



# GENDER & SEXUALITY DIVERSITY IN SCHOOLS (GSDS)

## Parental Experiences & Schooling Responses

NATIONAL FOCUS

RESEARCH REPORT

JUNE 2023

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The research, *Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools (GSDS): Parental Experiences and Schooling Responses* was conceived of in response to witnessing our pre-service teachers' fears about addressing gender and sexuality diversity within the curriculum in government-funded schools. A central concern of this fear was that parents and the broader school community would resist such inclusions in the curriculum and that there would be a backlash. Despite these anxieties, no large-scale research had been undertaken in Australia into what parents wanted in relation to gender and sexuality diversity in the curriculum. The research reported herein addresses that gap.

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- Janice Atkin (Health and Physical Education Consultant)
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## Glossary of Terms

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Australian parents	This refers to any/all parents, guardians or caregivers of children who reside in Australia.
Cisgender	Individuals whose personal gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth.
Cisgenderism	This concept refers to the rejection or pathologisation of someone's gender when it does not align with the gender with which they were assigned at birth.
Gender and sexuality diverse/diversity	This concept incorporates a range of people whose gender and sexuality identities do not reflect the socially constructed, normative and binary understandings around gender and sexuality. This is the primary term used throughout this research, however, LGBT/LGBTQ/LGBTIQ may be used when referring to other research that, or participants who, employ these identity acronyms.
Gender diverse	Individuals whose gender identities/expressions do not align with the sex they were assigned at birth.
Gender variant/gender non-conforming	Behaviour or expression of an individual that does not align with traditional, binary gender norms.
Gender non-binary	Individuals who do not identify within the male/female or masculine/feminine gender binary.
Heteronormative/heteronormativity	The construction of heterosexuality as the only natural, normal and superior sexuality, wherein all other forms of sexuality are positioned as deviant and abnormal. Heteronormativity includes the practices, policies and perspectives that privilege heterosexuality and position this form of sexuality as the normative standard.
Heterosexism/heterosexist	The attitudes, prejudices and discrimination that privileges female/male relationships and sexuality. A system of discrimination
Heterosexual	Sexual attraction to someone of the "opposite" [binary] sex.
Homophobia	A prejudice against people who are attracted to other people of the same sex.
Foundations-12	The year levels of formal schooling beginning with Foundations or Kindergarten, through to year 12 which is the final year of secondary education <sup>2</sup>
LGBTQ	Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans* and queer.
Transphobia	Negative attitudes, behaviours or feelings directed at trans/gender diverse people.
Transgender/trans*	An individual whose gender identities/expressions do not align with the sex they were assigned at birth.

<sup>2</sup> Foundations, and its synonyms Kindergarten and Preparatory/Prep, are used throughout this research for ease of understanding across educational jurisdictions, although the term "Foundations" is used in the Australian National Curriculum.

## About this Research

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*Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools: Parental Experiences and Schooling Responses* is a national study examining the perceptions of parents of children in K-12 public education regarding the inclusion/exclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in the school curriculum. Additionally, it reports on findings from parents of gender and sexuality diverse (GSD) children and their experiences of navigating the Australian public school system for/with their child.

The research dissemination strategy is comprised of several separate documents. The current overarching report, *Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools. Parental Experiences and Schooling Responses. A National Focus*, reports on the data analysis gleaned from the Australia-wide cohort of parent respondents to a national questionnaire. It also reports on qualitative findings of research conducted with parents of GSD children.

In combination with this document is a series of state-based ‘Snapshot’ reports pertaining to the localised findings from Australian states where a significant number of respondents were recruited. These include:

- *Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools (GSDS) New South Wales Snapshot*<sup>3</sup>
- *Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools (GSDS) Victoria Snapshot*<sup>4</sup>
- *Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools (GSDS) Queensland Snapshot*<sup>5</sup>
- *Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools (GSDS) South Australia Snapshot*<sup>6</sup>
- *Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools (GSDS) Western Australia Snapshot*<sup>7</sup>
- *Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools (GSDS) Tasmania Snapshot*<sup>8</sup> and
- *Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools (GSDS) Australian Capital Territory Snapshot*<sup>9</sup>

The qualitative data from the research forms the basis of a performed ethnography, which is a verbatim theatre piece entitled, *What Parents Want. Talking about Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools* (Ferfolja et al., 2023). The performed ethnography was co-created with the research project’s international partner investigator, Professor Tara Goldstein from the University of Toronto. In the performed ethnography, the voices of parent participants explore the issues faced by their GSD children and their families in K-12 public school education. The playscript, along with a film of the performed ethnography (produced by *Playhead Productions*) an associated professional development resource for pre- and in-service teachers as well as other research outputs related to this study, can be found online at <https://westernsydney.edu.au/gsd/home>.

3 NSW snapshot <https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws:61311>

4 Vic snapshot <https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws:61314>

5 QLD snapshot <https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws:61317>

6 SA snapshot <https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws:61315>

7 WA snapshot <https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws:61313>

8 Tasmania snapshot <https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws:61312>

9 ACT snapshot <https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws:61316>

## Terminology

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Throughout the report, the term “gender and sexuality diverse/diversity” is used to denote individuals who do not identify as heterosexual and/or cisgender. The authors recognise that the word “diversity” within this phrase can have the inadvertent outcome of centring heterosexual and cisgender identities; however, the phrase has been consciously used to signal and value the increasing variety of identities beyond lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ). Its use enables recognition of both gender and sexuality fluidity and acknowledges the rising numbers of individuals who do not identify as a named, specific gender or sexuality identity. Additionally, the researchers recognise that sex may also not be reflected in the binary male/female; however, sex identity was not an identified factor in this research so has not been included in this overarching term.

Within the survey, gender was used as a generic term for use with lay participants, in order to identify how participants identified, rather than to delineate between expression (gender) and biology (sex).

The term “parent” is used in this research to denote biological and non-biological parents of children, as well as those who have full-time care for children.

