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University of San Francisco

Are school districts supporting Queer high school students? A document analysis of Sacramento school district handbooks and websites

A Field Project Proposal Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in International and Multicultural Education

By
Jisel Suguey Aguirre Noriega
May 2022

Are school districts supporting Queer high school students? A document analysis of Sacramento school district handbooks and websites

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

by
Jisel Suguey Aguirre Noriega
May 2022

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project (or thesis) has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

Instructor/Chairperson

Date

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ABSTRACT

Queer youth face many obstacles and challenges, including unsafe conditions while in school and a lack of inclusive curriculum. Queer Theory, which disrupts and challenges the norms and heteronormativity of our current systematic, norm-based systems, helps us imagine what schools might look like if they support LGBTQIA+ youth. Using content analysis, I created my own protocols to analyze the handbooks and websites of three Sacramento area school districts. The findings indicated that all three school districts are providing some essential information in their handbooks and in their district websites for supporting Queer youth. There is still much work to be done to provide Queer youth with the support and services that they need to navigate the educational system.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Identifying as Queer, as LGBTQIA+, can be incredibly difficult to grapple with, especially as a youth. My work is influenced by someone close to me that has undergone the questioning of themselves and who identifies themselves as Queer, my younger sibling. My interest in exploring the types of support LGBTQIA+ youth receive come from hearing my sister's first-hand struggles and questioning how the school is supporting her and other LGBTQIA+ youth. This made me question and become skeptical of their high school, of what they're seeing, and what actual support there is. If my younger sibling is facing these issues in an urban area and in a blue state where there are normally more resources available, what are other students undergoing? Do most Queer youth struggle to find safe learning spaces? My work aims to discover what resources are available, specifically in three of Sacramento, CA's largest school districts, how accessible they are, and how we can bridge the gaps in support for LGBTQIA+ students in high school.

Statement of the Problem

Challenges Faced by Queer Youth in High School

Queer youth face many challenges and obstacles while undergoing high school, many more obstacles than those that identify as non-LGBTQIA+. Queer youth have been identified as at-risk students by the National Mental Health Association (NHMA), are susceptible to a multitude of mental health conditions (NAMI, 2022), and many schools contain "an extremely hostile environment" that does not bode well for students' health (Johnson, Singh, & Gonzalez, 2014, p. 419). In the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network's (GLSEN) most current National School Climate Survey (2019), a majority of students reported experiencing discriminatory

policies and practices in their schools (p. 6). There is a multitude of evidence that supports the notion that effective resources and policies that provide for and protect LGBTQIA+ youth during their time in school are lacking. According to the Movement Advancement Project's (MAP) equality map, there are 25 states that have no laws protecting LGTBQIA+ students in the United States (MAP, 2021) and with the current political and social climate, this may increase in the near future.

Queer youth face unsafe school environments which can lead ultimately lead to their death through violence or suicide. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) website, LGBTQIA+ youth are more than “twice as likely to report experiencing persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness... and Transgender youth...are twice as likely to experience depressive symptoms, seriously consider suicide, and attempt suicide compared to cisgender lesbian, gay, bisexual, Queer and questioning youth” (NAMI, 2022). An obstacle that Queer youth frequently face in schools is having a school climate filled with harassment. According to the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), 86.3% of LGBTQIA+ youth expressed facing harassment or assault with a majority reporting that they did not report their incidents because they felt that nothing would be done (GLSEN, 2019, p. 5). Many of the current high school resources and policies are not providing a safe space for Queer youth and are not being seen as supportive of the plights that Queer youth face.

An additional obstacle that Queer youth face is a lack of LGBTQIA+ curriculum and a lack of inclusion in sexual health education. By excluding LGBTQIA+ youth in curriculum, it renders them as invisible in the school system as teachings become unrelatable to them because many of the current teachings focus on enforcing heteronormativity and the gender binary (Helmer, 2016). In McCready's (2010) work, they share the stories of Antione and Kevin, two

gay, gender non-conforming youth. Antoine and Kevin would sometimes “dress, speak, and act in ways considered feminine, and therefore inappropriate for their male bodies” which led to “tension in the class, particularly among some of the male dancers and drummers - and with Nana [the director]” (McCready, 2010, p. 6). The tensions and inner thoughts of those interacting with Antoine and Kevin affirm the gender binary and contribute to the divide. This lack of inclusion in school curriculum serves as silencing LGBTQIA+ youth in the school system (Gowen & Wings-Yanez, 2013). By failing to include LGBTQIA+ inclusion in sexual health education classes, or only mentioning them when in relation to AIDS, Queer youth felt that they were being seen as an “other” - as “aliens” and “freaks” (Gowen & Wings-Yanez, 2013, p. 791).

Activism of LGBTQIA+ Youth

Due to LGBTQIA+ youth facing such obstacles, many become involved in activist work to combat the obstacles that they face in school, and even outside of school. Gay Straight Alliances (GSA/GSAs) function as more than just school clubs, they are a home for LGBTQIA+ youth and their allies to start and strengthen their activism work. These student-run clubs harbor activism by fighting against school policies, by hosting events, by spreading the word about LGBTQIA+ rights and fighting for them. Youth activism can also be seen outside of school as schools are not always receptive to LGBTQIA+ students and their rights. LGBTQIA+ youth can become involved in extracurricular activities and programs that make a change in the community and that may also tie back and impact the school environment. LGBTQIA+ youth activism is vital in understanding the type of support that is needed for Queer youth in high schools.

Improving School Climate for Queer Youth in High School

Improving the school climate for Queer youth in high schools can take many forms: improving the general climate, looking into the roles of school personnel and professionals, and reviewing the curriculum. In order to improve the school climate for Queer youth, schools must be open to improving the general climate of the school by engaging in different practices (e.g. gender-inclusive language, knowledge of LGBTQIA+ youth rights, privacy, and even by assisting in navigating transitions, especially in relation to school forms listing name/gender). There are a multitude of ways to improve the general climate of high schools and the Southern Poverty Law Center provides some best practices such as providing a safe and inclusive environment, encouraging staff to be allies, enforcing an equal dress-code for all, and using inclusive language to name a few (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013). These best practices can be implemented in multiple areas in the schools to improve the climate.

School personnel can become involved in policymaking committees to make suggestions for improvement in harassment and discrimination policies (Pollock, 2006) and in providing workshops, trainings to other staff members, and even seeking additional trainings with regards to LGBTQIA+ youth. School personnel have an obligation to assist and improve the school climate for LGBTQIA+ youth. School counselors, staff, and psychiatrists are some of the positions that work with students on the ground on a daily basis and may be best inclined to assist with implementing these changes. While we expect to rely on school personnel to assist with enacting change in order to support LGBTQIA+ youth, there is a current deficit in providing adequate training for school counselors and psychiatrists. Professional development opportunities for school personnel are needed as research shows that they are not receiving

sufficient education or training with regards to LGBTQIA+ youth (Heck, Linqvist, Machek, & Cochran, 2014).

Purpose of the Project

The aim of this field project is to conduct a critical document analysis in order to analyze existing Sacramento-area school district websites and student handbooks that are distributed to youth in high schools regarding their rights and resources. The population will be three high school districts in the Sacramento area (Twin Rivers Unified School District, Natomas Unified School District, and Sacramento City Unified School District). This analysis can be used to revise current handbooks and websites that are shared with high school youth that detail their rights, information regarding where they can find more information regarding their rights, and available resources (e.g. websites, legal aid, suicide prevention, local organizations, housing). This project will be of interest to those school professionals that wish to build a more supportive campus for their Queer youth and to those school professionals who want to spread awareness about student rights and resources. This project was chosen because research demonstrates that there is a lack of resources for Queer youth. According to the GLSEN 2019 survey, “all too many schools fail to provide critical resources” (GLSEN, 2019, p. 8) to LGBTQIA+ youth.

Theoretical Framework

Queer Theory is oftentimes described as being “indefinable” and ambiguous (McCann & Monaghan, 2019, p. 1). Queer Theory emerged in the 1990s in academia and the name was coined by Teresa de Lauretis to be “deliberately disruptive” and to “challenge what was taken for granted as ‘theory’ in the academy” (McCann & Monaghan, 2019, pp. 2-3). According to Gunckel (2009), “Queer theory provides a framework for examining schools, curriculum, and pedagogy to find those identities, bodies, and experiences that have been silenced, ignored, and

rendered invisible” (p. 65). Notable contributors to Queer Theory in the 1990s were Judith Butler who challenged the gender binary (1990) and Michael Warner (1991) who coined the term *heteronormativity*, the assumption that heterosexuality is the standard and is the norm, and explored new notions of Queer Theory and what Queer Theory actually encompasses. In the 21st century, there have been various authors, researchers, and theorists expanding on Queer Theory. Gunckel (2009) stated that “Queer Theory resists definition” (p. 63) and explores Queer Theory characteristics. About a decade later, Linville (2017) explored Queer Theory as a tenet for reframing deficits and the concept of the “deserving student” (p. 6). This section includes a brief history of Queer Theory which includes (in chronological order) a variety of contributors that contribute to the components of this theory that is always changing, always bending, and that will continue to evolve.

A foundational scholar of Queer Theory in the 1990s was Judith Butler. Butler is famously known for the manner in which they challenge the gender binary of “female” and “male” and heterosexism in their famous book *Gender Trouble* (1990), and challenged society’s thoughts on gender. Butler’s thoughts on performativity and the heterosexual norm are of significant interest to understanding how homophobia [the prejudice against gay/Queer people] and sexism [a prejudice or discrimination based on gender] work in schools” (Meyer, 2007, p. 18). Butler critiqued performativity and questioned outwardly showing an external appearance that “fits” with your assigned traditional male/female gender. Butler discussed how gender is performative in society and how societal norms and thoughts are precise in their desired effect on gender identity (Butler, 1993, as cited in Hall et al., 2013, p. 22):

Gender is performative insofar as it is the effect of a regulatory regime of gender differences in which genders are divided and hierarchized *under constraint*, Social

constraints, taboos, prohibitions, threats of punishment operate in the ritualized repetition of norms...to the extent that this repetition creates an effect of gender uniformity, a stable effect of masculinity and femininity...There is no subject who is “free” to stand outside these norms or to negotiate them at a distance; on the contrary, the subject is retroactively produced by these norms in their repetition, precisely as their effect

This script on how to act is taught to children from a very young age so they live their entire lives “knowing” what represents “boys” and “girls” in our culture and [by] placing children into these strict gender molds...[this] limits their opportunities to express their gender freely (Meyer, 2007, p. 20). Meyer (2007) goes on to interpret and expand on Butler’s thoughts that “gendered harassment, which includes homophobia, harassment, (hetero) sexual harassment, and harassment for gender nonconformity, is one very clear way that society polices and reinforces the heterosexual matrix” (p. 20). This contribution introduced this concept of performativity and gender norms to be part of Queer Theory tenets.

Michael Warner (1991) articulates and introduces the concept of heteronormativity in their work (McCann & Monaghan, 2019) and explores Queer Theory as being more than just lesbian and gay studies. Warner states that the “task of Queer social theory...must be to confront the default heteronormativity of modern culture with its worst nightmare, a Queer planet” (Warner, 1991, p. 16). Warner (1991) states that this new purpose of Queer Theory is to demonstrate lesbian and gay struggles in greater detail and that being Queer means fighting for issues all the time and that Queer persons know that stigmatization is ingrained in:

gender, with the family, with notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and

national fantasy, class identity, truth and trust, censorship, intimate life and social display, terror and violence, health care, and deep cultural norms about bearing of the body. (p. 6)

Warner had a very futuristic thought of Queer Theory and about how they expect Queer Theory to grow and encompass so much more than was described in the 1990s. Warner's contribution to Queer Theory was through the exploration of this new concept of heteronormativity.

Building on this foundation, Kristin Gunckel (2009) explores Queer Theory and its purpose. Gunckel describes Queer Theory as "making the normal Queer" and that Queer Theory "disrupt[s] normative processes" (p. 63). Queer Theory may be confusing to understand to some because it is not defined - to define Queer Theory would be to contradict the intent of Queer Theory (Gunckel, 2009, p. 63). Queer Theory is meant to disrupt systems, current definitions, and the known. Queer Theory aims to examine how "social constructions of sexuality [are] normalized so that heterosexuality is portrayed as the only normal and natural form of being human. Queer Theory reveals how truths and selves are socially constructed (Gunckel, 2009, p. 63). By examining current social constructs and by disrupting current system, Queer Theory allows researchers to imagine and to explore "out there" ideas of what could be.

In relation to Gunckel's work, Linville utilized Queer Theory to apply this to schools. According to Linville (2017), "Queer Theory has demanded that educational theorists and researchers reframe their questions away from deficits in students to look at structural impediments that keep students from succeeding" (p. 6). By looking into breaking the norm of blaming students for their "failures and shortcomings," Linville is utilizing Queer Theory as described by Gunckel - to disrupt current systems. Linville (2017) also utilizes Queer Theory to examine the role of the "deserving student" and to "restructure the social and academic atmosphere of educational institutions to be accessible to all students" (p. 6). Queer Theory asks

us to question “what is taken for granted, natural, and normal, they ask us to see new possibilities and potentialities for ourselves and our students” (Linville, 2017, p. 6). Queer Theory is important because it does much more than have tenets of LGBTQIA+ rights, it also allows us the opportunity to delve into “what ifs,” to imagine alternate societies through disruption.

