in negative outcomes for transgender students. As stated in the theoretical underpinnings of this study and supported by comments in the open-response section of the survey instrument, policies and practices regarding identity and facility usage can help satisfy basic motivations and allow transgender students to address more of the higher levels in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Regarding facility usage, respondents in this study with official policies tended to use the gender from the official record (37.5%) or provide a unisex or private option (37.5%) with only 12.5% using the student's preferred gender and the remaining 12.5% deciding on a case-by-case basis. While these percentages are based on only eight respondents, they are notably different from *The 2017 National School Climate Survey* of

23,001 LGBTQ students in which 72.8% of those with policies specific to transgender students had a policy that allowed them access to the bathroom that matched their gender, 62.2% had a policy that provided access to a gender-neutral bathroom, and 45.9% reported a policy that gave access to a locker room matching their gender identity (Kosciw et al., 2018).

For the open-response question inquiring what prompted the establishment of formal policies, responses referred to following federal guidelines, case law, and making students feel safe and accepted despite lack of support at home. Respondents did not specify which case law and federal guidance they were adhering to in developing these policies, and it is worth noting that much of the cases and earlier federal guidance supported the transgender students' identity while more recent federal rulings have left it to the states or removed gender identity from Title IX protection (Battle & Wheeler, 2017; Ferg-Cadima, 2015; Lhamon & Gupta, 2016; Meyer & Keenan, 2018; Stern et al., 2018; Turner & Kamentez, 2018).

RQ 2: Unofficial practices. In each of the four areas surveyed regarding transgender students, principals usually reported having no official policy for name and pronoun use in the classroom (89.3%), identity use on student records (76.8%), sex-separated facility usage (85.7%), and sex-separated activities (96.4%). In addition to having no formal policy, many also reported having no established general practices for name and pronoun usage in the classroom (28%), identity on student records (25.6%), sex-separated facility usage (29.2%), and sex-separated activities (29.2%). Given that 37.5% of respondents did not know of a transgender student enrolled in their school in

the past three years, it is not surprising that many lacked even established practices in place of a formal policy.

One issue that arose from the literature review was the tension between having a formal policy to guarantee student accommodations and fend off controversy versus having an adaptable approach to best serve each individual student, even going beyond the formal policy (Kurt & Chenault, 2017; Mangin, 2019). The flexibility to meet individual student needs on a case-by-case basis was a common theme touted throughout the open-response questions of this study, but when asked about their general practices in place of a formal policy, most respondents did not indicate that these decisions were made on a case-by-case basis. This option was only selected by 8% for name and pronoun usage in the classroom, 4.7% for identity on student records, 18.8% for sex-separated facility usage, and 27.8% for sex-separated activities. While some of the other options selected may have been outcomes based on individual decisions, one would still expect a higher selection of case-by-case as a general practice based on its stated importance in the open-response section.

RQ 3: School demographic tendencies. The demographic variables of school size, community type, socioeconomic rates, and geographic region of each school did not appear to affect policies and procedures regarding transgender students. This finding contradicts any notion that some areas of the state or schools of a certain size might inherently be more or less accommodating of transgender students than others are.

Other conclusions. The completion rate of the survey itself may demonstrate the discomfort school leaders have with the topic. Of the 342 principals in the sample, 119 participants viewed the survey, 79 began the survey, and 55 completed it. The 24 non-

completers left the survey with a 69.6% completion rate for those who started, and the average time was only three minutes. This quick completion time suggests that other factors may have led so many participants to view but not begin or to begin but not finish.

On the multiple-choice portion of the survey, 37.5% of principals indicated they had not had a transgender student within the past three years. This differs from the literature review that estimated 0.75% of Arkansans between the ages of 13 to 17 were transgender (Herman et al., 2017). Some possible explanations could include principals not realizing the higher presence of transgender students in their schools or students not feeling comfortable being open with their gender identity in these schools. Either way, the disconnection between student identity and school leadership could impact the ability to create a safe and accommodating place for students.

Recommendations for Practice

First, schools and districts should adopt some formal policies to protect and accommodate the needs of transgender students. As established in the literature review, transgender students benefit from supportive policies (Day et al., 2018; Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2013; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; McGuire et al., 2010; Mangin, 2018; Mangin, 2019; Markow & Dancewicz, 2008; Meyer & Keenan, 2018; Payne & Smith, 2014; Porta et al., 2017; Russell et al., 2018). These policies should align with federal and state law, advocacy group recommendations, and court decisions. Such policies should guarantee the basic needs of transgender students as well as the school's willingness to work with them while leaving room for the flexibility and fluidity principals championed in their survey responses. As Kurt and Chenault (2017) write, "it would behoove school leaders to find a happy medium between having a clear

policy reference for administrators navigating contentious situations and being adaptable by allowing individual students to have a say in their own educational experiences."

