

June 2021

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End of the Year Message

The 2020 – 2021 school year – what a year it has been! Educators across the state have risen to the challenge of teaching in multiple learning environments, adapting curricula and teaching methods to engage students. The experience of teaching through a pandemic has been challenging, yet many educators have identified ‘silver linings’ as they innovated throughout the year to meet the needs of their students. These silver linings will help reshape education for the upcoming school year and beyond. As summer vacation becomes a reality, please take the time to relax, refresh, and rejuvenate – you have certainly earned it!

Supporting Gender-Diverse Youth

I recently received an inquiry from a high school ELA teacher asking about [the use of the singular “they”](#) and how to teach that to students as part of grammar and usage instruction. I provided some resources and referred the teacher to a [previously published newsletter](#) in which I wrote about this very topic. What struck me the most about this inquiry was that the students were not being disrespectful or discriminatory in any way; they simply wanted to understand how to be grammatically correct while being inclusive. These students were respectfully speaking from a desire to understand and this teacher wanted to honor their curiosity by teaching them about the shift in grammar that has taken place over the years in an effort to legitimize the spectrum of gender identity.

It seems to me that a gender-diverse student would feel welcome and supported in this kind of classroom environment, but this is certainly not always the case. [Learning for Justice’s](#) article, [“The Gender Spectrum,”](#) reports some upsetting statistics.

Compared to the general population, gender-diverse kids face drastically increased rates of bullying, assault, depression, school drop-out, drug abuse, self-harm and suicide...Nearly 90 percent of transgender youth surveyed had experienced verbal harassment at school because of their gender expression. Two-thirds expressed feeling unsafe at school; more than half experienced physical harassment. A quarter experienced physical assault. Most of these incidents were never reported to school officials. Students in the study who experienced high levels of gender-identity harassment were more likely to skip school for safety reasons and to have significantly lower grade-point averages than their peers who experienced little to no harassment. ([Kilman, 2013](#))

Thankfully, Learning for Justice also presents solutions to these problems. The article "[Being There for Nonbinary Youth](#)" discusses the story of a transgender student and what educators can do to support their gender nonconforming students. Learning for Justice put together a [toolkit](#) that synthesizes the key points of the article and offers a collection of online resources educators can use to support transgender students. Among them is the fact that experiences of LGBTQ+ youth vary greatly, and that the "needs of transgender youth remain distinct from those of their LGB peers—and they extend beyond pronoun usage and bathroom access" (Ehrenhalt, 2016).

The 2013 GLSEN National School Climate Survey found that, compared to their LGB peers, transgender and gender-nonconforming students face the most hostile school climates. According to the National Center for Transgender Equality, in 2015, 75 percent of transgender youth felt unsafe at school, and those who did not drop out altogether were more likely to miss school due to a safety concern, have significantly lower GPAs, and were less likely to plan for future education. (Ehrenhalt, 2016).

Having mentors to model what happens when "kids like me" grow up is important to transgender youth, as is simply having an adult with whom they feel safe. As Kilman says, "A gender-diverse child's best predictor of success is whether that child receives support at home and from teachers." In "Being There for Nonbinary Youth," Caitlin Ryan of the [Family Acceptance Project at San Francisco State University](#) offers some tips for educators facing family push-back, including assuming that families care deeply for their child, using an evidence-based approach in discussing the topic, and letting them tell their stories. However, despite a teacher's best efforts, for some students "informed and sympathetic educators are their only chance for a safe place" (Kilman, 2013). These educators need to trust that the student knows who they are and what they need, and that this may change. Not only that, but they need to examine their own biases so that they are better equipped to interrupt microaggressions and other aggressive or bullying behaviors in the moment, demonstrating that this type of behavior will not be tolerated and showing the gender-diverse student that they are safe.

As with any identity group that has been historically marginalized, teachers can support gender-diverse students by diversifying their texts and other curricular materials, thereby providing them the opportunity to see themselves represented in curriculum. Diverse and inclusive materials also allow the greater student body a glimpse of the lived experiences of people who are "different" from them.

For more information about supporting gender-diverse students and resources to help you do so, see the Resource section at the end of this newsletter.

Lexile Framework Resources

The Lexile Framework for Reading uses Lexile measures to help educators and parents find reading materials at each student's unique reading level, engaging students in learning by ensuring they comprehend their reading materials and monitoring their progress over time. Educators can use Lexile measures to personalize student learning, differentiate their instruction, and better communicate with parents.