In summary, Queer Theory proposes new alternatives to our current systematic, norm-based systems. This includes foundational work from Butler (1990) that describes the performativity of gender roles and how straying from the norms creates “the other,” who is then subject to the scorn and anger of those following the gender norms. Warner (1991) coins the term heteronormativity in their work that gives an explanation to an important concept in Queer Theory. Gunckel (2009) and Linville (2017) provide their thoughts on Queer Theory and its purpose, its characteristics, and how to apply this to school-based systems. My research aims to examine the manner in which Sacramento-area high schools are contributing to providing resources to their high school LGBTQIA+ youth that may fall outside of the norm or providing more than just the required resources to youth who embody Queer Theory tenets. Related to this is a body of research that demonstrates the practical application of Queer Theory. Chapter 2 describes this research and justifies the claim that we must know the challenges that Queer/LGBTQIA+ youth face in high school in order to be able to effectively provide support.

Methodology

This field project will be informed by a critical document analysis of three Sacramento-area school district websites and their respective student handbooks. Document analysis will be used to collect and analyze current materials and website resources in order to suggest revisions to current materials. By analyzing the current resources that are given and

available to students, I will be able to examine what the current resources are and what can be changed to provide extra support for Queer youth. I will analyze the resources and check whether they meet fifteen protocols ranging from resources for suicide prevention to current procedures for reporting staff/teachers/school professionals for discrimination and/or harassment. Once the data are collected and analyzed, they will be used to mend gaps in support for LGBTQIA+ youth by providing accessible materials regarding their rights and resources.

Significance of the Project

This field project may be of interest to students, families, administrators, and school personnel and professionals. It may hold significance for those youth that identify as LGBTQIA+ because there is currently a lack of available resources for Queer youth. Making these materials available and implementing them in the school system will be an important step to support our Queer youth. In addition, this field project may also interest families because schools will be providing materials to encourage diversity and ensuring that all students are attending a space that is safe for them. Finally, this field project may be important to administrators, school personnel/staff, and professionals because they will be given resources that are made to support them in their roles, foster better relationships amongst Queer youth, and gain trainings and understandings regarding Queer youth as there is a current lack of education and knowledge on how to support LGBTQIA+ youth.

Limitations of Project

The limitations of this project are various as this is a qualitative study and focuses only on a specific region in the Sacramento area. This study focuses on three school districts, a very small sample, so we cannot make assumptions or generalizations of all school districts based on information solely from these three school districts. Another limitation is that this study is based

on content analysis. It is impossible to know if the documents that were analyzed shape reality or reflect reality. It is most likely a combination of both, but it is impossible to know.

Definition of Terms

Throughout my research and field work, there are a multitude of terms that are frequently used in the LGBTQIA+ community and in LGBTQIA+ discourse. The following terms are integral and come up in various parts of my own work and of others. The below definitions should clarify and define the terms.

- **At-risk students:** According to The Glossary of Education Reform, “the term at-risk is often used to describe students or groups of students who are considered to have a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school” (Ed Glossary, 2013).
- **Cisgender:** “A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.)
- **Coming Out:** “The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.)
- **Gender Binary:** “Pervasive within the US school system is the heteronormative culture or dominant socio-cultural belief system that reinforces and perpetuates heterosexual privilege and anti-gay prejudice by accepting as valid only a strict binary male/female socially constructed conception of sexuality” (Steck & Perry, 2015, p. 327).
 “A system in which gender is constructed into two strict categories of male or female. Gender identity is expected to align with the sex assigned at birth and gender expressions and roles fit traditional expectations” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.)

- **Gender expression:** “External appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, body characteristics or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.)
- **Gender Identity:** “One’s innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.)
- **Gender Non-Conforming:** “A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category. While many also identify as transgender, not all gender non-conforming people do” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.)
- **Gender Performativity:** “Judith Butler questions the belief that certain gendered behaviors are natural, illustrating the ways that one's learned performance of gendered behavior (what we commonly associate with femininity and masculinity) is an act of sorts, a performance, one that is imposed upon us by normative heterosexuality” (Felluga, 2011)
- **Heteronormativity:** “the assumption that heterosexuality is the standard for defining normal sexual behavior and that male–female differences and gender roles are the natural and immutable essentials in normal human relations. According to some social theorists, this assumption is fundamentally embedded in, and legitimizes, social and legal institutions that devalue, marginalize, and discriminate against people who deviate from

its normative principle (e.g., gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered persons)”
(American Psychological Association, n.d.)

- **Homophobia:** “The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who are attracted to members of the same sex” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.)
- **LGBTQIA+:** “An acronym for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer,” intersex, asexual...with a "+" sign to recognize the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities used by members of the community” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.)

This term is used interchangeably with the term ‘Queer’ throughout this work and research. This term is used instead of the popular ‘LGBT/LGBT+’ term to encompass more marginalized persons in research when reading and speaking the term.

- **Non-Binary:** “An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer or gender-fluid” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.)
- **Normative:** “Of, relating to, or determining norms or standards; conforming to or based on norms” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)
- **Norm:** “standards of proper or acceptable behavior; something (such as a behavior or way of doing something) that is usual or expected” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)
- **Queer:** “Often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive

identities. This term was previously used as a slur, but has been reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQ+ movement” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.).

This term is used interchangeably alongside ‘LGBTQIA+’ throughout the work.

- **Questioning:** “A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.)
- **Sexual Orientation:** “An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people. Note: an individual’s sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.)

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review makes the claim that it is important to understand what challenges Queer youth face in high schools, and what resources are available to them, in order to identify and rectify gaps in support. The body of scholarship that justifies this claim includes three sets of evidence that demonstrate that: (a) Queer youth, or perceived Queer youth, face specific challenges in high school; (b) LGBTQIA+ youth engage in activism to enact change and acceptance; (c) it is important to improve school climate for Queer youth in high schools. Queer Theory can be used to frame this body of scholarship.

Challenges Faced by Queer Youth in High School

Research demonstrates that Queer youth, and those perceived as Queer, face many challenges in high school. This section includes research that provides evidence of a lack of resources at the high school level, including a lack of effective policies in protecting LGBTQIA+ youth during their time in school. Research also includes a discussion based on the lack of LGBTQIA+ school curriculum, including a lack of sexual health education for LGBTQIA+ youth. Finally, this section also addresses the school climate which very often includes the bullying of LGBTQIA+ youth. It is important to recognize the various challenges that Queer youth face in order to identify how high schools are lacking in supporting their LGBTQIA+ youth and in identifying potential solutions to improve Queer youth experiences, or those perceived as Queer, in high school.

Research illustrates that there is a lack of resources and effective policies in place to support LGBTQIA+ students in high schools. According to Johnson et al. (2014), LGBTQIA+ students navigate “extremely hostile environments” and “there are very few school-based

interventions designed to keep them safe” (p. 419) during students’ time in schools. Schools are currently functioning as systems of discrimination and prejudice by rejecting or failing to implement personnel training on heterosexism and homophobia for school staff/personnel/administrators (Johnson, Singh, & Gonzalez, 2014, p. 422) and there are either a lack of policies in place to protect LGBTQIA+ youth or the current policies in place are ignored or enforced in a discriminatory manner.

According to Biegel and Kuehl (2010), there are both “structural and institutional failures” within schools (pp. 3-4). Schools are failing to recognize the importance of LGBTQIA+ educators, and schools are failing to recognize and address the homophobia in many sports programs (Biegel & Kuehl, 2010, pp. 3-4). Teacher education programs and professional development programs are failing to focus and cover topics relating to LGBTQIA+ youth (Biegel & Huehl, 2010, pp. 3-4), and schools are failing to recognize and speak about LGBTQIA+ youth in additional on-site trainings and inservices. As LGBTQIA+ and gender non-conforming students are more likely to feel unsafe in schools, they “often stop coming to classes regularly; many drop out, run away from home, or attempt suicide” (Biegel & Kuegl, 2010, p. 3). These students have been identified as *at-risk* students (exposed to the possibility of danger, harm, or loss) by the National Mental Health Association (NMHA).

According to the Movement Advancement Project’s (MAP) equality map based on nondiscrimination safe schools laws, there are currently 25 states that have no laws protecting LGBTQIA+ students in the United States and two states that have laws that prevent schools from adding LGBTQIA+ protections to nondiscrimination policies (MAP, 2021). Similarly, the research presented in the most current Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network’s (GLSEN) National School Climate Survey (2019) states that most LGBTQIA+ students (59.1%) reported

that they personally experienced LGBTQ+-related discriminatory policies and practices at school (GLSEN, 2019, p. 6). Students reported being prevented from using the bathrooms assigned with their gender identity, were disciplined for public displays of affection that were not similarly disciplined among non-LGBTQ+ students, prevented from using locker rooms aligned with their gender identity, prevented from using chosen names/pronouns, prevented from wearing clothing considered “inappropriate” based on gender or prevented from wearing clothing that supported LGBTQ+ issues, prohibited from discussing or writing about LGBTQ+ topics in school assignments, prohibited from including LGBTQ+ topics in school-based extracurricular activities, restricted from forming or promoting a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), prevented or discouraged from participating in school sports because they were LGBTQ+, prevented from attending school dances with someone of the same gender, and even being disciplined for identifying as LGBTQ+ (GLSEN, 2019, p. 6). According to the multitude of research, schools are currently lacking in resources and policies to support LGBTQIA+ or those students perceived as Queer.

In relation to the lack of school resources and policies, there is also currently an exclusion of LGBTQIA+ coverage in school curriculum, including a lack of coverage in sexual health education classes. This exclusion and lack of coverage renders LGBTQIA+ youth as invisible in the school system and causes some teachings to be un-relatable to this group of students. This is especially true in traditional teachings that enforce heteronormativity, the *gender binary* (gender as being only male or female), and *nuclear families* (an adult couple and their children) (e.g. focusing on heterosexual sexual health education topics) (Helmer, 2016). Reflecting the societal norms, schools are based on the dominant heteronormative culture - which, in turn, means all of

the adopted materials and textbooks, the assignments, rules and routines enforce heteronormative practices and policies (Steck & Perry, 2015).

In support of these claims, Gowen and Wings-Yanez (2013) conducted research regarding LGBTQQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning) youth and their perspectives on inclusive sexual education. Gowen and Yanez (2013) found that a lack of inclusion was a dominant theme across their work. In the focus groups of this research, it was discovered that there were two types of silencing when discussing sexuality education - passive silencing and active silencing. Passive silencing is when “LGBTQ discourse was completely absent from sexuality education curricula” and active silencing is when “LGBTQ youth were silenced by another” - educators ignoring or avoiding questions that arose (Gowen & Wings-Yanez, 2013, p. 791). With the sexual education curriculum lacking LGBTQIA+ issues and representation, and with educators refusing to discuss such issues or stating that LGBTQIA+ issues were not allowed to be discussed, youth expressed that they felt like they were othered - they felt like they were “aliens” or “freaks.” The only times youth noticed LGBTQIA+ inclusion in their sexual health education course was when the discussion of AIDS would occur which upset some of the participants as this was stigmatizing LGBTQIA+ persons (Gowen & Wings-Yanez, 2013, p. 792) by only mentioning them in this context and ignoring their presence in all other aspects of sexual health education.

According to Steck and Perry (2015), the current curriculum taught in the U.S. is limiting and excludes Queer content which results in denying students an equitable and balanced education. In order to enact change, Queer materials need to be fully integrated into the curriculum with the purpose to diversify the human experience in order to make change; to disrupt and deconstruct heteronormativity and the dominant gender binary (p. 329). The

curriculum process should seek more than just tolerance, it should seek to “foster recognition, acceptance, inclusion, and affirmation of human diversity” (Steck & Perry, 2015, p. 330). A major fear of incorporating LGBTQIA+ discussions in the classroom and an argument against doing so is that such conversations are inappropriate because people fear that students learning about these topics will result in the practice of homosexuality, but in fact, these conversations ensure that students are “less likely to insult someone and less likely to ostracize LGBTQIA+ persons” (Flores, 2012, p. 129). Non-gender conforming and non-heterosexual persons exist so instead of pretending that they do not, and trying to hide the fact that students and children know about them, schools should be embracing an inclusive curriculum.

LGBTQIA+ and Queer perceived youth, encounter a school climate filled with harassment during their time in school. Many instances of harassment are often not reported and are made invisible. The GLSEN 2019 National School Climate Survey (2019) reported that 86.3% of LGBTQIA+ students experienced harassment in the forms of verbal, physical, sexual, and electronic harassment as well as physical assault. A majority of students (56.6%) did not report their incidents because they felt that no “effective intervention would occur or the situation could become worse if reported” (GLSEN, 2019, p. 5). For those that did report, 60.5% of students stated that school staff did nothing in response or were advised to “ignore it” (GLSEN, 2019, p. 5).