# Executive Summary

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## Introduction

Although schools are perceived as suitable environments in which to teach about sexual health, teachers often exclude gender and sexuality diversity-related topics in their teaching. This is reportedly due to a number of factors; however, a common perception is that parents disapprove of the inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in the curriculum and that engagement with such content will ignite parental backlash. Recent moral panics over such inclusions have exacerbated this fear and have added to the complexity of teachers' work through their contribution to teacher confusion about parental reactions in relation to gender and sexuality diversity inclusions. These events also contribute to apprehension about what knowledge is permissible in the classroom. However, there has been limited research in Australia that has examined what parents want in public school education (Foundations through to 12), if anything, in relation to gender and sexuality diversity, and *no* research that has comprehensively investigated this issue. Additionally, relatively few studies have examined how parents of school-aged, gender and/or sexuality diverse children navigate the schooling context with/for their child and what lessons their experiences can offer educators. This research contributes to addressing these gaps. Finally, the data from this research has resulted in the development of a performed ethnographic play which has been filmed, and, along with the production of teacher education materials, been made publicly available via the researchers' website ([https://westernsydney.edu.au/glds/educator\\_resources](https://westernsydney.edu.au/glds/educator_resources)) for teacher professional learning.

## Aims of the Research

The aims of this research were four-fold.

1. Develop and validate a new, multidimensional measure of parental attitudinal reasons for supporting or opposing a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive schooling curriculum, the Parental Attitudes Towards Inclusiveness Instrument (PATII).
2. Use nationally representative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of parents' perspectives regarding the inclusion/exclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in school curriculum and practices to inform curriculum and policy development.
3. Investigate parental narratives pertaining to their navigation of the state school system for their GSD child.
4. Use the narratives of parents to write and film a performed ethnography for an online professional development resource. Associated resources will incorporate national trend data, for pre- and in- service teachers and broader school communities.

## The Research

This research is a mixed methods study that was conducted using five phases as detailed below.

### Phase 1: Development and Pilot Testing of the Parental Attitudes Towards Inclusiveness Instrument (PATII)

A new, multidimensional self-report measure of parents' personal beliefs regarding the benefits and risks associated with a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive schooling curriculum, the Parental Attitudes Towards Inclusiveness Instrument (PATII; Hobby et al., 2021) was developed and pilot tested via an online international recruitment platform ( $N = 998$ ). Following rigorous statistical analysis, the final 48-item PATII measured reasons why parents may support such educational policy via five first-order factors (Oppression, Equality, Wellbeing, Personal Importance and Personal Capability) and reasons why parents may oppose such a curriculum via three first-factors (Religious Values, Suggestibility and Appropriateness). The scores that emanated from the PATII were determined to be reliable, valid and invariant across critical groups.

### Phase 2: National Survey of Australian Parents

#### Demographics

Nearly 2100 ( $N = 2093$ ) Australian parents of a school-aged child attending a government (public) school across the nation participated in an online survey. Using a probability panel of Australian adults, the data were rigorously statistically weighted based on demographic indicators (including gender, location and language spoken at home) and a substantive item reflective of attitudes towards gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive education, to ensure that the results were nationally representative. As a result, participants' demographic characteristics were largely approximately commensurate with those reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in the national Census data (ABS, 2022).

Parents had one or more child attending schools across the range of stages from Kindergarten/ Preparatory (11.3%) in primary school through to Year 12 of high school (15.2). In terms of parents' gender identity, 52.6% of the sample identified as female/woman, 46.7% as male/man and 0.7% as a different identity. Most parents identified as cisgender and heterosexual (85.2%), with 14.8% identifying as gender and/or sexuality diverse. Parents were primarily aged between 35 to 44 years of age (44.6%) and were residing in one of Australia's major cities (66.4%). The sample was culturally diverse, with 4.1% of parents identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, 29.2% indicating they spoke a language other than English (LOTE) at home, and 35% identifying as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD). Approximately half of the sample reported holding some type of religious belief (39.2% Christian; 11.4% Other religions).

## **Attitudes Towards Relationships and Sexual Health Education (RSE)**

### **Purpose of RSE**

The overwhelming majority of parents (94%) want relationships and sexual health education (RSE) taught in schools. When asked to select from four statements describing the purpose of RSE, the most-endorsed response from parents, consisting of nearly half the sample, was: “In addition to covering biology and reproduction, RSE should teach that sexuality is a positive part of life, and focus on empowerment, choice, consent, and acceptance of diversity”.

### **Providers of RSE**

Approximately 70% of parents either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the provision of RSE in schools must be a shared, whole-school responsibility that involves several stakeholders including parents, schools, teachers and students. Importantly, this whole-school approach was endorsed as the most appropriate, even above parents themselves; experts from external organisations; classroom teachers; or religious/faith leaders, the latter of which received the lowest level of support (12.5%).

### **Parental Involvement in RSE**

A high percentage of parents wanted to be involved with their young person’s learning in RSE at school (68%). Most of these parents indicated that they wanted to ensure particular topics were either included or excluded from the RSE curriculum. Looking more closely at parents’ wishes for curricular inclusion, 41% of this sub-cohort specifically reported that they would like to ensure that gender and/or sexuality diversity is *included* in the RSE curriculum. Only 8% of parents across the survey specifically listed gender diversity, gender fluidity or transgender identities as topics which would motivate them to remove their child from RSE lessons. Even fewer parents across the survey (4.9%) reported same-sex relationships, same-sex attraction or same-sex sexual practices as topics which would motivate them to remove their child from RSE lessons.

### **RSE Curriculum Content and Stage for Inclusion**

When asked to rate the importance of nine specific, gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive RSE content areas spanning the six broad topics of family, relationships, biology, reproduction, sexuality and the influence of social norms, the majority of parents (60.6% to 82.2%) reported this content as either of “high-” or “moderate” importance). The content areas covering sexual health, safety and wellbeing for gender and/or sexuality diverse young people were ranked of highest importance overall.

On average, 82% of parents supported the inclusion of the gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive six broad topic areas as part of the RSE curriculum from Kindergarten through to Year 12, with the majority of parents supporting their introduction to students by the end of Stage 4 (Years 7 and 8) and many by the conclusion of primary school.