In addition to benefitting from supportive policies, transgender students also benefit from supportive staff (Grant et al., 2011; Greytak et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2013; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; McGuire et al., 2010; Mangin, 2018; Mangin, 2019; Markow & Dancewicz, 2008; Porta et al., 2017) and supportive leadership (Albritton et al., 2017; Kosciw et al., 2018; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; McGuire et al., 2010; Mangin, 2018; Mangin, 2019; Payne & Smith, 2018; Porta et al., 2017). Educators need training on the unique needs of transgender students to advocate and support them effectively. According to Mangin (2019), supportive leaders focus on educating themselves, their staff, students, and sometimes the larger community.

Payne and Smith (2018) recommended prioritizing the training of school leaders, as many did not recognize the benefits of LGBTQ-related training or feared backlash for such. The responses to the survey in this study demonstrate the need for such training by showing a lack of experience working with transgender students, the potential unawareness regarding the prevalence of transgender students in schools, misinformation about transgender students, a desire to learn more, a disconnect between recommended and actual practices, and a reality that such a topic is still taboo in some school communities.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies regarding transgender student policies and practices in Arkansas schools would benefit from a larger response rate. If the survey instrument is replicated, researchers may want to rework Question #20 so respondents do not take it to ask why

they specifically did not create a policy but rather their district or school. Beyond surveying principals, researchers could also use qualitative interviews to provide more depth into how policies and practices are being carried out. Data collection could also include students, families, counselors, teachers, board members, district-level staff, private schools, and/or younger grade levels. Researchers could also examine the official, written policies that do exist among various Arkansas schools and compare those with policy recommendations from advocacy groups, policies from other states, federal laws, and court decisions. Research exploring why schools are hesitant to support transgender students when such support aligns with their vision and mission would also be of value. Finally, any research about transgender students in Arkansas is incomplete without the voices and experiences of the students themselves.

Summary

This chapter included a summary of the findings, conclusions, recommendations for practice, and suggestions for future research. The conclusions addressed each research question as well as some other related findings.

This study illustrates a clear disconnect between what the research implores educators to do in supporting transgender students and what is happening in both policy and practice in Arkansas schools. Policies, training, and most of all, advocacy are needed to ensure this population's access to public education.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Instrument

1. What size is your school according to your Arkansas Activities Association basketball classification? (multiple choice)

   6A

   5A

   4A

   3A

   2A

   1A

2. How would you classify your school's community? (multiple choice)

   Rural

   Small town

   Suburban

   Urban

3. In the 19-20 school year, what percentage of your student body had free or reduced lunch? (multiple choice)

   0%-25%

   26%-50%

   51%-75%

   76%-100%

4. In which region is your school located? (multiple choice)

   Northwest

   Northeast

   Central

   Southwest

   Southeast

5. Has your school had any students who identify as transgender in the past three years? (multiple choice)

   Yes

   No

6. Does your school have an official policy regarding the use of transgender students' preferred names and pronouns in the classroom? (multiple choice with branching)

   Yes

   No

   6A. If yes on question #6,

   Which option most closely describes your official policy regarding the use of transgender students' preferred names/pronouns in the classroom? (multiple choice)

   Use student's preferred name/pronouns

Use name/identity on the official record

Determined on a case by case basis

Up to individual teacher/staff

6B. If no on question #6,

Although you have no official policy, which option most closely describes your general practices and procedures regarding transgender students' preferred identity usage in the classroom? (multiple choice)

Use student's preferred name/pronouns

Use name/identity on the official record

Determined on a case by case basis

Up to individual teacher/staff

No established procedure or practice

7. Does your school have an official policy regarding the use of transgender students' preferred name and gender <u>on student records</u>? (multiple choice with branching)

   Yes

   No

7A. If yes on question #7,

Which option most closely describes your official policy regarding the use of transgender students' preferred name and gender on student records? (multiple choice)

Use student's preferred name/gender

Use birth certificate name/gender on the official record

Determined on a case by case basis

7B. If no on question #7,

Although you have no official policy, which statement most closely describes your general practices and procedures regarding the use of transgender students' preferred name and gender on student records? (multiple choice)

Use student's preferred name/gender

Use birth certificate name/gender on the official record

Determined on a case by case basis

No established procedure or practice

8. Does your school have an official policy regarding transgender students' use of sex-separated facilities such as restrooms and locker rooms? (multiple choice)

Yes

No

8A. If yes on question #8,

Which option most closely describes your official policy regarding transgender students' use of sex-separated facilities such as restrooms and locker rooms? (multiple choice)