According to researchers, an increase in LGBTQIA+ bullying was connected to school personnel ignoring or “looking the other way when heterosexist/homophobic incidents of bullying occur” and also by denying the existence of LGBTQIA+ students (Johnson, Singh, & Gonzalez, 2014, p. 421). An example of a worsening climate and an increase in bullying due to a lack of action is shown in Blackburn and McCready (2009) who describe an experience by an

openly gay student named Dylan who was bullied because of their sexual orientation. Dylan discusses an incident that involves six students that surrounded Dylan and threw a lasso around their [Dylan's] neck and stated "let's tie the faggot to the back of the truck" (Blackburn & McCready, 2009, p. 223). The administration did nothing to reprimand the six students and advised Dylan to not discuss their sexual orientation with other students. The bullying, harassment, and violence did not wane or decrease but instead increased after no action was taken by the administration.

Berry (2018) states that "school bullying is an oppressive mode of interpersonal conflict that rattles the bodies and beings of young people" (p. 502) and goes on to state that feeling safe should be an essential state of being (p. 506). LGBTQIA+ students experience hostile school environments and experience bullying, harassment, discrimination, and assault in various forms (e.g. verbal, physical, sexual, online/electronic), in schools across the nation. According to the 2019 GLSEN National School Climate Survey, 59.1% of LGBTQ students expressed feeling unsafe in their school because of their sexual orientation (p. 3) and 86.3% of LGBTQ students expressed being harassed or assaulted (p. 4). GLSEN also reports that some effects of a hostile school climate include a higher likelihood of missing school, a lower GPA, becoming twice as likely not to plan to pursue any post-secondary education, a lower self-esteem, and higher levels of depression. The norm for many LGBTQIA+ youth, or for those youths perceived as Queer, is to attend school with a fear of harassment and assault, a fear of enclosed spaces where violence often occurs and is hidden from others, and even being in an academic space where their safety may be ignored by their school administration. LGBTQIA+ students live in an alternative reality where they stay home out of fear for their well-being, not because they want to be away from

school, but because they are thrust into an environment where they have to be vigilant at all times (Berry, 2018, p. 506).

In summary, research demonstrates that Queer youth, and those perceived as Queer, face a multitude of challenges attempting to survive through high school. This includes research that demonstrates a lack of resources for LGBTQIA+ youth in high schools, as well as a lack of effective policies protecting LGBTQIA+ youth. Research also articulates that there is a lack of inclusive LGBTQIA+ school curriculum, as well as a lack of inclusive sexual health education classes, which contributes to the invisibility of Queer youth. Research also illustrates that school climate very often includes the bullying of LGBTQIA+ youth with the inclusion of harassment and assault in various means. Taking all this research together justifies that we must understand the challenges and current resources available to Queer youth in high school in order to evaluate and identify gaps in support.

Activism of LGBTQIA+ Youth

Due to facing a multitude of challenges in schools, LGBTQIA+ youth engage in activism to combat the discrimination, heterosexism, and homophobia that is present in high schools and in the world. This section of the literature review includes research that demonstrates that Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) are more than just a school club - GSAs are a home for LGBTQIA+ students to join, practice, and strengthen their activism while in school. While GSAs and in-school activism are needed to change the school culture, change may also occur by becoming involved outside of school by engaging in extracurricular activities. This is important because Queer youth and allies engaging in activism are needed in the fight against heterosexism and homophobia. Activism work allows us to not only identify the challenges that Queer youth face

but to rectify any gaps in support and imagine a more equitable, inclusive world for LGBTQIA+ persons.

To begin, Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) can be a hub for student-led activism. GSAs allow a space for students to enhance and practice their activism by fighting to make change in their schools by contesting the gender binary, gender norms, and heteronormativity in a multitude of ways. According to Elliot (2015) and their observations made regarding a high school GSA, the students of the club engaged in activism by fighting for a gender-neutral restroom and by hosting inclusive health presentations during sexual education courses. The GSA students campaigned for a gender-neutral bathroom and were granted the use of one on-campus bathroom - they were able to provide at least one safe space for LGBTQIA+ students. By presenting to their fellow peers during a sex education class, the GSA students were able to share their experiences and viewpoints regarding gender and sex and to come out to the different classrooms. The GSA students allowed their fellow peers to ask questions, to hear their experiences regarding homophobia they've experienced, their own narratives about gender and sex, and to make their presence known in their heteronormative school. Activism does not always have to be upfront protests; sometimes activism takes the form of being present, being out, and facilitating change in that manner.

Similarly, in Hsu's work (2017) about how they support their LGBTQIA+ students, their school's GSA hosts a variety of events from celebrating Pride Month, to hosting an annual Day of Silence, to facilitating drag shows for their school and community, and even coordinating trainings for the school's teachers. Providing these spaces for students, staff, and the community to come together to celebrate and participate in these events is activism. The students hosting these events are agents of change - they are attempting to change the culture of their school into

one that is more accepting. GSAs can be a great resource for students to become involved and strengthen their activism.

Related to this, youth activism is not only seen in schools. There are times when schools are not accepting of change and where GSAs or other similar clubs are not available or accepted. Extracurricular activities are another manner in which LGBTQIA+ youth are exposed to and practice activism. According to Blackburn (2004), schools may actually prohibit youth from engaging in activism while in school (p. 104) so these students must look elsewhere to find a space and place to make necessary change. Youth that become involved in extracurricular activities outside of school can enact change both in and out of school. Blackburn (2004) shares their experience of encountering youth activism while they volunteered at The Attic in Philadelphia. The Attic has a Speakers Bureau which consists of “trained peer educators who conduct outreaches on topics such as HIV/AIDS, safer sex, sexuality, suicide, substance abuse, heterosexism, and homophobia to youth and youth service providers in schools, organizations, and health care facilities” (Blackburn, 2004, p. 104). Youth were able to participate in this Speakers Bureau and spread awareness both inside of schools but also outside to their communities and are engaging in activism work that combats homophobia and heterosexism.

In total, research demonstrates that LGBTQIA+ youth activism is vital in understanding the type of support that is needed. This includes research that states that activism can be in school - standing up for oneself against a teacher, including oneself in class work where they are not visible - but it can also be outside of school - leaving school because it is unsafe, working in an out-of-school context in order to educate oneself or others on issues of social change or to combat these institutions (Blackburn, 2004, p. 109). The research about youth LGBTQIA+ activism justifies that activism is necessary and that we must understand why youth are wanting

to enact change in order to discover the types of support that are needed and where the gaps in support are in order to provide effective assistance and support to LGBTQIA+ youth.

Improving School Climate for Queer Youth in High School

With relation to the literature on challenges and activism, a body of scholarship demonstrates how to improve school climate for Queer youth. This includes research on improving the general climate for high school students who identify as LGBTQIA+. It also includes scholarship that explains the role of various high school staff and their connection to Queer youth in high schools and their contributions to the high school climate. A third theme that moves toward improving the climate for Queer youth is a change in curriculum. This is important because it helps to justify the claim that it is important to understand what challenges Queer youth face in high school in order to identify and rectify gaps in support - a change in climate is a hopeful step towards improvement and rectifying these gaps in support.

To begin, research and project work completed by the Southern Poverty Law Center (2013) demonstrates that there are various best practices for creating an LGBT+ inclusive school climate. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (2013), having inclusive leaders and allies that “promote a safe and inclusive environment are essential” (p. 2) because it creates “a culture in which other staff members are unafraid to be allies” (p. 2). In relation to creating a culture of acceptance, schools should equally enforce dress codes as youth use clothing as a form of self-expression and schools can “empower students” to be themselves (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, p. 3). For those students that do not conform to gender norms, they can feel excluded in extra-curricular activities and events, especially in events like prom, so schools should use “gender-inclusive language on all event communications, including invitations” and “event organizers [should be educated] about students’ First Amendment right to attend events with a

same-sex date and to wear clothing of their choice” (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, p. 3). Having coordinators and students aware of these rights before the event can ensure that all parties are understanding of the regulations and can avoid fallout at the actual event. In addition, offering assistance and guidance with regards to paperwork that incorrectly lists their gender for those students that are gender non-conforming, transgender, and intersex ensures that staff and peers address them using their preferred pronouns (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, p. 3). There should also be the inclusion and designation of gender-neutral restrooms as restrooms are very often non-safe spaces for Queer/gender non-conforming students (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, p. 3). The Southern Poverty Law Center (2013) continues by adding that privacy is essential - staff should never reveal a student’s sexual orientation or gender identity without the student’s permission. Four out of ten Queer youth state that they feel they are unsafe where they live so it is “absolutely imperative that educators respect a student’s right to privacy” (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, p.3).

Related to climate improvement, school personnel also have an obligation to assist and improve the school climate for LGBTQIA+ youth. School counselors, staff, and psychiatrists are some of the positions that work with students on the ground on a daily basis. Various research states that school counselors and school psychiatrists are in an “ideal position to address the issues” (Pollock, 2006, p. 33) for Queer youth and can also “influence and advise principals and policymaking committees to establish and enforce policies forbidding homophobic discrimination” (Pollock, 2006, p. 34). Enforcing and creating effective anti-bullying policies is a manner in which school personnel can assist in creating a better school climate. Anti-bullying policies should include specific language “prohibiting harassment based on nonconformity to gender norms, gender identity and expression” (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, pp. 3-4),

they should be frequently evaluated based on feedback, and that the “reactions to reports of harassment do not further stigmatize those who were targeted” (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, p. 4).

According to Greytak et al. (2013), schools that contain anti-bullying/anti-harassment policies that specify “protections from victimization based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression experience less harassment” (p. 47). School counselors can also “influence and advise principals and policymaking committees to establish and enforce policies forbidding homophobic discrimination” (Pollock, 2006, p. 34) and school psychologists are also “ideally suited to ensure that schools are safe places for all students by specifically targeting the issue of bullying and victimization in our schools... [they] also improve school climate by establishing comprehensive antidiscrimination policies” (Heck, Linnquist, Machek, & Cochran, 2014, p. 33). These actions are, in fact, part of the American School Counseling Association guidelines with regards to diversity (Pollock, 2006, p. 34) so they should be implemented by school counselors and psychiatrists in order to protect students and offer a safe school environment.

Maru Gonzalez conducted research regarding counselor experiences and found there were four thematic categories in which school counselor support for LGBT+ youth was described as: “(a) student advocacy, (b) education as advocacy, (c) systems advocacy, and (d) social/political advocacy” (Gonzalez, 2018, p. 41). “Student advocacy” work was classified as actions such as providing individual support, serving as an advisor to LGBT-friendly groups, providing access to research, and assisting students in developing strategies to navigate barriers and overcome adversity (Gonzalez, 2018, p. 41). “Education as advocacy” is seen as providing LGBT+ education to staff, students, and even themselves (Gonzalez, 2018, p. 41). “Systems advocacy” is work such as assisting with the process of name changes for students and families,

collecting school data and developing anti bullying initiatives/curriculum/committees, and even providing visible displays of support in their office to increase visibility of inclusive spaces (Gonzalez, 2018, p. 42). “Social/political advocacy” was described as “working to create change for and with LGBT+ students beyond the school level through community collaboration and legislative activism” (Gonzalez, 2018, p. 42). These four types of advocacy from school counselors are ways in which current school counselors provide support for their LGBT+ students that may work for others.

According to various researchers, school counselors are also in a position to “facilitate training sessions for faculty, staff, parents, and students for the purpose of improving awareness and education about heterosexism, homophobia, and the dangers of bullying” (Pollock, 2006, p. 34). Diversity trainings for students that encompass diverse conversations and bullying as a topic (behavior that classifies as bullying, the negative impact of bullying, how to respond to bullying, consequences for bullying, and the process for reporting bullying) are methods that the school community can take part in to create a more inclusive and safe environment for all involved. Similarly, Flores’ (2012) idea about providing multicultural education and sexual orientation workshops for school leaders, staff, and administration about pedagogy, sexual diversity, and school policies amongst other topics (p. 192) aligns with the Southern Poverty Law Center’s belief and suggestion of training for educators/staff. Mary Gonzalez (2018) classified that some counselors currently use an “education as advocacy” approach which is described as educating students about LGBT+ issues, educating school personnel, and even educating themselves through various professional development opportunities to enhance their own knowledge (p. 42).

