

Know Your Rights as an Advocate

If you want to show your support for LGBTQI+ students:

- Know your rights and the limits on them. You have the strongest protections when you are speaking off school time as a private citizen on a matter of public concern, such as at a protest or a school board meeting. This is because while students have broad free speech rights at school, as a school employee, your speech rights are more limited. When you are performing your duties, school districts have the right to set policies around what is taught, what curriculum is used, and what is displayed.
- If you are unsure about whether something complies with school policy, it is best to seek clarification from an administrator. Union representatives may also be able to advise you about past interpretations of school policies.
- Consider advocating for school board policies that express support for LGBTQI+ students' rights and inclusion, and that seek to ensure a safe, affirming and welcoming environment for all students. Acting together with other educators or through your union can greatly strengthen your advocacy for inclusive classrooms, school practices and curriculum.
- Consider posting LGBTQI+ Pride, Safe Space stickers, or other markers of inclusion. If you have not seen others posting similar items in their classroom, make sure to tell your principal in advance so that you can address any concerns they may have. If your principal or another school administrator prohibits you from posting such inclusive posters, consult your union representative about how best to proceed.
- If you are instructed to remove materials from classrooms or libraries, you should comply with this directive and immediately notify your union and local or state legal counsel to discuss options.
- Be aware that Title VII, Title IX and the First Amendment prohibit retaliation for expressing support of students; complaining about discriminatory or harassing conduct toward students, yourself or other employees; or for filing a complaint with a civil rights agency. If you believe you have been retaliated against for speaking out about your rights or those of your students, contact your union or legal counsel and consider filing a complaint with a local, state or federal civil rights agency.