Notably, parents were most supportive of discrimination against, and bullying of, gender and sexuality diverse (GSD) individuals being included in the curriculum (88%), with 59.8% wanting this to be introduced to their children in the primary school years.

## **Gender and Sexuality Diversity Inclusion Across the Curriculum**

Parents were approximately equally likely to endorse that gender and sexuality diversity should be either (a) encapsulated within the RSE curriculum (59.8%) or (b) embedded as part of a whole-school approach, with inclusions spanning policies, ethos and practices (59.1%).

## **PATII Instrument Revalidation**

A higher-order version of the PATII previously developed and pilot tested in Phase One of the research, was re-validated within the Australian national sample (Ullman et al., 2023). The original 48-item scale was refined such that four of the original Supports factors and the three Barriers factors were encapsulated by overarching higher-order factors, and the Parental Capability factor remained a first-order factor. A thorough, statistical process of revalidation demonstrated that the scores produced from the revised version of the PATII were reliable, valid and invariant across key groups. Accordingly, this instrument, including instructions for use and scoring, is publicly available online for use by schools, researchers and other stakeholders in the field.<sup>10</sup>

## **Parents' Attitudes Towards Gender and Sexuality Diversity-Inclusive Curriculum**

Overall, parents were more supportive of, than opposed to, a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum within schools. When considering the nuanced reasons that underpinned parental endorsement of inclusion, the strongest support was for the Equality factor, which encapsulated beliefs in a legal requirement for equity and inclusion of gender and/or sexuality diverse people within the education system.

The greatest barrier to inclusion for parents related to the Appropriateness factor, which captured parental concern about the matching of inclusive content to the developmental levels of students. That this was selected as the largest concern for parents, above Religious Values and Suggestibility is promising in two ways. Firstly, concerns regarding developmental matching can be addressed by appropriate curriculum design. Secondly, our findings show that the majority of parents are on the same page about when such content should be introduced; at least by the end of Stage 4 (Years 7 and 8) and many by the end of the primary school years.

## **GSD Child Identity and Discrimination**

Approximately 20% of parents reported that their child either self-identified, or was perceived by others to be, gender and/or sexuality diverse. Of these, parents reported in equal amounts direct knowledge of (21.9%) or suspicions that (21.9%) their child has experienced harassment in relation to their actual or perceived diversity. The most common form of harassment reported was subtle homophobia/transphobia (e.g., 'that's so gay' or 'but what are you really?').

<sup>10</sup> The full PATII measurement resource is available for public use on the project website: <https://westernsydney.edu.au/gds/outcomes-publications/measurement-instrumentation>

### **Phase 3: Qualitative Interviews with Australian Parents of Gender and/or Sexuality Diverse Children**

In the first qualitative component, online and face-to-face interviews were conducted with a sub-sample ( $n = 13$ ) of Australian parents from Phase 2, who had GSD children (self-identified and/or whose peers perceived them to be GSD). The aim of the interviews was to investigate these parents' experiences with, and traversing of, the public education system for their GSD child.

### **Phase 4: Forum with Australian Parents of Gender and/or Sexuality Diverse Children**

In the second qualitative component, a further sub-sample ( $n = 16$ ) of Australian parents from Phase 2, those with GSD children (self-identified and/or whose peers perceived them to be GSD), participated in an online discussion forum about their and their child's experiences navigating public schooling. The interviews and online forum were used to create a performed ethnography play script, film, and professional learning resources for teachers to help disseminate the findings of the research to teaching professionals and lay people.

For the purposes of this report, key themes across forum and interview data are amalgamated, and are presented below.

#### **Curriculum inclusions/exclusions**

- The degree to which parents reported the inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity across their children's educational experiences varied.
- GSD-related curriculum inclusions were often led by either GSD-identified teachers or teachers who were knowledgeable about, or sympathetic to, this form of diversity, resulting in continuity issues when individuals left the school or changed roles.
- Parental reports of whole school approaches related to gender and sexuality diversity were rare, as were targeted inclusions in the curriculum.
- Participants reported that it was their GSD child/ren or their parents who educated the school staff about inclusion.
- Visibility of gender and sexuality diversity was less likely in primary schools than secondary schools.
- Some schools attempted inclusion, but this was peripheral, tokenistic, and covert. When more specific teaching did occur, it was contained to specific groups of students who had direct contact with the GSD child or their siblings, and who were perceived as 'needing to know'; the implication of this, is that other cohorts of students did not 'need to know' and opportunities for learning were censored.
- Inclusion of GSD-related topics was sometimes introduced when addressing, or teaching students about, "bullying", linking gender and sexuality diversity-related education to negative experiences.
- Often GSD-related discrimination that was positioned as bullying was reduced to the poor behaviour of individuals during discrete instances or interactions, rather than reflecting the impact of broader socio-cultural inequities that are embedded in society and reflected in schools.
- Participants recognised that other minority identities were acknowledged in the curriculum and that similar approaches could be taken in relation to gender and sexuality diversity.

## **Relationships and Sexual Health Education (RSE)**

- Even though Australia's national Health and Physical Education curriculum does appear to make space for the inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity, most participants reported that their GSD child was not adequately catered for in this learning area.
- There were some reports of specific curriculum inclusions, although rare.

## **Educators' understandings about GSD**

- Teachers and school leaders have an inadequate understanding of GSD students and their needs. In some instances, this had a tangible impact on GSD students' experiences of school.
- Poor teacher recognition of the impact of discriminatory language and its effect on GSD young people was reported.
- Almost all parents commented that more professional development is required of all school staff to effectively meet the needs of, and adequately support, GSD students.
- Some parents highlighted how school counsellors required support and training, and that there was inadequate counselling support available in schools.