While the default may be to rely on school personnel to enact change in order to support their LGBTQIA+ students, there is also a current deficit in providing school counselors and

psychiatrists with adequate training. According to Heck, Lindquist, Machek, and Cochran (2013), school personnel “commonly report that they are unsure of appropriate actions in response to anti-gay bullying, and feel they are inadequately trained to do so” (p. 33). There is a need for ongoing professional development for school personnel as they are not receiving sufficient education or training with regards to LGBTQIA+ youth and research has found that “graduate counseling trainees primarily received LGBT-related information within a single class or lecture” and that there is a “lack of LGBT-specific school counselor training” (Kull, Kosciw, & Greytak, 2017, p. 14). There is a current need to provide, and to keep providing, opportunities for school mental health professionals to seek additional training and opportunities for professional growth. Those counselors that expressed “more exposure to LGBT-related graduate education and professional development also reported higher self-efficacy and more frequent LGBT-related practice” (Kull, Kosciw, and Greytak, 2017, p. 17). While eliminating all bullying is unrealistic, research does show that at least half of all bullying can be prevented (Pollock, 2006, p. 34-35).

A final body of research claims that an inclusive curriculum can lead to an improvement in climate for LGBTQIA+ youth. According to Steck and Perry (2015), “Queer-inclusive curriculum creates spaces for students to engage in open dialogue... [which is] shown to improve intergroup relations and reduce fear and discomfort interacting with typically marginalized and stigmatized group members” (p. 332). Secondary school leaders should be providing an inclusive environment that supports their students’ “physical, psycho-social, and cognitive development” (Steck & Perry, 2015, p. 328). When educators purposefully choose texts that function as counternarratives for Queer persons, they allow students to “develop a historicized understanding of the construction of gender, sexuality, and sex” and to ensure that such texts are

read in ways “that uncover radical potential” (Helmer, 2016, p. 913). By ensuring and incorporating an inclusive curriculum, schools and educators are promoting equal treatment and acceptance of all persons. Excluding Queer-inclusive curriculum sends a message to “all students that there is something deviant about people who identify as Queer and invalidates their contribution to society, culture, and history” (Steck & Perry, 2015, p. 331). This inclusive curriculum provides “Queer students and their heterosexual peers with an opportunity to explore, learn, and understand the historical, social, and cultural contributions by the Queer community in science, art, family, sports, social movements, and other areas that shape the world” (Steck & Perry, 2015, p. 332). The inclusion of Queer content in curricula and in instructional materials provides all students with a more open view about various aspects of life.

In order to improve the school climate, states and the federal government must be willing to implement changes to their laws and policies. State and federal laws should adhere to current policies that protect LGBTQIA+ youth and provide protection to all students. In the California Education Code, there are a multitude of laws and policies protecting LGBTQIA+ youth. For example, sections 200-220 of the the education code protects students from “different kinds of bias and discrimination, including harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression” (American Civil Liberties Union of California, 2013) while also prohibiting discrimination based on gender identity or expression which includes respecting one’s pronouns and allowing one to dress as it relates to their gender identity (American Civil Liberties Union of California, 2013). There are current federal and state laws that positively contribute to improving the school climate for LGBTQIA+ youth but whether they are being adhered to, or effectively implemented, needs to be examined.

In summary, research demonstrates how to improve climate for Queer youth. This includes research that illustrates how to improve the general climate for high school youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ by various means. The Southern Poverty Law Center has established various best practices and other researchers have supported that to improve school climate, schools should have inclusive leaders and allies, equally enforce dress codes, utilize gender-inclusive language, have all persons involved in event coordination aware of student's rights, use preferred pronouns, provide access to gender-neutral restrooms, and ensure student privacy. Research also claims that to improve school climate, school personnel can support the mission to improve school conditions for Queer youth. School counselors, staff, and psychiatrists can assist in this mission by enforcing and creating effective anti-bullying policies, in facilitating training sessions, and in seeking additional education and training. Taken together, this body of research justifies that in order to understand what challenges Queer youth face, we must know what resources are available in order to help rectify any gaps in support.

Summary

Understanding what challenges LGBTQIA+ youth face in high school and identifying what resources are available to them is vital. Both of these are necessary in order to identify and rectify gaps in support. The body of scholarship that justifies this claim includes three sets of research that demonstrate that: (a) Queer youth (and those seen as Queer youth) face specific challenges; (b) LGBTQIA+ youth engage in important activism; and (c) it is important to improve school climate for Queer youth. Queer Theory was used to frame this body of scholarship because the research that is conducted takes in tenets of Queer Theory - what it is and what it aims to do. Queer Theory aims to disrupt current systems, to disrupt the binary. With my thesis, I aim to utilize the tenets of Queer Theory to undergo a critical document analysis in order to

provide suggestions for selected documents. I propose to provide three high schools districts with suggestions for improving their website and documents to be more encompassing for LGBTQIA+ youth with regards to fifteen selected protocols. I aim to assist in providing schools with a better understanding of their LGBTQIA+ youth in order to be able to provide support.

CHAPTER III

THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

Brief Description of the Project

For this research, I focused on the critical document analysis of three Sacramento-area high school districts and their respective websites and student handbooks. I conducted a search for factors that impact LGBTQIA+ high school students in order to create a protocol. Examples of such factors are references to anti-bullying policies and protocols, information and steps for reporting harassment, discrimination, or bullying, resources for anxiety and depression, and student rights.

Given the multitude of factors that impact high school LGBTQIA+ students, this critical document analysis focuses on analyzing these handbooks and websites to gauge how these three school districts are including information with regards to LGBTQIA+ students regarding their rights, the ease of access to information, and policies and regulations that affect Queer youth in high school.

Development of the Project

This project was inspired by conversations with my younger sister, my curiosity with regards to the sorts of resources given and available to Queer high school students, and my sister's experiences in her high school. My sister identifies as both Queer and as a high school student, which led to my interest in this specific population. When undergoing open discussion and conversations with my sister, I began to question whether she knew her rights, whether she knew where to look for this information, and whether her school and school district were providing students with the appropriate resources.

During my sister's second year of high school, she faced a very negative and difficult experience with one of her teachers. This teacher was vocally anti-Trans, anti-immigrant, and frequently forced their political and personal beliefs onto their students. We had previously submitted a complaint against this teacher for being fatphobic and making harsh and negative comments towards students that could not meet what seemed like impossible physical education assignments. This initial complaint was completely ignored (we believe due to nepotism). After the teacher continued to berate and intimidate their students, my sister and a couple of her friends, who were sophomores at the time, made the decision to report this teacher to their administration. They sent the complaints through email communication to their administration and ensured they included all of their teachers on the email, as well as included screenshots and recordings of their Zoom chats/class as proof, so that they could not be ignored. We never received the results or any further communication of this investigation after the initial interviews but we know this teacher is not currently teaching at the school but they do show up as a teacher on the school website.

Queer youth face many obstacles - both similar to my sister's experience(s) but also vastly different. Queer youth need to know where they can go to find the support and services that they need when they need them. The thought of questioning where these resources are and what they are prompted the initial stages of this project. These concerns led me to conduct a critical document analysis.

Through critical document analysis, I had to narrow down what it was that I was looking for, whether I wanted to look at individual schools or school districts, and which documents and items I wanted to analyze. I knew I wanted to research Sacramento-area school districts because I am a Sacramento native and have been a part of this community since birth. It was important to

me to conduct research in an area that had significant ties to my identity and personal development.

I initially began by reaching out to two larger LGBTQ+ organizations to receive feedback and assistance with my project and to see if my research could assist their organization in any way. I received a response back that they did not have any contacts in the area and were unsure how they would be able to assist with my project but wished me well. This then led to the decision to create my own protocols of what I wanted to look for and narrowing the focus from examining different handouts and documentation given to students throughout the school year to focusing on district handbooks and websites. I pulled from topics in my literature review, alongside topics that fit with state legislation to develop the content analysis protocol used to review the documents.

In the California Education Code, there are a multitude of laws and policies protecting LGBTQIA+ youth's rights. Per the ACLU (2013), schools must have an anti-harassment policy with a clear policy on how to report harassment and prevent retaliation of those that disclose. Education Code Section 220 states the prohibition of discrimination against someone based on a multitude of factors such as gender identity and expression, which includes allowing youth to utilize their chosen name and gender pronouns, expressing themselves in a manner that confirms their gender identity or dressing in non-confirming ways, and "providing access to sex-segregated spaces such as restrooms and lockers room...in a way that corresponds to your gender identity" (ACLU, 2013). Youth are also protected with regards to privacy; i.e., no one has the right to out you without your permission (unless under certain circumstances) (ACLU, 2013). The ACLU (2013) states that Gay-Straight-Alliances (GSAs) have a right to meet like any other non-curricular club on the school's campus with the same rights as other clubs (e.g. hanging up

posters, having fundraisers, etc.) California Education Code 51500 states that public schools cannot instruct students or condone activities that reflect a bias or discrimination against any person because of their sexual orientation, gender, or gender identity or expression (ACLU, 2013). Finding resources that lay out LGBTQIA+ student's rights is critical in allowing us to fight for Queer youth rights and to rectify any gaps in support.

To find the available and most current district handbooks (2021-2022), I went to each school district's website and searched for their handbooks (Natomas Unified School District, Sacramento City Unified School District, and Twin Rivers Unified School District). For each of the protocols, I went page by page to see if there were any resources available in the handbooks that correlate with that specific factor. I created a matrix where I was able to list page numbers and direct quotes from the handbooks for that factor. The handbooks did not provide too many references to outside resources but included the necessary information they are obligated to share with students and families, which was expected.

For the research of district websites, I utilized the "search" feature on each district website and typed in keywords for each protocol to see what resources were available. I discovered that while some protocols were easily found, some were vague. For example, when searching for anxiety resources, I would be directed to general mental health resources. While the mental health resource may support anxiety management, it wasn't directly geared towards providing a direct resource or tips for anxiety and anxiety management. To organize my research, I utilized the same chart I used when analyzing the handbooks and included columns for this work. I included links and notes from the websites since they're easily accessible through the links.

Analysis of the District Materials

This project will be broken into fifteen sections based on the different factors in the protocol. Analysis includes both the district handbooks and district websites under each section for each district.

Anti-Bullying/Nondiscrimination Policies

School bullying is a major factor that affects Queer youth throughout their educational endeavors. LGBTQIA+ youth experience hostile school environments and experience bullying and discrimination in various forms (e.g. verbal, physical, sexual, online/electronic) in schools across the nation. According to the 2019 Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network's (GLSEN) National School Climate Survey, 86.3% of LGBTQ students expressed being harassed or assaulted (GLSEN, 2019, p. 4). Queer Theory allows us to think of new ways of solving these issues that do not fall into the traditional means and solutions that prove to be ineffective. Queer Theory also allows us to be proactive in coming up with solutions for our youth.

Natomas Unified School District (NUSD):

NUSD's school handbook features their bullying policy and states that the district and school will focus on the prevention of bullying through their school rules and conduct expectations. They provide the location of where students can find the school rules related to bullying (mainly in their handbook), encourage them to report bullying, and include a link to NUSD's Report Bullying website (NUSD, 2021, p. 45). Pages 45-46 of the handbook discuss sexual harassment, types of conduct that classify as harassment, and their policy on non-discrimination with the inclusion of the policy number BP5145.3 (NUSD, 2021, pp. 45-6). NUSD devotes two pages towards their bullying, harassment, and non-discrimination policies and resources in their district handbook (NUSD, 2021, pp. 45-6).

On NUSD's website, I searched for the term "bullying" and then reviewed the results that came up that were applicable to the protocol. NUSD's website includes a link to their bullying prevention newsletters, which are released monthly. The search function also leads to a link to NUSD's Bullying Prevention Manual, which gives more in-depth information on what bullying is, the different types of bullying, their policies, the necessary procedures, and resources for families and students, and the final search item that appears also gives access to a Bullying FAQ page.

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD):

SCUSD's district handbook features five pages on their anti-bullying and nondiscrimination policies. Page 3 of the handbook gives information on the district's nondiscrimination policy and defines bullying (what is required by the state to convey) (SCUSD, 2021, p. 3). The nondiscrimination policy on page 3 also includes contact information to the Title IX Coordinator which includes the contact information (phone number and email address) and address of the Coordinator (SCUSD, 2021, p. 3). SCUSD's page 18 features the definition of bullying, the school's promise to provide a non-discriminatory learning environment, and mentions the obligation to report bullying (SCUSD, 2021, p.18). The reporting process is specific and directs people to report to the principal. The handbook includes a link to their reporting website and offers anonymous reports through their Bullying Prevention Hotline, with a phone number included. This handbook also references Title IX training requirements for compliance officers and the reporting and complaint process on pages 19 and 20. (SCUSD, 2021, pp. 19-20).

On SCUSD's website, when one searches for "bullying," there is a link to a school climate and bullying prevention site with links to brochures, descriptions of the different types of

bullying, and the definition of bullying. Another result that appears is a link to the report bullying behavior page which includes a link to the “Report of Suspected Bullying Form” and information regarding their to the anonymous tip line.

Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD):

TRUSD’s district handbook features five pages discussing their bullying and non-discrimination policies. Page 3 of the TRUSD handbook includes their nondiscrimination policy, which includes all of the necessary legal language that schools are mandated to include (TRUSD, 2021, p. 3). Page 25 touches on discrimination concerns and how to report these types of concerns (report to the school principal and it also features the phone number to the Student Services Department for any appeals) (TRUSD, 2021, p. 25). Pages 37-38 of the handbook include the district’s policy with regards to bullying (TRUSD, 2021, pp. 37-8). This section includes the policy, the definition of bullying, encouragement to report bullying or suspected bullying (encouragement to report within 24 hours), and includes a link to report complaints via their website, as well as mentioning that complaints are protected from retaliation and intimidation. Page 51 mentions cyberbullying, harassment, and discriminatory attacks under their Student Technology Acceptable Use Agreement (TRUSD, 2021, p.51).

On the TRUSD website, when you search “bullying,” you get a variety of results. One is the “bullying of a student” result that lists the definition of bullying and includes a link to the available forms to use in order to report bullying. Another result is the link to “Parent Resources,” which includes LGBTQ resources, bullying policies, prevention, resolution, and Section 504 for accommodations. The website also yields a link to their gender equity/Title IX page which features information on general parent concerns and forms (bullying, discrimination/harassment/personal injury/uniform complaints/williams complaints/complaints

against district employees). A final link that appears is information to the district's non-discrimination page, which discusses the equity compliance officer information, a space for feedback submissions, and information for students and staff.

Policies and Reporting Harassment/Bullying

As mentioned, Queer youth face many obstacles in their school climate with regards to bullying and harassment. Having this information readily available would be incredibly beneficial to Queer youth. According to Gunckel (2009), "Queer Theory provides a framework for examining schools, curriculum, and pedagogy to find those identities, bodies, and experiences that have been silenced, ignored, and rendered invisible" (p. 65). Utilizing Queer Theory as the theoretical framework allows us to rectify the silencing of Queer youth by establishing policies that encompass them and their needs and assists us in establishing better or easily-accessible ways in which Queer youth can report harassment or bullying to their administration.

Natomas Unified School District (NUSD):

In the NUSD handbook, on page 45, they cite board policy 5131.2 which reports that the school shall focus on the prevention of bullying through their school rules which will be stated in their handbook and other means (NUSD, 2021, p.45). Students are encouraged to report bullying to school staff and can report bullying anonymously through their Report Bullying webpage.

When you search for "harassment" on the NUSD website, you are linked to their nondiscrimination/harassment policy information with the links to the district's policies and a PDF with instructions on how to report bullying.

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD):

In the SCUSD handbook, page 3 touches on the nondiscrimination policy (the legal terminology of not allowing discrimination, harassment, or intimidation based on ancestry, color,

disability, race, gender...) (SCUSD, 2021, p. 3). The handbook also includes information on the Title IX policy with regards to sexual harassment on pages 23-27 (SCUSD, 2021, pp. 23-7).

When you search for “report harassment” on the district website, you are taken to the Title IX/Harassment Complaint Form which are printable and online fillable forms in multiple languages to submit any complaints. You are also taken to a Title IX page where you can download a PDF discussing Title IX (download link is in a box to the right).

Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD):

TRUSD’s handbook features a small section which discusses sexual harassment and the prohibition of unlawful sexual harassment of any students by any employee, student, or other person at the school (TRUSD, 2021, p. 25). The handbook also features a section on page 51 that discusses cyberbullying, harassment, and discriminatory attacks with regards to internet-based attacks (TRUSD, 2021, p. 51).

When you search for “report harassment,” you are taken to their web page for discrimination and harassment which discusses the definition of harassment, how to file a complaint, the proper form to use, and board policy information. You are also directed to their Discrimination of Harassment in Employment page for employees or applicants filing a complaint. The TRUSD search function also resulted in a Complaint and Inquiries page that discusses bullying, forms, the descriptions of each form of bullying and of the complaints, where you can file, a link to an organization chart, and a work flow chart. The search also resulted in a link to the Gender Equity/Title IX page and to their general parent concerns and forms page which discusses bullying, discrimination, harassment, personal injury with direct links to the pages for each of these items.

Procedures for Reporting Staff/Teachers for Discrimination/Harassment

As harassment and discrimination are prevalent obstacles that Queer youth face, students should have access to information on how to report staff or teachers in their schools for discrimination and harassment they may face in the classroom. Michael Warner (1991) coined the term *heteronormativity*, which is the assumption that heterosexuality is the standard and is the norm. This deficit manner of thinking is, unfortunately, prevalent in many educators and in many administrations but the process for reporting them is not always clear.

Natomas Unified School District (NUSD):

In the NUSD handbook, there is a section that discusses a pathway to successful communication (NUSD, 2021, p. 25). The handbook states that students can address the matter directly with a site staff member, they can then contact a school administrator if unresolved, and then proceed to an informal and formal complaint through Constituent and Customer Services. The handbook also directs students to make anonymous complaints online via the district website.

For the NUSD website, I utilized the search feature to search for the word “harassment” and came across a link to their nondiscrimination/harassment/and Title IX information. When you search for “reporting,” you come across the link to their Bullying FAQ page. The information on the page was taken from the California Department of Education “Bullying at School” PDF which is included as a link on the webpage (Counseling and Student Support Office, California Department of Education, 2003).

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD):

In the SCUSD handbook, page 36 lists the complaint procedure and states that all complaints must be filed with a site administrator. The handbook also discusses the timeline of

the complaint process (SCUSD, 2021, p. 36). The complaint must be resolved within 60 days and also features the steps when filing a complaint (SCUSD, 2021, p. 43).

On the SCUSD website, when searching for “report harassment,” you are directed to the district’s Title IX/Harassment Complaint Form. The web page featured printable and fillable forms in multiple languages to submit complaints directly from the website.

Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD):

The TRUSD handbook does not mention reporting complaints with regards to staff personnel or teachers. The bullying section of the handbook discusses reporting other students. When you search for “report harassment” on the district web page, you are taken to the Discrimination Harassment of a Student including Sexual Harassment page which includes a description of the type of harassment and the form you should complete to report this type of harassment. You are also taken to the “Complaints and Inquiries” page which features different types of complaints with links to their direct webpages. Utilizing those links, you are then taken to the Gender Equity/Title IX page which discusses what Title IX is, Title IX Rights, and the complaint procedure.

Resources for Suicide Prevention

As LGBTQIA+ and gender non-conforming students are more likely to feel unsafe in schools, they “often stop coming to classes regularly; many drop out, run away from home, or attempt suicide” (Biegal & Kuegl, 2010, p. 3). Queer Theory aims to disrupt the norm so Queer Theory allows us the means to disrupt this system where suicide rates are incredibly high amongst teenagers and establish or provide better, more accessible suicide prevention resources to all youth.

Natomas Unified School District (NUSD):

The NUSD handbook features a page on community resources (p. 25) with organization names and websites (e.g. La Familia Counseling Services, California Youth Crisis Line) but these resources do not include any that are specific to LGBTQIA+ youth (NUSD, 2021, p. 25). On the NUSD website, when you search for “suicide,” you are linked to the district’s “Suicide Prevention Month Resources” page from September 2020. This page features a link to the actual training, a link to a Spanish training, handouts that were part of the training, a link to contact the appropriate school psychologist, a referral form link, and a PDF toolkit. The website also links you to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Hotline which features a link to their website and their phone number. A third link takes you to the district’s Mental Health Resources page which features three resources on suicide prevention (the hotline information, facts and tips from the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), and tips for parents and education from NASP).

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD):

The SCUSD handbook features a half page on suicide prevention which includes tips for caregivers, how to help students, and contact information to the district’s Connect Center which features 24/7 support resources (SCUSD, 2021, p. 8). Another section of the handbook features a reference to the health service’s office and includes their contact information.

When you search the district website for the term “suicide prevention,” you come across the SCUSD Suicide Risk Assessment Procedures which is a PDF which features information on the role of all district staff (steps for staff) and the role of SCUSD Mental Health Professionals. The search function directs you to an article from 2020 which discusses watching for warning signs and includes a video to watch. The search also directs you to the Mental Health Crisis

response and Suicide Prevention page which features various local and national resources and features a link to their “Know the Signs” webpage with information about suicide prevention. The national resource features information for The Trevor Project, a suicide prevention organization geared specifically towards LGBTQIA+ youth.

Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD):

The TRUSD handbook features a complete page on comprehensive suicide prevention. This page discusses measures and strategies and the California education code which requires schools to provide faculty with education, training, assessment and support skills that are necessary to support at-risk students of suicide.

When you search for “suicide” on the TRUSD website, you are taken to the emergency numbers webpage which includes contact information for suicide prevention hotlines, youth crisis lines, texting lines, and local and national organizations. One of the national resources is The Trevor Project, the Queer-specific site for suicide prevention. The search function also led to the district’s prevention web page which features website information and phone numbers for various mental health resources. The suicide resource featured is a link to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline alongside their 1-800 phone number.

Anxiety

According to GLSEN’s 2019 School Climate Survey, a negative or hostile school environment negatively impacts a student’s mental health and those that experience victimization and discrimination have a “poorer psychological well-being” (GLSEN, 2019, p. 6). The norm for many LGBTQIA+ youth, or for those youths perceived as Queer, is to attend school with a fear of harassment and assault, a fear of enclosed spaces where violence often occurs and is hidden from others, and even being in an academic space where their safety may be ignored by their

school administration. Fear is a major factor in anxiety and a student's fear of the unknown can lead to an increase or inability to manage anxiety.

Natomas Unified School District (NUSD):

In NUSD's handbook, on page 25, there is one reference to community resources that includes counseling services. This school district's handbook does not specifically address anxiety and we can only make the assumption that the counseling services can address anxiety or anxiety management for its students. (NUSD, 2021, p. 25).

On NUSD's website, when you search for "anxiety," you receive event information for a workshop that was held in October 2021 for anxiety but includes no resources or recordings from the workshop. NUSD's website does include a link to their mental health resources page which features various mental health resources for many conditions and does feature a section for anxiety. The anxiety section includes two links - one to the CDC's website on anxiety/anxiety management and the second to an article from the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) on information for parents on anxiety and anxiety disorders. The NUSD website also includes a social emotional enrichment resource, as part of their social emotional learning, which is a PDF workbook targeted towards teens in grades 6-8 (Schlab, 2008).

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD):

In SCUSD's district handbook, there are two pages which reference a student's mental health but nothing specific to anxiety/anxiety management. Page 6 includes the school district's student support and health services which includes a paragraph regarding their health services staff, the health service's office, and includes their phone number (SCUSD, 2021, p. 6). Page 7 includes a paragraph on the district's Connect Center, a centralized support center for critical support services, which includes information on the center, the services they offer (information

and referral, case management/service coordination, individual and family counseling referrals, and crisis assessment/crisis response), and the address of the Connect Center, as well as their direct office contact, phone number, and website. (SCUSD, 2021, p. 7)

When you search for “anxiety” on the district’s website, you find a link to the student support center which includes information on coping with stress and anxiety after tragedies. This was the school’s response to the tragic shooting that occurred in 2019 at Saugus High School. This page includes a link to the Student Support Center webpage where you can see the services that are provided and the history of the center. The district website also leads to a page where you learn about resources that help students cope with stress and anxiety, many of them being community resources.

Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD):

The TRUSD handbook features one page on mental health resources. Page 27 features a small section on the available regional Sacramento-area social services. This section instructs families to dial 211 to connect with mental health services and the section instructs families to visit the TRUSD website to look up available parent resources. (TRUSD, 2021, p. 27). There are no resources specific to anxiety.

When searching for “anxiety” on the TRUSD website, you are directed to their upcoming workshops. On this same webpage, there is a previous trainings section that features a “reducing stress and anxiety” workshop that includes the recording of the training, the presentation, handouts, and table of resources discussed during the training (many are community resources). The search function also leads you to the “Mental Health Resource Links for Parents & Families” page on the district website. This features two specific resources targeted towards anxiety/anxiety management. One is a direct link to a “Care for your Coronavirus Anxiety”

project page which features support, toolkits, expert advice, and access to free meditations for anxiety. The second link directs users to the “Coping with Stress” CDC webpage with tips on managing stress and the potential effects of doing so.

Changes to Curriculum

An important factor to improving the climate for Queer youth is a change towards inclusive curriculum. An inclusive curriculum allows Queer youth to engage in their studies due to representation, equal treatment, and acceptance. This protocol was included to see if the district handbooks and web pages include information on how they’re working towards a more inclusive curriculum, any information on how often the curriculum is updated, or if curriculum suggestions are open from the outside community. To create inclusive curriculum, we can integrate tenets of Queer Theory to ensure that we are encompassing materials and topics that are actively going against the gender binary and heterosexism.

Natomas Unified School District (NUSD):

The NUSD handbook features no reference to their curriculum practices with regards to the protocols I was searching for. When searching the NUSD website for “curriculum” or “curriculum changes,” no results appeared that were specific to curriculum changes.