Use restroom/locker room based on the birth certificate/official record

Use restroom/locker room based on preferred gender identity

Determine on a case by case basis

Provide unisex or private option

8B. If no on question #8,

Although you have no official policy, which statement most closely describes your general practices and procedures regarding transgender students' use of sex-separated facilities such as restrooms and locker rooms? (multiple choice)

Use the restroom/locker room based on the birth certificate/official record

Use restroom/locker room based on preferred gender identity

Provide unisex or private option

Determine on a case by case basis

No established procedure or practice

9. Does your school have an official policy regarding transgender students' participation in sex-separated activities such as physical education classes, homecoming royalty, or overnight field trip accommodations? (multiple choice)

Yes

No

9A. If yes on question #9,

Which option most closely describes your official policy regarding transgender students' participation in sex-separated activities such as physical education classes, homecoming royalty, or overnight field trip accommodations? (multiple choice)

Base placement on the birth certificate/official record gender

Base placement on student's preferred name/gender

Determined on a case by case basis

9B. If no on question #9,

Although you have no official policy, which statement most closely describes your general practices and procedures regarding transgender students' participation in sex-separated activities such as physical education classes, homecoming royalty, or overnight field trip accommodations? (multiple choice)

Base placement on the birth certificate/official record gender

Base placement on student's preferred name/gender

Determined on a case by case basis

No established procedure or practice

10. If you have official, formal policies in place regarding transgender students, what led to the establishment of these official policies? (open response)

11. If you have unofficial yet established practices and procedures regarding transgender students, what led you to keep these unofficial instead of making formal policy? (open response)

12. In your experience, how have various stakeholders reacted to your school's official policies and unofficial practices regarding transgender students? (open response)

13. Is there anything else you would like to say regarding this topic? (open response)

Appendix B: AAEA Email

Dear AASSP Members,

Please see the below survey from Associate Member Matthew White. Matthew is currently a doctoral student at Arkansas Tech University and is needing information for his dissertation research. The target audience is secondary building principals (those with grades 9 and up), and it should take about five minutes to complete.

"The purpose of this study is to describe official policies and unofficial but established practices regarding transgender students in Arkansas secondary schools. It is intended to be completed only by the building principal of any Arkansas public school that includes 9th grade or higher as participation from anyone else could lead to duplicate responses from the same building. The survey is anonymous, includes no foreseeable risks or costs, and should take about five minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary and you may exit the survey at any time if you decide not to continue. The data will be collected by researcher Matthew White and eventually destroyed. By submitting the survey, you consent to have your anonymous responses used in this study by investigator Matthew White for his dissertation research as approved by the Institutional Review Board at Arkansas Tech University. If you have questions about this study, you may contact Matthew White at mwhite9@atu.edu.Thank you for your participation."

https://arschooltrans.questionpro.com

Arkansas School Polices/Practices for Transgender Students | Arkansas School Polices/Practices for Transgender Students - Online Survey Software

Arkansas School Polices/Practices for Transgender Students - Online Survey Software

Appendix C: Second Email Request

Arkansas secondary principals,

I am completing my doctoral studies in school leadership at Arkansas Tech University, and I could really use a few more survey responses for my research study. The survey is anonymous and will take about five minutes. If you already completed it when AAEA sent it out last week, there is no need to submit a second response. I appreciate your participation, especially in these busy times.

Link: https://arschooltrans.questionpro.com

Thanks!
Matthew White

Official blurb: "The purpose of this study is to describe official policies and unofficial but established practices regarding transgender students in Arkansas secondary schools. It is intended to be completed only by the building principal of any Arkansas public school that includes 9th grade or higher as participation from anyone else could lead to duplicate responses from the same building. The survey is anonymous, includes no foreseeable risks or costs, and should take about five minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary and you may exit the survey at any time if you decide not to continue. The data will be collected by researcher Matthew White and eventually destroyed. By submitting the survey, you consent to have your anonymous responses used in this study by investigator Matthew White for his dissertation research as approved by the Institutional Review Board at Arkansas Tech University. If you have questions about this study, you may contact Matthew White at mwhite9@atu.edu. Thank you for your participation."

Appendix D: IRB Approval

ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

Office of Sponsored Programs and University Initiatives
Administration Building, Room 207
1509 North Boulder Avenue
Russellville, Arkansas 72801

Office: 479-880-4327
www.atu.edu

October 7, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

The Arkansas Tech University Institutional Review Board has approved the application for Matthew White's proposed research, entitled "Policies and Practices Regarding Transgender Students According to Arkansas School Administrators." This protocol has been assigned approval code White_100720. The IRB approves for the researcher(s) to proceed with the class project.

Please note that, in the event that any of the parameters of the study change, the researcher may be required to submit an amended application.

Sincerely,

Sarah Gordon

Sarah Gordon, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
Arkansas Tech University