## **Parents' labour**

- Participants reported high levels of school negotiations which demonstrated an additional layer of labour not necessarily required of other parents whose children reflect socially normalised gender binaries and heterosexuality. This was the result of schools being inadequately prepared for gender and sexuality diverse students.
- The types of labour incurred by parents of GSD children included having to:
  - educate the educators about gender and sexuality diversity;
  - frequently “check in” with schools and teachers to ensure their child's well-being;
  - engage with the school in relation to the marginalisation and abuse experienced by their child;
  - deal with bureaucracy which involved lengthy communications;
  - monitor the curriculum for positive inclusions for their child or, conversely, to protect their child from information which could have a negative impact on their wellbeing.
- Schools need to be better equipped for GSD students, through policy, Departmental guidance documents, school leadership, and teacher professional development.

## **Toilets**

- Parents commented on the need for gender neutral toilets and/or for schools to permit young people to use the toilet aligned with their gender identity.
- An inability to access appropriate facilities resulted in distress and dysphoria for some gender diverse children.
- Parents also highlighted how bathroom selection resulted in additional discrimination via complaints coming from other members of the school parent community.
- The frequent mention of bathroom issues by participants illustrates a need for clearer, supportive guidance for schools as well as well-socialised school policy among staff in terms of bathroom facilities and their use.
- Some parents reported positive experiences around bathroom access. This occurred where schools were open to suggestions, had or knew about policies to support gender diverse students, or already had alternative toilets which were unisex or gender neutral.

## **Navigating uniform requirements**

- School regulations which gender elements of the school uniform can create distress for some GSD young people as well as their parents.
- School workarounds, such as allowing a child to wear the sport uniform on non-sport days as an alternative to the regular uniform made some GSD students more vulnerable.
- Some parents reported that uniform was a non-issue as it was not gender-specific and therefore posed little problem for their child.
- The selection of unsuitable attire for extra-curricular activities was problematic for some gender diverse students.
- Some parents selected their child's school based on the school having a gender-neutral uniform.

## **Bureaucracy and administration**

- Parents reported encountering bureaucratic and administrative issues with their child's school, particularly in relation to gender diverse children.
- There were problems related to changing names and personal records on computer systems, databases, and school administrative documents.
- Meeting assessment requirements were difficult for some students because of body conscious issues. Not addressing these shortcomings created additional stress for the child; however, some schools were accommodating.

### **Positive school experiences**

- Reported positive experiences of schooling reflected a receptive school culture, where gender and sexuality diversities were visible, articulated and celebrated, and where an ethos of zero tolerance towards gender and sexuality diversity-based harassment existed.
- Teachers, support staff and leadership who are caring, diversity-trained and inclusive helped to create a positive environment for GSD students.
- Foregrounding student wellbeing promoted an encouraging and affirming student community who were educated about diversity and provided moral support and friendship to their GSD peers.

### **Negative school experiences**

- Some parents described difficulty in finding a school in which their child would be welcomed and safe. Some schools appeared supportive but, in practice, demonstrated a culture of exclusion.
- Some schools continued to use antiquated practices of organising activities by binary gender which resulted in exclusion for students who are gender diverse.
- The prevailing heteronormative and cisgender culture of schools had a negative impact on some GSD children's wellbeing necessitating emotional support through counselling/psychiatry outside of school.

### **Discrimination, abuse, and questions of duty of care**

- Some parents reported incidents of emotional, verbal and physical abuse towards their GSD child from peers and some teachers, as well as a lack of duty of care in some situations.
- As a result of not feeling safe or included, some parents withdrew their child from mainstream public schooling, instead enrolling them in distance education or alternative schooling options.

### **Educational policy**

- There was some general mention of policy inadequacies.
- Policy inadequacy, both in schools as well as more broadly across states/territories, was perceived to be the result of defunding initiatives.
- Parents talked about policy needing to be realised through professional development for teachers and other school staff.

## Phase 5: Performed Ethnography

Using the voices of the parents from the qualitative data, a performed ethnography playscript entitled, *What Parents Want. Talking about Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools* was written by the chief investigators (Ferfolja/Ullman) and the international partner investigator (Tara Goldstein). This has been developed into a film with an accompanying teacher professional learning module. These three resources are not included in this Report. They are, however, available on the chief investigators' website *Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools* ([www.westernsydney.edu.au/glds](http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/glds)). These are freely available for the professional development of educators. The film is also available via YouTube.<sup>11</sup>

## Project Recommendations

The key summative recommendations, informed by both the quantitative and qualitative phases of data collection in this research, are categorised below in terms of whether they are related to pre-and in-service teacher education, structural aspects of schooling, teacher practice, or school facilities.

### In-service and pre-service teacher education recommendations

- Increase in-service teachers' awareness and understandings about gender and sexuality diversity through regular professional development programs that focus on these areas.
- Require initial teacher education providers to include gender and sexuality diversity-related understandings in their curriculum.
- Ensure Health/Physical Education teachers receive professional development about gender and sexuality diversity and its inclusion in this element of the curriculum.

### Structural recommendations

- Increase the visibility of gender and sexuality diversity across the primary/secondary school curriculum using age-appropriate content and teaching methods.
- Ensure that gender and sexuality diversity is clearly articulated and supported in the curriculum, syllabi and supporting documentation/resources for teacher guidance.
- Ensure that Relationships and Sexual Health Education is inclusive of gender and sexuality diversity to ensure that the curriculum is relevant to all students.
- Ensure school counsellors are trained to support gender and sexuality diverse students and their families.
- Include gender and sexuality diversity in school and departmental policies on student welfare, safety, gender equity and bullying.
- Acknowledge young people's identities at school (i.e. remove dead names from rolls; remove outdated photographs; use student's preferred name).
- Engage with parents locally to increase confidence in school-based approaches related to this area.
- Celebrate and acknowledge gender and sexuality diversity-related events such as Wear It Purple Day.

<sup>11</sup> Both the full-length film and individual parts of the film (Parts 1-3) can be found on YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLsDr59migXF3NMUXKLVbA3mX-l-p00ed>

## **Teacher practice recommendations**

- Discourage teachers from setting up activities by binary sex/gender (i.e., male/female, girls/boys).
- Include gender and sexuality diversity in everyday teaching so that it is ‘normalised’ and not ignored/avoided, only introduced around issues of bullying, or only included as a one-off ‘special event’.
- Address homophobia/transphobia in the classroom and playground. Recognise that comments such as “That’s so gay” are derogatory towards GSD students, GSD families, and GSD school staff, and should not be accepted. The anti-social nature of such language needs to be discussed and specifically taught about rather than treated as a simple disciplinary issue.