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD):

The SCUSD handbook features two pages which mention their curriculum. On page 30, the handbook discusses curriculum and instruction materials and discusses the family’s right to review the instructional materials and the right to discuss the curriculum in the student’s course. While this familial right seems to be helpful to LGBTQIA+ youth, it is often used against LGBTQIA+ curriculum and topics in schools. On page 31, the handbook includes information on Education Codes § 49091.14 and § 49063 which mention that the curriculum of every course

shall be compiled at least annually in a prospectus and is available for review upon request. (SCUSD, 2021, p. 31). When you search SCUSD's website for "curriculum" or "curriculum changes," there are no results.

Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD):

The TRUSD handbook includes one section on a page that discusses their curriculum. This page includes information from Education Codes § 49091.14 and § 49063 which discusses how the curriculum is compiled at least once annually and that the findings are available upon request. (TRUSD, 2021, p. 20).

When searching for "curriculum" on the TRUSD website, you are directed to the "Curriculum and Instruction" webpage which discusses their vision, mission, and standards of excellence. This webpage includes contact information for the staff, phone numbers, direct extensions, and the address of the district office and also includes current high school course offerings, testing from home protocols, the curriculum frameworks, and the course options and placement policies for grades 7-12 mathematics. You can also find links for the California Healthy Youth Act FAQs (with regards to comprehensive sexual health education), the FAIR Act FAQ (Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful Education Act) and Education Code Section 600400 about adopting instructional materials that "accurately portray the cultural and racial diversity of our society" (TRUSD, n.d.). The FAIR Act is an act that has been used to call for a more inclusive curriculum with regards to incorporating LGBTQIA+ history, culture, and people.

Resources on Depression

Depression is a major mental health factor that affects many Queer youth. GLSEN's 2019 National School Climate Survey reports that a hostile school climate is a cause for higher levels of depression in LGBTQIA+ youth in high schools (GLSEN, 2019, p. 4). In the district

handbooks, I looked for depression resources such as tips, referrals to community organizations or a mention of referral to school counselors or school psychologists/psychiatrists.

Natomas Unified School District (NUSD):

In NUSD's handbook, there is one page that discusses community resources. Page 25 of the NUSD handbook discusses different community resources (e.g. groups, companies) that provide services or have covered services in the Sacramento area (e.g. La Familia Counseling Center, WEAVE, CA Youth Crisis Line) but does not specifically mention depression. There is also a referral to the district website for a complete list of community resources (NUSD, 2021, p. 25).

On the NUSD website, when you search for "depression," you are shown various website links. The first is for workshop information from October 2021 but does not include meeting materials or recordings. A second relevant link is to their Mental Health Resources Page which includes a section on depression. This section includes two links from the National Association of School Psychologists: one to a PDF for depression in children and adolescents geared towards parents and educators that lists what depression is, the prevalence and risk factors, signs and symptoms, evaluation and treatment, and what schools and adults can do. The second link is to a PDF for a depression handout for the home which discusses what depression is, what to consider when selecting interventions and support, recommendations, and recommended resources. The last relevant link in the search is for their Social Emotional Enrichment Resources page (connected to their Social Emotional Learning page) which features a "Dealing with Depression" 68-page workbook for grades 6-8 from the Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction and the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development. (Bilkser et al., 2005).

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD):

The search results for SCUSD's handbook are the same as the anxiety resource results. In SCUSD's district handbook, there are two pages which reference a student's mental health but not specific to depression/depression management. Page 6 includes the school district's student support and health services which includes a paragraph regarding their health services staff, the health service's office, and includes their phone number (SCUSD, 2021, p. 6). Page 7 includes a paragraph on the district's Connect Center, a centralized support center for critical support services, which includes information on the center, the services they offer (information and referral, case management/service coordination, individual and family counseling referrals, and crisis assessment/crisis response), and the address of the Connect Center, as well as their direct office contact, phone number, and website. (SCUSD, 2021, p. 7)

When you search the SCUSD's webpage for the word "depression," there are no relevant results that appear.

Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD):

The TRUSD handbook yielded the same results as the anxiety resource search - no resources specific to depression are listed. The TRUSD handbook features one page on mental health resources. Page 27 features a small section on the available regional Sacramento-area social services. This section instructs families to dial 211 to connect with mental health services and the section instructs families to visit the TRUSD website to look up available parent resources. (TRUSD, 2021, p. 27)

When you search the district website for "depression," you are directed to their Emergency Numbers web page which lists phone numbers and web pages for resources such as the Suicide Prevention Crisis Line, the Trevor Project, the CA Youth Crisis Line, HOPE and

Crisis texting lines, CPS, phone application suggestions (calm, headspace), and information for the CA Parent and Youth Helpline. The Trevor Project is a resource specific to LGBTQIA+ persons.

Extra-Curricular Engagement

LGBTQIA+ youth may utilize extracurricular activities as a form of activism to combat discrimination, heterosexism, and homophobia present in their schools and communities. For this protocol, I searched for any mentions of extracurricular activities and whether the district handbooks and websites are recommending off-campus organizations and resources, and any mentions of activities or organizations from their school districts.

Natomas Unified School District (NUSD):

In NUSD's handbook, there is one mention of extracurricular engagement. On page 11, the handbook discusses staff responsibilities for those in the counseling office and there is one mention that states that staff are a system of support for extracurricular activities. (NUSD, 2021, p. 11).

On NUSD's website, when you search for "extracurricular activities," no results appear. When you search for "extracurricular," this leads to an FAQ page for Extracurriculars and Athletics which discusses information such as student athletes, when games/competitions begin, and health screening information. When you search for "GSA," "Gay Straight Alliance," and "Gender Sexuality Alliance" on the district website, there were no results.

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD):

In SCUSD's district handbook, there is one page which mentions extracurricular activities. On page 19, there is the mention that extracurricular club participation is available as a support at all schools. (SCUSD, 2021, p.19).

On the SCUSD website, when you search for “extracurricular activities,” there are no results. When you search for “extracurricular,” there are no results that appear. When you search for “GSA” on the district website, you are directed to the LGBTQ Support Services page which features the crisis lines, resources, national resources, LGBTQ task force, and fact sheets for AB 1266. When you search for “Gay Straight Alliance,” you are directed to a page for LGBT related links (LGBT 9 Keys to Inclusive Clubs, Know Your Rights, Making Schools Safe, Youth of Color, and Legal Issues in Schools). The page also has a link to the LGBTQ Support Services page.

Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD):

In the TRUSD handbook, there is one page which mentions extracurricular activities. On page 11, the handbook states that they value and recognize the importance of extracurricular activities as they enrich student development and that they support and encourage student participation and go on to list the student requirements to participate in extracurricular activities (e.g. good behavior, the mention of GPA requirements for certain activities, student expectations of conduct) (TRUSD, 2021, p. 11).

On the TRUSD website, when you search for “extracurricular,” a link to the Title IX website appears which gives information about the right to be provided with an equitable opportunity to participate in all academic extracurricular activities. A link to their CA Career and Tech Student Organizations also appears. This page explores the three different career and technical student organizations (Family Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA), Future Farmworkers of America (FFA), and SkillsUSA) that function as extracurricular groups in Career Technical Education pathways. When you search for “extracurricular activities,” you are directed to two links: one for a middle school activities page and one for high school

activities which discuss different events (some hosted by clubs) on various of their campuses. When you search for “GSA,” “Gay Straight Alliance,” and “Gender Sexuality Alliance” on the district website, no results appear.

Dress Codes

Schools should equally enforce dress codes for all youth as clothing can be a form of self-expression (including gender identity and expression) that students use to empower themselves. Sections 200-220 of the education code protect students from “different kinds of bias and discrimination, including harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression” (American Civil Liberties Union of California, 2013) while also prohibiting discrimination based on gender identity or expression which includes respecting one’s pronouns and allowing one to dress as it relates to their gender identity (American Civil Liberties Union of California, 2013). For this protocol, I searched for any mentions of the school dress code and any mentions of school districts equally enforcing the dress code and any mention of whether they are abiding by the state laws regarding freedom of expression.

Natomas Unified School District (NUSD):

NUSD’s handbook contains one page which discusses the school dress code and discusses the regulations with regards to clothing. The handbook mentions the concealment of undergarments, denotes skirt/short length, the sagging pants policy, non-permissible clothing such as those that promote drugs, alcoholic beverages, tobacco, clothing that is sexually suggestive or racially-offensive, and clothing that promotes violence, group intimidation, or gang/cult/satanic affiliation (NUSD, 2021, p. 38). On the NUSD website, if you search for “dress code,” “dress,” or “attire,” no relevant results appear.

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD):

In the SCUSD handbook, there are no mentions of their district's dress code, attire, or clothing policies.

On the SCUSD website, when you search for "dress code," "dress," or "attire," no relevant results appear on the default "site" section. If you toggle and search for content, you then find a link to the "5000 Series - Students." This link then leads you to a blank website with a column of "related links" on the side for board policies listed from 5000-5149 (SCUSD, n.d.). You can then search for "dress" on the webpage and two dress and grooming sites appear (BP 5132 (Board Policy) and AR 5132 (Administrative Regulation) (SCUSD, n.d.). The site for BP 5132 leads to a PDF revised document from 2002 that describes dress and grooming standards, listed codes that the district is following (dress and grooming, freedom of speech/expression, gang-related apparel, the comprehensive safety plan), and uniforms (SCUSD, n.d.). The second link to the AR 5132 PDF is the district's administrative regulations document revised in 2002 with regards to dress and grooming. This document discusses that the school principal is the one to establish the school rules governing dress and grooming and a listing of school plans and education codes that schools must follow (e.g. allowing sun-protective clothing, shoes requirements, free of crude, vulgar, profane, or sexually suggestive clothing, the concealment of undergarments, hair requirements) and then goes on to discuss gang-related apparel and uniforms (SCUSD, n.d.)

Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD):

TRUSD's handbook features one page that discusses dress codes. Page 39 starts off by stating that each individual school decides on their own dress code and that students must conform to the dress code policy of their school (TRUSD, 2021, p. 39). The section goes on to describe the basic requirements expected at all sites. These requirements state that students are

expected to dress appropriately for the education environment and that clothing should not interfere or disrupt the education environment, unless it's protected under freedom of speech laws. This policy also mentions that accessories or clothing with language or images that are vulgar, sexually suggestive, discriminatory, obscene, libelous, or that promote illegal or violent content are prohibited. This policy then goes on to describe clothing expectations such as fit, neat, clean, decent, and that sun protective clothing is permissible. Education Code 35183.5 is referenced (TRUSD, 2021, p. 39). On the TRUSD website, when you search for “dress code,” “dress,” or “attire,” no relevant results appear.

Gender-Neutral Bathrooms

According to GLEN’s 2019 National School Climate Survey, 59.1% of LGBTQIA+ students reported that they personally experienced LGBTQ+-related discriminatory policies and practices at school which included students being prevented from using the bathrooms matching their gender identity (GLSEN, 2019, p. 6). Queer Theory allows us the means to actively fight against discrimination and against the gender binary and facilities that are not encompassing of all youth. Analyzing the district handbooks and websites for mentions of gender-neutral bathrooms/restrooms is an important factor to research to analyze whether students are being informed of important access to campus resources.

Natomas Unified School District (NUSD):

The NUSD handbook contains a matrix (page 35) about behavior expectations in bathrooms but does not mention an inclusion of gender-neutral bathrooms (NUSD, 2021, p. 35). The expectations in the restroom include doing your business and getting out, washing your hands, keeping water in the sink, reporting unsanitary conditions, keeping the bathrooms clean,

returning to class promptly, flushing toilets, using bathrooms before and after class, cleaning up after yourself, using appropriate language, and respecting others' privacy (NUSD, 2021, p. 35).

On the NUSD website, when you search for "gender neutral," no results appear. When you search for "bathrooms," no relevant results appear. The only link is the "Maintenance and Operations" web page with information on facility use, custodial services, and ground keeping.

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD):

In the SCUSD handbook, on page 36, there is a mention of sexual and gender non-discrimination which states that under limited circumstances, arrangements may be made for students according to gender, such as separate locker room facilities, in accordance with federal law (SCUSD, 2021, p. 36).

On the SCUSD website, when you search for "gender neutral," a link to the LGBTQ Support Services site appears which includes resource information, information on the LGBT Task Force, and a link to the AB 1266 Fact Sheet. The AB 1266 Fact Sheet also appears in the search results. This Fact Sheet is about AB1266, the School Success and Opportunity Act, that went into effect in 2014 to clarify the roles of school staff in working with students of all genders, and clarifies that students' access to educational resources shall correspond to the student's gender identity (Sacramento City Unified School District, n.d.) This Fact Sheet does mention restroom facilities and that students have the right to use the facilities that align with their gender identity. SCUSD includes in their recommendations that sites provide access to a private area in the public area (i.e. a nearby restroom stall with a door, an area separated by a curtain, a P.E. instructor's office in the locker room, or a nearby gender neutral restroom) if a student feels they need additional privacy (Sacramento City Unified School District, n.d.)

Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD):

The TRUSD handbook has no mention of gender neutral bathrooms. When searching for “gender neutral,” “restroom,” or “bathroom” on their website, no results appear.

