

The logo features a green circular graphic with a stylized 'E' shape on the left. To the right of this graphic, the text '2025-26 BACK-TO-SCHOOL TOOLKIT' is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

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A decorative graphic consisting of two horizontal bands of diagonal stripes in various colors including red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple.

Who we are:

OutFront Minnesota is our state's largest LGBTQ+ advocacy organization.

Grounding:

All students have the right to learn.

As teachers and administrators head back to schools this fall we know that you will be faced with questions about how to navigate the evolving landscape we find ourselves in as a state and nation.

It's important to remember: LGBTQ+ students, staff, and families are part of every community and district in our state.

Now more than ever, intentional efforts to understand and address community-specific concerns are important to building healthy learning environments.

There are some important pieces of information to know and steps everyone can take to help ensure their local schools remain places of welcome and inclusion for all.

Navigating a Shifting Landscape:

The national landscape around LGBTQ+ rights and issues is complex, and our schools are at the heart of many of these discussions.

Minnesota's laws protecting the rights of LGBTQ+ students and educators have been in place for many decades - but federal interpretation of these same issues remains in flux.

In a shifting landscape it is important that teachers, support staff, and administrators maintain access to accurate and up to date information - and that changes in policy or practice are carefully reviewed and communicated effectively.

Trusted resources, including those from expert organizations as well as state agencies and Minnesota's Attorney General can help guide decision-making and provide reassurance for those seeking solid grounding in this environment.



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Supporting Students, Supporting Families, Supporting Colleagues:

When LGBTQ+ students feel safe, supported, and seen in their school environments they are more likely to achieve their academic goals and feel part of the educational environment.

And that sense of support is just as critical for families and staff who may themselves be members of LGBTQ+ communities.

It is important that educators, administrators, and staff work to foster supportive environments that recognize that heightened cultural and political rhetoric can have an impact on educational settings - for students, families, and colleagues. Providing welcoming messaging, signage, and supportive resources are easy steps to cultivating an environment that is supportive of LGBTQ+ communities. Holding trainings, community listening sessions, or other events can create more opportunities to recognize and support LGBTQ+ populations in every district. And beyond district-wide decisions, every member of a school community can take time to check-in with student, families, and colleagues to remind them of their value to the school community. Small actions can go a long way to fostering a culture of inclusion that can benefit every member of a district.

Preventing Bullying:

Minnesota's Safe and Supportive Schools Act obligates school districts to have detailed plans addressing bullying. But the best approach to bullying is not just responsive, it's proactive in creating a culture of bullying prevention.

For LGBTQ+ youth, bullying remains all too prevalent in Minnesota schools with 2/3rds of LGBTQ+ youth in our state's schools reporting bullying once a month or more frequently. No other demographic category reported those persistent levels of bullying. Unfortunately, reports across the state during the 2024-25 school year suggest that both the frequency and impact of those targeted actions has increased.

It is important that every member of a school community is committed to a culture of bullying prevention.



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For administrators, teachers, and staff, it is important to review the legal requirements under the Safe and Supportive Schools Act; to seek out and offer training opportunities around bystander intervention and bullying prevention strategies; and to address school climate issues before they lead to serious incidents.

Mental Health Support:

It is important that administrators, educators, and staff have a good understanding of mental health resources and supports within their school districts. And for counselors and other supportive staff - understanding LGBTQ+ identities and topics is crucial to helping support student populations. Having a basic understanding of terminology, resources, and support can better facilitate connections and work with students who are seeking help from trusted sources.

In addition to general resources, The Trevor Project offers a national suicide prevention helpline and mental health resources for LGBTQ+ youth and young adults.

Ensuring Access to Bathrooms and Facilities:

The Minnesota Human Rights Act protects the rights of Minnesotans to use bathroom, locker-room, and other facilities consistent with their gender identity.

These protections have been in place since 1993; and have been reaffirmed through decisions in Minnesota's courts.

It's important that all students have access to bathrooms, locker-rooms, and other changing facilities that they feel safe and comfortable in. That means access to facilities they can use, support from staff, and clear expectations around appropriate facility usage and behavior.

Sports and Activities:

The Minnesota Human Rights Act and the policies of the Minnesota State High School League ensure the full participation of all students in sports and activities consistent with their gender identity.

While Title IX continues to be a topic of litigation in the courts, no rulings have been issued that contravene our state's inclusive policies.

The Attorney General underlined these protections in a guidance letter to MSHSL on February 20, 2025:



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“An educational institution violates the MHRA by discriminating in any manner in the services or benefits it offers a student because of the student’s gender identity. This includes prohibiting transgender student athletes from participating in extracurricular activities, as such a practice inherently separates and segregates transgender student athletes from other student athletes based solely on their gender identity.”

While this remains an area of significant cultural discussion and policy debate - Minnesota law is clear - and schools should work to support all students who participate in sports and activities; free from bullying and harassment.

Pronouns, Names, and Language:

Everyone in an educational setting deserves to be treated with respect and dignity. The names and pronouns students, staff, and families use are an important part of recognition and respect. Many students and staff may choose to use nicknames that they prefer, regardless of their gender identity; and changes of name through marriage are commonplace.

Schools should have an established process for working to ensure that students, families, and educators know how and where different names and pronouns are used in school records, and what processes exist for requesting changes.

Books and Content:

Minnesota has passed legislation that helps to guide school districts in navigating conversations around books and other content in school libraries. The state of Minnesota provides opportunities for opt-outs for families that choose not to participate in particular lessons or content - it’s important that one family’s choice to opt-out of content does not impact the ability of other students to engage with content that reflects their identities and lives.

Including Families and Engaging Communities:

We recognize that issues of LGBTQ+ inclusion will remain a significant point of discussion for schools and communities around the state of Minnesota and across our country. These topics often touch on issues that are deeply personal, can touch on deeply rooted cultural and religious beliefs, and are likely to remain in the front of political and policy discussions.

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While engaging in those conversations requires care and understanding - it is important that schools, administrators, educators, and staff do continue to engage on these important topics. There is no better place to model healthy civic discourse and values than in a learning environment.

And whether it is about school culture or policy, engagement with local communities and families is an important part of the process.

Families should be encouraged to engage in healthy discussions about their beliefs and values with their children, have access to supportive resources for understanding LGBTQ+ identities, and have access to information about school materials, policies, and expectations. Supportive and engaged families can play a crucial protective role for LGBTQ+ youth and young people.

Back to School:

As administrators, educators, and staff head back to school this fall, it is crucial that we work together to ensure that everyone feels safe, welcome, and supported at school.

This guide is a starting point for that journey, to help equip and support your work and school community.

Additional Resources:

- Minnesota Attorney General's Office | <https://www.ag.state.mn.us/>
- Minnesota Department of Education | <https://education.mn.gov/>
- OutFront Minnesota | <https://outfront.org>
- Gender Justice | <https://genderjustice.us>
- Gender Inclusive Schools | <https://genderinclusiveschools.org>
- Minnesota School Outreach Coalition | <https://www.mnschooloutreach.org/>