## **School facilities/amenities recommendations**

- Ensure that all genders toilets are available for students.
- Ensure that students are permitted to use the facilities that correspond to their gender identity.
- Ensure schools have school uniform options that meet the needs of all genders in the school – uniforms should ideally be gender neutral uniforms.
- Ensure students have age-appropriate support visible in the school (e.g., school library books that are inclusive of gender and sexuality diverse characters; posters and visual stimuli).

## Chapter 1: Introduction

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An enduring belief exists among educators that addressing content and issues about gender and sexuality diversity in public school classrooms will provoke parental<sup>12</sup> and community hostility, criticism and resistance. This belief is based on a perennial assumption that school inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity within curriculum, policy and pedagogy conflicts with what parents want their children to learn about at school (Smith, Schlichthorst, et al., 2011). Such educator beliefs and fears exist alongside often-inadequate policy and curriculum guidance on these topics (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2014; Ullman & Ferfolja, 2015). This results in an ongoing stasis in relation to the inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in school curriculums, policy and practices (Lawrence & Taylor, 2020).

The silences and invisibility are problematic considering supra-national education policies and guidance that support gender and sexuality diversity-related inclusions on a whole of school basis (e.g., UNESCO, 2018). Additionally, national guidance documents endorse a discrimination-free school experience irrespective of gender or sexual orientation (Education Council, 2019). This is particularly critical in Australia considering the mandating of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) across national settings; long-standing legislation outlawing discrimination on the grounds of gender and sexuality; relatively recent nationally-recognised marriage equality; the reported increases in youth identifying as gender and/or sexuality diverse (Fisher et al., 2019); young people's experiences of gender and sexuality as more fluid (Hill et al., 2021); and of particular concern, the high level of youth suicide and mental health concerns that prevail among young GSD people (Hill et al., 2021).

Parents can play an important role in the development of policy and curriculum and the substance and delivery of education and can impel changes to the educational landscape (Gofen & Blomqvist, 2014). However, parental perspectives about GSD-related curriculum inclusions are under-researched. Thus, teacher assumptions about parents' desires to exclude gender and sexuality diversity-related content in curriculum are not evidence-based. In fact, no large-scale research has ever been conducted in Australia examining what parents with children in the K-12 years of state-administered schooling want in the curriculum in regard to such issues. This is the first study of its kind to undertake this task nationally.

Additionally, there is relatively little research that specifically examines how parents of school-aged, GSD children experience and navigate for/with their children the hetero- and gender normativity pervasive in education (some exceptions include Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017; Ferfolja & Ullman, 2021; Johnson et al., 2014; Kivalanka et al., 2014; Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2015; Tyler et al., 2021) and what lessons their experiences can offer teachers and schools. Enhancing understandings, particularly of the needs of gender diverse child/ren in schooling, is critical, as a large percentage of gender diverse individuals experience marginalisation and discrimination in schools (Hill et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2016; Tyler et al., 2021; Ullman, 2021) as well as in the broader community (Zwickl et al., 2021).

<sup>12</sup> Parents in this research include all adult carers of children, regardless of biological or social relationship.

## Research Aims

The aims of this research are to:

1. Develop and validate a new, multidimensional measure of parental attitudinal reasons for supporting or opposing a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive schooling curriculum, the Parental Attitudes Towards Inclusiveness Instrument (PATII).
2. Use nationally representative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of parents' perspectives regarding the inclusion/exclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in school curriculum and practices to inform curriculum and policy development.
3. Investigate parental narratives pertaining to their navigation of the state school system for their GSD child.
4. Use the narratives of parents to write and film a performed ethnography for an online professional development resource. Associated resources will incorporate national trend data, for pre- and in- service teachers and broader school communities.

## Australian Curriculum as Context

The Australian Curriculum, developed by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, outlines the learning outcomes for all Australian students from the Foundation year, through to Year 10 (F-10). The Australian curriculum requires students in years F-10 to complete eight learning areas: English, mathematics, science, humanities and social sciences, the arts, languages, and health and physical education (HPE). It defines the learning outcomes for students in year groups in pairs forming Stages.<sup>13</sup>

### HPE context

Of particular interest to this research is the *national* HPE curriculum for years F-10, where inclusion of content related to gender and sexuality diversity would most likely be incorporated to guide teachers' integration into their practice. It should be noted that although the national HPE curriculum is available for use by Australian state and territory departments of education, these jurisdictions can either adopt or adapt the curriculum to suit their requirements. This means that each state can employ different interpretations and applications of the national curriculum<sup>14</sup>.

At the Australian Federal level<sup>15</sup>, the HPE curriculum is comprised of two strands – *Personal, Social and Community Health*, which aims to provide students with theoretical understandings of health and wellbeing, and *Movement and Physical Activity*, which generally encompasses practical lessons where students engage in sports and physical activities. The *Movement and Physical Activity* strand does broadly cover the idea of 'fair' and inclusive play across all stages of the curriculum; however, any direct acknowledgement of gender and sexuality diversity in the current HPE F-10 curriculum is located in the *Personal, Social and Community Health* strand for each year group (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022). While the Australian Curriculum does not include a specific section on Relationships

<sup>13</sup> Foundation year is the exception to this. Foundation, and years one and two, form Stage 1. Years three and four, comprise Stage 2. Years five and six, make up Stage 3. Years seven and eight, and nine and ten form Stages 4 and 5, respectively. The senior secondary years (11 and 12) form Stage 6; however, no set Stage 6 curriculum is required for HPE. Each Stage has one 'band' that shares an achievement standard and content description.

<sup>14</sup> At the time of survey design and deployment, version 8.3 of the Australian National Curriculum was in use (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016). Since then, an updated version of the curriculum (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022) has been released and it is this version that is discussed in detail within this section of the report.