Gender-Inclusive Language

Utilizing gender-inclusive language ensures that all students are encompassed in the school environment. An example per the Southern Poverty Law Center, schools should use “gender-inclusive language on all event communications, including invitations” and “event organizers [should be educated] about students’ First Amendment right to attend events with a same-sex date and to wear clothing of their choice” (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, p. 3).

Natomas Unified School District (NUSD):

In the NUSD handbook, gender-inclusive language is not specifically mentioned. The handbook does mention a language policy but it mentions using appropriate language (i.e. no vulgar or profane language) (NUSD, 2021, p. 46). On the NUSD website, when you search for “gender inclusive,” an event from 1/12 appears about LGBTQ+ Best Practices and Protections in Public Education but no recording or handouts are uploaded.

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD):

In the SCUSD handbook, there are no mentions of gender-inclusive language. When you search for the term “gender inclusive” on the website, you are sent to the LGBT+ page which includes links to outside resources and rights specific to LGBTQ+ students.

Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD):

There are no mentions of gender-inclusive language in the TRUSD handbook. When you search for the term “gender inclusive,” there are no search results.

Improvements to School Climate

Improving the school climate is an important goal because LGBTQIA+ youth encounter schools filled with harassment, bullying, and assault during their time in school. When considering this protocol, I considered things such as what the school aims for, if any protections are listed in handbooks and websites, and any general improvements for the school climate listed.

Natomas Unified School District (NUSD):

In the NUSD handbook, the school district claims that the vision for all NUSD students is to graduate and be college and career ready, productive, responsible, and engaged global citizens. The NUSD handbook also has information regarding the district being a Safe Haven school (a school site that is welcoming regardless of immigration status) and having equal access to all students. The handbook features a Safety, Optimism, Achievement, and Respect portion which touches on having students feel they belong and are supported on campus (NUSD, 2021, p. 10), their responses to undesired behaviors being intervention-based and focusing on reteaching (NUSD, 2021, p. 34), and all students must sign a compact (NUSD, 2021, p. 56) that they must abide by all of the rules listed on the form. When you search for “school climate” on the website, there are no results.

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD):

In the SCUSD handbook, there are no relevant sections which discuss improvements to the school climate, any protections for students, nor the aims of the school. On the SCUSD website, upon searching “school climate,” you are taken to a link to the School Climate and Bullying Prevention web page with a link to a brochure with more information. The search results also show a 2021-2022 School Climate Survey that is open for completion.

Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD):

The TRUSD handbook does not feature any relevant sections. When you search for “school climate” on their website, you are directed to four relevant links. You are directed to a Healthy Kids Survey to complete and you’re able to see previous survey results. There is a link to their Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports Page with the department contact information and with information about what they do. There is a link to a “Child and Welfare Attendance” page, which encourages a positive and engaging school climate while increasing attendance. There is also a link to a letter from 2019 about Safe Haven schools.

Staff Connection, Involvement, and Purpose to High School Youth/School Climate

School personnel have an obligation to assist and improve the school climate for LGBTQIA+ youth. School counselors, staff, and psychiatrists are some of the positions that work with students on the ground on a daily basis. Various research states that school counselors and school psychiatrists are in an “ideal position to address the issues” (Pollock, 2006, p. 33) for Queer youth. In this section, we explore the district handbooks and websites to see if there are any mentions of the staff’s purpose in the district mission.

Natomas Unified School District (NUSD):

In the NUSD handbook, staff are included in the school’s core belief. This core belief states that staff must be “committed, collaborative, caring, and exemplary” and are expected to “serve as role models for students,” and staff are to enforce board policies which include “prohibitions against bullying, cyberbullying, harassment of students...” (NUSD, 2021, p. 33). When you search the website for “staff climate,” “staff support,” “staff involvement,” there are no results that appear.

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD):

In the SCUSD handbook, pages 17-18 discuss the teacher and support staff responsibilities (SCUSD, 2021, pp. 17-8). This includes topics such as appropriate behavior and attitudes, communication expectations, expectations to establish an environment where students can meet academic standards, and interacting with all parents and students with respect and dignity while providing quality customer service. When you search their district website for “staff involvement,” “staff purpose,” “staff climate,” and “staff support,” no results appear.

Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD):

In the TRUSD handbook, there were no sections discussing staff involvement and their relation to the school climate. When you search for “staff involvement” on the district website, there are no relevant results. When you search for “staff support,” you are sent to the New Teacher and Mentor Support page which features resources for new teachers (list of the support team, monthly newsletters, invitations) to assist new teachers in being effective educators in their schools to contribute to a better school climate.

Student Rights (e.g. right to privacy, freedom of expression, state laws)

Students, school staff/administrators/, and families should all be aware of student rights so that student voices and rights are respected while in school. These rights should be easily accessible to all in case of any misunderstandings.

Natomas Unified School District (NUSD):

In the NUSD district handbook, there is mention of a Civility Policy, Board Policy 1213, which states that students have the opportunity to voice their concerns about policies and practices and to be involved in problem solving (NUSD, 2021, p. 24). The handbook does not explicitly state student rights. On the NUSD website, when you search for “student rights,” there

are no results. When you search for “right to privacy,” you’re linked to the Board Policies and Administrative Regulations page which lists all board policies.

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD):

The SCUSD handbook lists a student’s rights to learn in a safe environment and to discuss issues or concerns with any administrator, teacher, or personnel (SCUSD, 2021, p. 12). The SCUSD handbook also includes a section on pupil and family privacy and their rights to privacy (SCUSD, 2021, p. 28). This section also includes information about a pupil’s participation in surveys and their rights with regards to surveys and their rights with relation to political affiliations/behavior/close family relationship surveys (SCUSD, 2021, p. 28). Page 29 discusses a pupil’s records and privacy rights granted to students that fall under certain classifications (SCUSD, 2021, p. 29). On the SCUSD website, when you search for “student rights,” you are linked to the student handbook and to a webpage for “Students Rights under Title IX.”

Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD):

In the TRUSD handbook, there are no mentions of student rights (e.g. right to privacy, freedom of expression, etc). On the TRUSD website, when you search for “student rights,” you are taken to the student handbook and linked to the Student Services page which has information on work permits, discipline guidelines, and immunization and healthcare links.

Support/Assistance/Guidance with Paperwork that Incorrectly Lists Student Gender

Offering assistance and guidance with regards to paperwork that incorrectly lists their gender for those students that are gender non-conforming, transgender, and intersex ensures that staff and peers address them using their preferred pronouns (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, p. 3). Queer Theory actively works to disrupt the norms of current, biased systems and by

utilizing Queer Theory we can advocate to provide better support and assistance to youth that face difficulty with having their preferred gender and name recognized.

Natomas Unified School District (NUSD):

In the NUSD handbook, there isn't a specific mention with regards to assistance given to those that are misgendered in their school. Through the NUSD website, when you search for "gender," you are taken to the registration page for the LGBTQ+ Best Practices and Protections Workshop which occurred on December 9, 2021. The page contains no links, no materials, and no recording to access. When you search for "gender expression," there are no results.

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD):

In the SCUSD handbook, on page 7, there is a section discussing LGBTQ Support Services. This section gives LGBTQ+ students and families with contact information and website information for support with counseling services, gender update form, and advocacy (SCUSD, 2021, p. 7). On the SCUSD website, when you search for "paperwork gender," "gender," and "gender expression," you are taken to a link to the AB 1266 Fact Sheet. This page gives a brief overview and allows the download of the fact sheet which discusses terms, summaries of the rights, and FAQs. You are also provided links to the non-discrimination policy and Title IX coordinator and there is also the inclusion of the LGBTQ Support Services website (local resources, crisis lines, brochures, and a link to the AB 1266 Fact Sheet) which is a page geared specifically towards LGBTQIA+ youth.

Twin Rivers Unified School District (TRUSD):

In the TRUSD handbook, there are no mentions of assistance being provided to students making changes to gender on documentation. On the TRUSD website, when you search for "paperwork gender," you are taken to the Title IX/Gender Equity page. You are also provided

links to the Parent Resources, Bullying, and 504 accommodations (i.e. student rights to have their name and gender respected by the school). TRUSD also provides a Safe Space Kit from GLSEN on the webpage and a “Schools in Transition” Handbook from the ACLU (GLSEN, 2016). GLSEN is the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network - an LGBTQIA+ specific organization and their Safe Space Kit is geared specifically towards Queer youth (GLSEN, 2016).

Concluding Thoughts

This work is based on the critical analysis of three Sacramento-area school districts’ handbooks and websites. There were fifteen different factors analyzed that used a protocol to determine the support of Queer youth from these school districts based on the materials that were examined. The following chapter will discuss the findings and recommendations based on the analysis that was conducted and discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER IV CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions and Recommendations

"All young people, regardless of sexual orientation or identity, deserve a safe and supportive environment in which to achieve their full potential." - Harvey Milk

In this critical document analysis of three Sacramento-area school district handbooks and websites, I analyzed these documents to see how they serve LGBTQIA+ youth. The fifteen (15) factors that were used to examine these documents are all essential elements to uncovering the gaps in support for Queer high school youth. Discovering these gaps helps us improve support for LGBTQIA+ youth. The results indicated that all three school districts are providing some essential information in their handbooks and in their district websites for supporting Queer youth. There is still much work to be done to provide Queer youth with the support and services that they need to navigate the educational system while facing these challenges, while also potentially growing their activism in and outside of school to improve the school climate.

Anti-Bullying/Anti-Harassment/Anti-Discrimination Resources and Reporting

All three school districts are providing enough coverage to provide basic resources for Queer youth and their families on anti-bullying/discrimination topics in their handbooks and websites. These resources also include information on reporting bullying. The handbooks include a couple of pages on this topic and NUSD and SCUSD provide online reporting sites for bullying while TRUSD provides an online platform for complaints. These school districts are streamlining reporting through their online platforms and are making this process accessible to those with an internet connection. Their processes allow this reporting to be anonymous for

those who fear retaliation while still also providing the option to report issues to an administrator or in paper form. Ensuring that the process to report bullying is accessible to everyone is essential to providing a safe space for Queer youth and is a legal right that Queer youth have per the ACLU.

When searching for resources or for more information on bullying, discrimination, or harassment, the TRUSD website features a multitude of resources. They include a discrimination and harassment webpage with definitions, steps on how to report, information on the proper forms to utilize when filing official complaints, and the board policies that cover these topics. The website also guides you to their “Complaints and Inquiries” page which focuses on bullying, the types of bullying, where to file a complaint, the appropriate forms to utilize, and a workflow chart. The district website also leads to their “Gender Equity and Title IX” page which features information and student rights with regards to Title IX and equal opportunity for everyone regardless of their sex/gender identity. While TRUSD features a lot of information on their website, they do not include much information with regards to bullying, harassment, or discrimination in their district handbook. They only include small sections that discuss sexual harassment and cyberbullying/online harassment. Including information on bullying, harassment, and discrimination in both the handbook and the district website ensures that this information is accessible to students and their families, who may not be technologically savvy. If school districts refuse to include extensive bullying, harassment, or discrimination sections in the handbook, they should make reference to the websites they have available to address these topics to avoid families and students assuming there are none.

Mental Health Resources

With regards to resources that focus on anxiety and anxiety management, none of the school districts feature information in their handbooks which are specific to this topic. While the handbooks do not feature any specific resources, all school district websites feature some specific resource on anxiety and stress management ranging from workbooks to CDC websites with additional information.

As with anxiety and anxiety management, the three school district handbooks do not specifically mention depression or depression resources. Two school districts (NUSD and TRUSD) feature various materials for depression and depression management on their website. TRUSD makes a specific reference to The Trevor Project, an LGBTQ+ organization that focuses on suicide prevention and crisis intervention, as a resource. SCUSD had no results on their website which means that they have no resources in either their handbook or on their website.

With regards to suicide prevention, one school district (NUSD) focuses on community resources in their handbook while the other two (SCUSD, TRUSD) include either a comprehensive suicide prevention plan (TRUSD) or other various resources on their website (SCUSD). NUSD does feature an online recorded training with handouts for families to watch and a PDF Toolkit. Providing accessible information to mental health resources is crucial for all students, especially during their time in high school. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), suicide is the fourth leading cause of death in 15-29-year-olds (WHO, 2021) and LGBTQIA+ youth are at significantly increase risk due to mistreatment and stigmatization (Trevor Project, 2021). Per The Trevor Project, “Queer youth are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide than their peers” and 42% of Queer youth “seriously considered attempting suicide” (The Trevor Project, 2021). Teenagers rely on their schools to provide them with these

resources and when schools are lacking this information, it negatively affects all students. Per GLSEN (2019), “students who feel safe and supported at school have better educational outcomes” and “LGBTQ students who have LGBTQ-related school resources report better school experiences and academic success” (p. 8). Providing these resources is a must for schools and school districts to provide adequate mental health resources to their students, especially now during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many students did not have the sufficient resources while they were at sheltering in place and are in need of additional support to navigate not only their school lives but their personal lives as well. During the lockdown, youth lost access to their friends, their support systems, and extracurricular activities. This loss was felt by Queer youth because social distancing and a lack of social interactions negatively impacted Queer youth because they lost access to the people that supported them, they lost extracurricular activities that made them happy, they had to reimagine their friendships to not be based on physical proximity, and they had an increase in negative interactions with those at home if families are unsupportive of them (The Trevor Project, 2020). Youth also had an increase in negative social interactions if their families were not accepting.