There are two kinds of Lexile measures: Lexile reader measures and Lexile text measures. Lexile reader measures describe how strong a student's reading is. Lexile text measures describe how difficult, or complex, a text like a book or magazine article is. Comparing a student's Lexile measure with the Lexile measure of what they are reading helps gauge the "fit" between a student's ability and the difficulty of text.

The AOE was fortunate enough to have experts from MetaMetrics present a series of professional learning webinars designed to help educators understand Lexile measures and use the tools provided in the [Lexile & Quantile Hub](#).

[An Introduction to the Lexile Framework](#) helps lay the foundation for use of Lexile measures at the classroom level, including addressing the following questions: What is the [Lexile Framework](#) for Reading? What are Lexile measures for students and for text? Where do you find the measures? What are the benefits of using the Lexile Framework for Reading? Where are Lexile tools and resources available and how do you use them to guide instruction?

[An Introduction to the Lexile and Quantile Hub](#) offers both a quick "tour" and some "hands on time" to explore the new Lexile & Quantile Hub, a "one stop shop" for Lexile and Quantile tools for students, parents, and educators. This session addresses the following topics: accessing the Hub; creating and managing your account; support, Quick Start Guides, and video tutorials; and an overview of the individual Lexile and Quantile tools.

Find more information and resources on the AOE's [Lexile and Quantile Frameworks](#) page.

2021 – 2022 Peer Learning Communities (PLCs)

Summer is a great time to begin planning 2021 – 2022 professional learning activities. The Proficiency-Based Learning Team is excited to offer educators opportunities to fine tune their skills designing performance assessments and Project-Based Learning units, as well as participate in content specific PLCs. To begin this process for English language arts educators, readers are asked to complete [this questionnaire](#). Your feedback will be used to plan meaningful and pertinent professional learning opportunities in the upcoming school year.

Resources

Read more about this month's topics here:

Diversifying Curriculum and Screening for Bias

- [Diverse Texts in the Secondary ELA Classroom](#) – This resource from the Arizona Department of Education helps educators diversify classroom libraries, providing students with a broader viewpoint of the world and a way to celebrate greater representation. Each book in the chart includes protagonists from underrepresented groups. Included non-fiction texts represent diverse voices and historical perspectives.

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- [Tricia Ebarvia: How Inclusive Is Your Literacy Classroom Really?](#) – This resource includes eight questions educators can ask themselves in order to evaluate the authenticity of their efforts toward inclusivity.
- [Screening for Biased Content in Instructional Materials](#) – This tool from the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction helps educators evaluate texts and other resources for biased content.

Other Resources for Supporting LGBTQ+ Students

- [Critical Practices for Anti-bias Education](#) – This publication from Learning for Justice provides teachers with practical strategies for creating a learning environment that is culturally responsive and promotes anti-bias values.
- [Reading Diversity: A Tool for Selecting Diverse Texts \(Extended Edition\)](#) – This interactive tool from Learning for Justice provides educators with a multi-dimensional approach to the text selection process that includes considerations that prioritize text complexity, critical literacy, and cultural responsiveness.
- [Understanding LGBTQ+ Identity: A Toolkit for Educators](#) – This resource from PBS LearningMedia offers a series of digital media resources to help teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, and other educators understand and effectively address the complex and difficult issues faced by LGBTQ students.

Professional Offerings and Activities

Vermont PBS: Kids and Education Summer Resources – In lieu of a schedule for June, the Vermont Agency of Education and Vermont PBS have compiled [Vermont PBS Kids and Education: June 2021](#), a resource based on the [End of Year Teacher Planning Kit](#). This kit includes resources and lessons teachers can use with students at all grade levels through the end of the school year as well as free professional learning opportunities and activities to engage families in learning over the summer.

2021 Vermont Literacy Conference – [The 2021 Vermont Literacy Conference](#), “JOY & URGENCY: Addressing Equity while Inspiring Learners K-12,” is happening online August 2-4, 2021, with literacy experts Cornelius Minor and Jennifer Seravallo as the keynote speakers. With over 20 offerings to choose from K-12, there is something for every grade level. Details about keynote speakers and many expert Vermont presenters, as well as several published authors are available on the [Vermont Literacy Conference website](#). [Email Mary Grace](#) for more information.

Disrupting the Canon: Moving Towards Anti-Racist Teaching with Text Selection and Preparation – This [self-paced course](#) will help educators think critically about literacy instruction and engage in learning around [#DisruptTexts](#) four key pillars: Continuously interrogating our own biases; Centering Black, Indigenous, and authors

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<https://education.vermont.gov/student-learning/content-areas/language-arts>