<sup>15</sup> We have focused on the Federal/Australian curriculum as an overarching guidance document.

and Sexuality Education (RSE), the two main themes of RSE identified within the curriculum are *Identities and Change* and *Interacting with Others*.

### **Identities and Change**

In the earliest years of school, this area of RSE focuses on students' sense of self, personal identity/belonging and the people in their lives, including family members. Moving into years 1-2 (Stage 1), students describe their personal qualities and differences between themselves and others. In years 3-4 (Stage 2), students explore the development of their identities and discuss changes that occur over the lifespan. Discussions of changing identities continue into years 5-6 (Stage 3) when students learn about bodily changes related to puberty and are directed to age-appropriate products and resources. In years 7-8 (Stage 4), students examine "how cultural beliefs about the physical changes experienced during puberty can influence gender, cultural and sexual identities" (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022, p. 46). Students investigate emotional changes related to puberty, questions of power, coercion and control in relationships, and resources and services from which they can access sexual health information. Finally, in years 9-10 (Stage 5), students analyse the ways societal norms, including assumptions about gender, impact how young people view themselves and their relationships.

### **Interacting with Others**

There is a clear focus on healthy and respectful relationships within the Australian HPE curriculum. While some of this material is addressed in the area of *Identities and Change*, the *Interacting with Others* area clearly articulates individuals' and community responsibilities. In the Foundation year, students are introduced to consent in the form of "respecting someone's right to say no" and their right to bodily autonomy (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022, p. 5). In Stage 1, students are encouraged to reflect on how individuals demonstrate respect for one another and identify behaviours that "may cause hurt or harm to others, or cause them to feel disrespected" (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022, p. 12). In Stage 2, students explore ways of respecting and valuing difference and diversity. Students also explore what to do when they or others feel unsafe or disrespected, including going to trusted adults for support and engaging in safe bystander actions. Discussions about bullying and valuing community diversity continue in Stage 3, where students are encouraged to explore the changing nature of relationships and how to identify respectful, inclusive behaviours. In Stage 4, students "examine the roles of respect, empathy, power and coercion in developing respectful relationships" (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022, p. 48). Students continue to develop their understandings of the social nature of bullying, explore how consent can vary across different relationships, and understand how personal, social and cultural factors influence individuals' differential emotional responses. Finally, in Stage 5, students explore what actions can be taken to address power imbalances in relationships, explore the influence of historical patterns of inequity, and identify legal and personal expectations related to consent.

## Gender and Sexuality Diversity Inclusions

The following section reviews the current HPE curriculum (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022) from Foundation to the end of Stage 5 (Year 10) to illustrate where gender and sexuality diversity-related content is mentioned or alluded to in order to present what guidance exists for classroom teachers. It should be noted that, across the entirety of the multi-stage HPE curriculum documents, common terms associated with GSD identities (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, non-binary) are not present, nor is there any acknowledgement of gender transition.

### Foundation Year – Year 4 (Stages 1 and 2)

There is no direct articulation of gender and sexuality diversity-related content or obvious possibilities for inclusion in the Australian HPE curriculum between the Foundation year and year 4 (Stage 2). Rather, there are content descriptors where inclusion might be possible (e.g. examining “different [types of] families,” situated within Stage 1; exploring “how overcoming challenge or adversity together can unite a group of diverse people,” situated within Stage 2; (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022, p. 20); however, inclusion in these instances is ultimately up to an individual classroom teacher. While the Stage 2 materials also include a content descriptor focused on “valuing diversity” and “promot[ing] inclusion” (p. 23), using the terminology “people of different genders” (p. 22), rather than the binary male/female, GSD identities are not directly articulated.

### Years 5-6 (Stage 3)

Gender roles, gender equity, gender stereotypes, gender-based violence and the concept of human rights feature across the *Personal, Social and Community Health* module in the HPE curriculum in Stage 3, as does the recognition of bullying and harassment. While some connection is made for students around the importance of belonging and connection and the importance of valuing diversity, gender and sexuality diversity is acknowledged only in the context of negative social interactions. Students are to “encourage discussion...to tackle discrimination such as...homophobia” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022, p. 36) and “challenge disrespect and discrimination such as homophobia, transphobia and racism” (p. 37). While ACARA defines diversity in materials across every Stage as, “The mix of people in a group or society; i.e. differences in factors such as age, abilities, culture and religion and/or in *how people identify in relation to factors such as gender and sexuality*” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022, p. n.p. emphasis added), again it is notable that terms associated with GSD identities are not specifically included or defined for teachers.

### **Years 7-8 (Stage 4)**

In Stage 4, the HPE curriculum requires that students learn that “respecting diversity and challenging racism, sexism, ableism (disability discrimination) and homophobia influence individual and community health and wellbeing” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022, p. 49). The curriculum also requires students to examine how “resisting stereotypes can help students be themselves” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022, p. 49) with reference to examples including gender and sexuality. However, in this context it is unclear how gender is defined and whether this content descriptor is making space for non-binary and/or gender diverse identities or is framed around exploring binary gender roles more broadly. Stage 4 of the HPE curriculum is the first, and only, use of the term “gender diversity” (p. 49); however no specific articulation of associated trans/gender diverse identities is provided for teachers.

### **Years 9-10 (Stage 5)**

In the context of personal identity development, students in years 9 and 10 evaluate “how societal norms, stereotypes and expectations influence how young people view themselves and how they deal with these influences” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022, p. 58). This content does appear to make space for consideration of the experiences of puberty and adolescent development for GSD students; however, these are not specifically articulated within the associated elaborations. Students additionally work towards “analysing the implications of attitudes and behaviours such as prejudice, marginalisation, homophobia, racism, discrimination, violence and harassment on individuals and communities, and proposing countermeasures to prevent these behaviours” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022, p. 62). The Stage 5 materials are the first to use the term “gender and sexual diversity”, doing so in the context of addressing stigma associated with these identities and enhancing “their own and others’ health, safety, relationships and wellbeing” (p. 67-68).