Campus Inclusivity

Ensuring that students feel included and part of the school community aligns with various school districts’ missions to create an inclusive environment for their students. Creating an inclusive environment for all students is crucial in ensuring they feel accepted, comfortable, and able to thrive amongst their peers and their administration. With regards to inclusive campus facilities such as gender neutral restrooms, SCUSD’s handbook is the only handbook and website that specifically mentions information on accommodations to lockers and restrooms based on gender. SCUSD’s handbook mentions AB1266, which allows “transgender students to fully

participate in activities, facilities, and programs based on their gender identity” (GLSEN, n.d.) and the right to use the restroom that aligns with their gender identity, and allows schools to provide additional private areas in open locker rooms/restrooms for extra privacy (SCUSD, 2021). NUSD mentions that when utilizing spaces such as bathrooms and locker rooms, students should respect others’ privacy and TRUSD features no mentions of gender neutral restrooms in their handbooks or on their district website. The inclusion of gender neutral restrooms in district handbooks and websites is crucial for Queer youth. Bathrooms are a space where many LGBTQIA+ youth do not feel physically or emotionally safe or comfortable entering due to it being an enclosed space where bullying and harassment can occur.

With regards to utilizing or enforcing gender inclusive language (for example, they/them/their versus he/she/hers/his), none of the three school districts specifically mentioned using inclusive verbiage in their handbooks nor on their websites but do use consistent gender inclusive language throughout their handbooks. Regarding regulations based on dress, none of the three school districts mention the right of students wearing clothing that aligns with their gender identity. NUSD and TRUSD make no mention of dress codes on their website and give basic guidelines in their handbooks and SCUSD has no mention of dress codes in their handbook but discusses dress and grooming on their website. If school districts are attempting to be inclusive to all students, they should include sections on their websites and handbooks that discuss an attempt at enforcing and including gender inclusive language throughout their school districts to ensure an inclusive environment for all students. The lack of verbiage regarding a student’s rights to wear clothing that aligns with their gender identity is also not including information with regards to a student right. Queer youth should know that schools cannot punish them for choosing to wear clothing that expresses their chosen gender, as long as it adheres to

other school/district requirements, and they should have the right to challenge regulations made that go against their rights.

School Climate

Extra-curricular engagements and activities and staff connection and purpose come together to contribute to the school climate. Two school district handbooks (SCUSD and TRUSD) mention extracurricular activities and how they are available at all schools but do not specifically mention Gay Straight Alliances (GSA). When searching the district websites, two school districts have no results when you search for GSAs. SCUSD features various information on their website with regards to Queer youth resources (LGBTQ Support Services Page, LGBTQIA+ related links to inclusive club resources). Many Queer youth utilize involvement in extracurricular activities as a form of activism. Including resources and information about inclusive clubs, or Queer specific clubs, such as GSAs, are invaluable to Queer youth to provide them with a space where they are accepted and where they can enact change.

Staff involvement and their connection towards the school climate is an important part in incorporating staff and school personnel into having an essential part and being integrated into the school climate. NUSD includes staff expectations in their handbook and has the purpose to “serve as role models for students,” to enforce board policies against bullying and harassment for example, and includes staff in their core beliefs. SCUSD mentions teacher/staff responsibilities and expectations. TRUSD has no mention of staff involvement or expectations from staff/school personnel. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (2013), having inclusive leaders and allies that “promote a safe and inclusive environment are essential” (p. 2) because it creates “a culture in which other staff members are unafraid to be allies” (p. 2). Including staff as

contributors to the school climate makes their involvement have purpose and allows staff and school personnel the space to be allies to Queer youth.

Student Rights and Expectations/Supports

SCUSD includes student rights in their handbook by including the right to a safe environment, having a right to discuss issues and concerns with administrators/teachers/personnel, mentioning pupil/family privacy, and including a pupil's rights in surveys. NUSD and TRUSD do not explicitly state students' rights in their handbook nor on their website. Having students, staff, school personnel, and families/guardians aware of student rights benefits contributes knowledge and allows Queer youth and allies the opportunity to celebrate their rights as well as voice their objections against decisions that are against their rights and ensures that all students are treated equally.

TRUSD and SCUSD provide students with resources and assistance with regards to student gender and changing their school records. SCUSD includes information on their LGBTQ support services resource and references their gender update form in their handbook. SCUSD also features information on their website and this includes an AB1266 fact sheet, reference to Title IX, and additional resources on their LGBTQ Support Services page, one of three school districts that feature a website specifically geared towards Queer youth. While TRUSD does not include anything in their handbook, they include various resources on their website. The TRUSD website includes information on their Title IX/Gender Equity page, a parent resources page which includes 504 accommodations (a student's right to their preferred name/gender) and includes resources from GLSEN (a Space Kit) and from the ACLU (schools in transition). NUSD has no mention in their handbook nor in their website. Offering guidance with regards to documentation that incorrectly lists a student's gender ensures that staff and peers

address them using their preferred pronouns (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2013, p. 3) and enables Queer youth to feel respected at their schools.

Final Thoughts

When I first started this work, I was under the assumption that schools were completely failing in support Queer youth and didn't have high expectations for what I would find when conducting my document analysis. I have learned that while almost no school districts will have every resource available for Queer youth (issues will always arise and additional integration will always be necessary), we are slowly evolving to include more and more resources for Queer youth. Many school districts are already including valuable resources for LGBTQIA+ youth and can continue to include more and more to fully support Queer youth and to provide an inclusive environment for all students.

It was noteworthy to see that one of the school districts features an LGBTQ+ Support Services page on their district website. Incorporating a web page for Queer youth would be an essential integration in order to successfully support Queer youth. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that a district website included information from GLSEN and from the ACLU that are specific to Queer youth and building inclusiveness in student extracurriculars. GLSEN and the ACLU are advocates for Queer youth and are great resources for LGBTQIA+ youth through both the materials provided and through the work they do.

It was surprising to discover that many of the mental health resources that districts are providing or referencing are not listed in their school handbooks. The school handbook may be the first resource that students go through to find assistance and we fail Queer youth when we don't include or generalize resources on anxiety, depression, or suicide. We cannot make the assumption that students will think of going to the district website if they do not locate what they

need from the handbook or the school website. It was disappointing to discover that not all school districts feature information regarding gender neutral accommodations such as restrooms and locker rooms for students.

While examining district handbooks and websites, I began to wonder whether changes to these two items are enough. Students are no longer given physical copies of their district handbooks - they are digitally given a copy. Digital copies are not accessible to all students and students forget about them after the first couple days of the semester. They may not remember that they have this resource available to them. If they don't remember having this resource and don't know the type of information contained in these handbooks, do these resources help students? Do all school personnel and school administrations know all of the policies and information contained in their district handbooks? Do they abide by every one? Do they know the resources listed on their district websites and handbooks? If these policies and resources are available but not being referenced or regulated, do they make a change?

Our current school climate is in turmoil. More conservative states such as Texas and Florida are passing legislature against Queer youth and Queer persons. Texas is banning gender affirming care for trans youth and Florida is passing a "Don't Say Gay" bill where classrooms are being banned from discussing sexual orientation and gender identity. Research demonstrates that including more inclusive courses and topics positively affects Queer youth. Research proves that allowing students to express themselves and their identity positively impacts them, their school atmosphere, and creates a sense of belonging. The work that these three Sacramento school districts have done is so important especially when compared to this legislation and the actions that are being taken. Schools should be providing support for all students regardless of their gender identity and expression.

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Appendix A

Protocol Organization Table for Initial Notes

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS OF THREE (3) SACRAMENTO-AREA HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICTS' HANDBOOKS AND WEBSITES-- PROTOCOL SEARCH (I.E. FOR LGBTQIA+ SPECIFIC RESEARCH TOPICS)						
PROTOCOLS	NATOMAS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT HANDBOOK	NATOMAS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT WEBSITE	SACRAMENTO CITY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT HANDBOOK	SACRAMENTO CITY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT WEBSITE	TWIN RIVERS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT HANDBOOK	TWIN RIVERS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT WEBSITE
Anti-Bullying Policies/Nondis crimination						
Anxiety e.g. tips, community resources, referral to school counselors/psyc hiatrists/comm unity organizations						
Changes to Curriculum i.e. reference to inclusive		-				

changes, how often is curriculum updated						
Depression Resources e.g. tips, referral to school counselor/psychiatrists/community organizations						
Engaging in Extracurricular Activities i.e. recommending off-campus resources, activities, organizations						
Enforcing Dress Code e.g. equally enforcing dress code, abiding by state laws						

regarding freedom of expression						
Gender-Neutral Bathrooms (i.e. locations of restrooms, purpose of them)						
Gender-Inclusiv e Language (e.g. encouraging school community to use gender-inclusiv e language, language on websites and handbooks)						
Improvements to School Climate e.g. general, what schools aims for,						

protections for students						
Policies and Reporting Harassment/Bullying (how to report, state laws)						
Procedure for Reporting Staff/Teachers for Discrimination/Harassment						
Resources for Suicide Prevention e.g. Trevor's Project						
Staff Connection/Staff Involvement/Staff Purpose to High School Youth/School Climate						

Student Rights e.g. right to privacy, freedom of expression, state laws						
Support/Assistance/Guidance with Paperwork that Incorrectly Lists Student Gender						

Appendix B

Organization of Protocols by Theme (Color-Coded)

<p>Anti-Bullying/Discrimination:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p>Policies and reporting Harassment/Bullying</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p>Procedures for Reporting Staff/Teachers for Discrimination/Harassment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p>Resources for Suicide Prevention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p>Anxiety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p>Changes to Curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p>Resources on Depression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p>Extra-Curricular Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p>Dress Codes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p>Gender-Neutral Bathrooms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p>Gender-Inclusive Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p>Staff Connection/Staff Involvement/Staff Purpose to High School Youth/School Climate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p>Student Rights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p>Support/Assistance/Guidance with Paperwork that Incorrectly Lists Student Gender</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

Appendix C

Organizational Table of Materials by Theme - Exceptional/Needs Work

NEEDS WORK	EXCEPTIONAL/INCLUSION
<p>Procedures for Reporting Staff/Teachers for Discrimination/Harassment -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCHOOL DISTRICT - POLICY/INFO IN HANDBOOK/WEBSITE 	<p>Anti-Bullying/Discrimination -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HANDBOOK NOTES • WEBSITE NOTES
<p>Policies and Reporting Bullying -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCHOOL DISTRICT - POLICY/INFO IN HANDBOOK/WEBSITE 	<p>Policies and Reporting Harassment -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HANDBOOK NOTES • WEBSITE NOTES <p>Policies and Reporting Harassment -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HANDBOOK NOTES • WEBSITE NOTES
<p>Changes to Curriculum -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCHOOL DISTRICT - POLICY/INFO IN HANDBOOK/WEBSITE 	<p>Changes to Curriculum -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HANDBOOK NOTES
	<p>Extra-Curricular Engagement -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HANDBOOK NOTES • WEBSITE NOTES
<p>Gender Neutral Restrooms -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCHOOL DISTRICT - POLICY/INFO IN HANDBOOK/WEBSITE 	<p>Gender Neutral Restrooms -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HANDBOOK NOTES • WEBSITE NOTES
	<p>Resources for Suicide Prevention -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HANDBOOK NOTES • WEBSITE NOTES <p>Resources for Suicide Prevention -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HANDBOOK NOTES

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WEBSITE NOTES
<p>Staff Connection/Involvement to High School Youth/Culture -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SCHOOL DISTRICT - POLICY/INFO IN HANDBOOK/WEBSITE 	<p>Staff Connection/Involvement to High School Youth/Culture -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HANDBOOK NOTES WEBSITE NOTES
<p>Student Rights -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SCHOOL DISTRICT - POLICY/INFO IN HANDBOOK/WEBSITE 	<p>Student Rights -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HANDBOOK NOTES WEBSITE NOTES
<p>Support/Assistance/Guidance with Paperwork that Incorrectly Lists Student Gender -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SCHOOL DISTRICT - POLICY/INFO IN HANDBOOK/WEBSITE 	<p>Support/Assistance/Guidance with Paperwork that Incorrectly Lists Student Gender -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HANDBOOK NOTES WEBSITE NOTES <p>Support/Assistance/Guidance with Paperwork that Incorrectly Lists Student Gender -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HANDBOOK NOTES WEBSITE NOTES
<p>Resources on Depression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SCHOOL DISTRICT - POLICY/INFO IN HANDBOOK/WEBSITE 	<p>Resources on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HANDBOOK NOTES WEBSITE NOTES