Several additional learning goals of students in years 9 and 10 refer to outcomes that may be perceived as relevant to gender and sexuality diversity but make no clear reference to GSD identities. For example, students will work towards “critiquing media representations of different cultural and racial groups and analysing whether the representations are respectful, realistic and inclusive” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022, p. 62) or “analysing messages about gender norms and stereotypes in popular culture” (p. 63). However, in lieu of direct articulation of GSD identities, teachers may not interpret these learning outcomes as pertaining to gender and sexuality diversity.

## Chapter 2: Background Literature

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### Teacher knowledge of GSD

Although schools are perceived as suitable environments in which to teach about sexual health (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2022, p. 46), teachers often exclude gender and sexuality diversity-related topics in their teaching, with many avoiding relationships and sexuality education more generally. This is reportedly due to a number of factors, including a lack of training and awareness of policies and resources (Smith, Schlichthorst, et al., 2011; C. Taylor et al., 2015); limited curriculum time (Johnson et al., 2014); lack of confidence (Goldman, 2010; Ollis, 2005); disapproval on personal, moral or religious grounds (Kennedy & Covell, 2009; Y. Taylor & Cuthbert, 2019); discomfort around the topic; lack of support and guidance (Zimmerman, 2015); and, concerns about parental reactions (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017; Milton, 2003). As a result, schools often rely on external providers for the delivery of RSE (Goldman, 2011). Additionally, teachers tend to operate within a heteronormative, cisgender framework, considering heterosexuality and cisgenderism to be the norm. Some teachers who have knowledge of law, policy, support from school administration, and/or empathy developed from living as members of minority groups, may include GSD-inclusive curriculum or approaches in their classrooms, although whole school approaches to such topics are rare.

Teachers are reluctant to broach gender and sexuality diversity-related issues in the classroom, even in the interest of student welfare. They generally operate within a heteronormative framework which positions students and parents as heterosexual and cisgender unless otherwise indicated. GSD students report that their teachers frequently fail to address homophobic or transphobic language or harassment (Ullman, 2021). Further, limited clear curriculum and policy direction renders the onus for gender and sexuality diversity-related inclusion on the individual teacher, positioning them as personally responsible for any potential resistance or controversy that arises from such inclusion (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2017b; Ullman & Ferfolja, 2015) and reinforcing teacher silences (Cumming-Potvin & Martino, 2014; Leonard, 2010).

Critical to this research is a common perception, particularly amongst teachers but also amongst some parents (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2020b), that parents disapprove of the inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in the curriculum (Ollis et al., 2013) and that engagement with such content will ignite parental backlash (Duffy et al., 2013; Milton, 2003). Research with 226 Australian secondary teachers of sexual education found that 44% were “careful” about the topics addressed because of “possible adverse community reaction” (Smith, La Trobe University, et al., 2011, p. 27). Likewise, almost a third of Victorian teachers sampled as part of the *Beyond Homophobia* project (Leonard, 2010) reported that fears of media or parental community backlash served as a “major disincentive... to addressing the needs of [gender and sexuality-diverse] students” (p. 28).

## **GSD in education and moral panics**

Additionally, there have been a series of public moral panics around gender and sexuality diversity educational inclusion in Australia (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2020a) including the most recent surrounding the *Safe Schools Coalition Australia* (Law, 2017; Robinson et al., 2017), a national opt-in school initiative offering professional development and curricular resources to support GSD students. These public moral panics demonstrate the controversial and politicised nature of such topics, particularly when intersected with schooling and children/young people. Although there are parents, political parties and organisations across Australia who are in support of the incorporation of gender and sexuality diversity related topics in school education (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2020b; Macbeth et al., 2009), others resist (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017). The moral panics in this area, however, often perpetuate heteronormative/cisgender discourses through political and media rhetoric (Thompson, 2020) utilising notions of parental concern and resistance (among others). For instance, a Bill was submitted to the New South Wales (NSW) Legislative Council by the NSW One Nation Party to prohibit the teaching or discussion in schools of gender and sexuality diversity (*Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill*, 2020). Although the Bill was not passed, it is notable that the proposed repercussions for teachers and initial teacher education providers who included content related to gender and sexuality diversity was to withdraw their individual/institutional accreditation.

Moral panics have added to the complexity of teachers' work through their contribution to teacher confusion about parental reactions in relation to gender and sexuality diversity inclusions (Ferfolja, 2018; Ullman & Smith, 2018). These events also contribute to apprehension about what knowledge is permissible in the classroom.

## **GSD discrimination in schools**

Teacher and school silences about gender and sexuality diversity are of concern considering the high rates of prejudice against GSD students in schools. Discrimination towards gender and sexuality-diverse people, or those perceived to be, remains common nationally and internationally (Bradlow et al., 2017; Hill et al., 2021; Kosciw et al., 2018; Ullman, 2021) and Australian research reports disturbing rates of abuse towards GSD youth (L. Hillier et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2014; Ullman, 2015, 2021). A national study conducted by Hill et al (2021) of 6418 LGBTQA+ individuals aged 14-21 years found that negative remarks based on gender and sexuality diversity were common, with 97.2% of the study's sample "hearing negative language regarding [diverse] sexuality at secondary school in the past 12 months" (p. 57). According to UNESCO (2015), verbal harassment towards LGBT youth in Australia is one of the highest in the Asia-Pacific, second only to Vietnam. Additionally, GSD young people are more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to experience cyberbullying (Abreu & Kenny, 2018; Garaigordobil & Larrain, 2020).

Discrimination, harassment and unwelcoming educational environments, can result in safety concerns for GSD young people (Hill et al., 2021; L. Hillier et al., 2005); diminished educational aspirations (Birkett et al., 2009); lowered academic achievement (Murdock & Bolch, 2005; Poteat et al., 2014; Ullman, 2015); concentration problems (Blackburn, 2012); truancy (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002); decreased motivation, difficulties connecting with others at school; and poorer health and learning outcomes (Becerra-Culqui et al., 2018; Eisenberg et al., 2017; Pearson et al., 2007; Ullman, 2015). These may contribute to early school leaving which can adversely contribute to negative impacts on gross domestic product and ramifications on workforce participation (Access Economics, 2005). Additionally, concerns related to youth mental health are well-reported, with self-harm, suicide ideation, attempts and completion rates far greater than the national average for this cohort (Rosenstreich, 2013; Taliaferro et al., 2018). It is estimated that GSD youth are five times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual cisgender peers (LGBTIQ+ Health Australia, 2021) and one-quarter of all suicides between 2013-2015 for individuals aged 12-14 years were GSD-identifying adolescents (Ream, 2019). Despite the impact of negative school cultures and silencing and invisibility on GSD students in schools, it is critical to note that GSD young people are not 'victims'. Many GSD students are proactively engaged in providing support for others and demonstrate their agency and resistance in many ways that highlight their strength and power (Callaghan, 2016).

### **Positive impact of GSD inclusion in the classroom**

Schools can reduce the negative outcomes for GSD students through both distal and proximal factors. These include the creation of a safe and supportive school culture that is positively inclined towards diversity demonstrated through a school's values and mission; teacher/peer and administrator training in the area of gender and sexuality diversity; greater inclusion in the curriculum and representation in school resources such as library provision, as well as policies and practices that are inclusive of gender and sexuality diversity (Fantus & Newman, 2021). National and international research illustrates that GSD students in schools with GSD-inclusive curriculum and support experience less harassment and greater connection to the school environment (Bradlow et al., 2017; Kosciw et al., 2018; Ullman, 2021); in fact, these benefits extend to the entire school community (Baams et al., 2017). Moreover, greater inclusivity of gender and sexuality diversity-related content in relationships and sexual education has been shown to be linked to lower anxiety, suicidality and depression (Keiser et al., 2019).

In the *Free2Be...Yet?* survey of 2376 GSD high school students across Australia, aged 13-18 (Ullman, 2021), analyses revealed clear relationships between a positive schooling environment and enhanced school wellbeing for this cohort of teenagers. More specifically, students reporting the highest levels of GSD-inclusive curriculum in their HPE classes had statistically significantly higher levels of reported connection to school. These students felt less isolated and were more likely to report that their teachers respected diversity and knew how to manage bullying. Likewise, GSD students attending schools with wellbeing/harassment policies that included articulated protections for same-sex attracted students evidenced statistically significantly higher school wellbeing across every included measure, with the most

profound impact of inclusive policy on their reported sense of school connection (Ullman, 2021). Looking specifically at transgender and gender diverse students, cohort-specific analyses revealed that a respectful, GSD-inclusive school environment predicted these students' sense of school connection, while controlling for demographic variables and even students' sense of their teachers' individual investment in them as students (Ullman, 2022). Taken as a whole, this research unequivocally spotlights the value of GSD-inclusive environments, across curriculum, policy and school culture, for GSD students.

## **Parent perceptions of gender and sexuality diversity inclusions in the curriculum**

The research on parental perceptions of gender and sexuality diversity-related inclusion/exclusion in the school curriculum is limited. More has been researched on the inclusion of sex education generally, with fewer studies paying specific heed to gender and sexuality diversity. Thus, the literature mostly examines parents' views of sex education broadly with questions that inquire about GSD.

International research on parents' perspectives about relationships, sex and sexuality education in western contexts illustrates that many parents approve of the incorporation of comprehensive sexuality and relationships education in school education (Berne et al., 2000; Constantine et al., 2007; Eisenberg et al., 2008; Peter et al., 2015; Ream, 2019) and are assured about schools' capability to provide this content in an appropriate manner (Berne et al., 2000; Ollis et al., 2012). For instance, Cameron et al (2020) undertook a research questionnaire of 484 parents in South Carolina, USA, to understand parental attitudes towards school-based sex education. They found that parents want comprehensive sexual health education taught to their children, based on it being "effective, evidence-based, science-based, age-appropriate and taught by trained teachers or instructors" (p. 11). Similar findings have been found in other international research (e.g., Depauli & Plaute, 2018). Cameron and colleagues (2020) also reported that some young people do not receive adequate sex education at home, increasing the need for school-based intervention. Parents also consider the inclusion of a range of topics as being important, including among other things, gender identity and sexual orientation (Barr et al., 2014; Constantine et al., 2007; Eisenberg et al., 2008). Tensions about the age-appropriateness of these inclusions along with a simultaneous desire to reject discrimination are apparent.

Such findings have been identified in other research. A random digit dial questionnaire of 1284 parents in California found that nearly 90% of parents wanted comprehensive sexual health education to be taught in schools with most parents wanting "homosexuality" included in sex education (Constantine et al., 2007, p. 172); just 14% were in opposition to such inclusion. Despite generalised claims that race/ethnicity, religiosity and ideological affiliation may impact attitudes towards the inclusion of sexuality diversity in this learning area, parents' support for this was high across all subgroups, including race/ethnicity, education level, household income, religious affiliation and ideological learning (Constantine et al., 2007).

Depauli and Plaute (2018, p. 522) found in a survey of 1038 parents and 939 teachers in Austria that overall, there was “broad general approval and acceptance of sexuality education in primary schools”. They make the point that the provision of information to parents and parent education is critical in reducing potential parental anxieties about the inclusion of relationships and sexuality education. As they point out, “good quality sexuality education outside of the home is urgently required” (p. 514) and increasing parental confidence in school-based curriculum and approaches is critical to prevent parents from withdrawing their child from instruction. They also make the point that parents want to “see criteria such as the age and developmental stage of the children, their gender, their cultural background and other factors considered” (Depauli & Plaute, 2018, p. 518).

The literature focusing on parents’ attitudes and beliefs about gender and sexuality diverse-related content inclusion in Australia is scarce, although some research has been undertaken with parents that include items on gender and sexuality diversity. For instance, research by Robinson, Smith and Davies (2017) conducted with 342 parents of primary school-aged children sought data on parents’ understandings of the relevance and worth of sexuality education generally; the discourses in which their perspectives were positioned; beliefs about who had responsibility for the teaching of sexuality education; and the topics, if any, that would be better broached by family. The researchers found that, despite the perceived controversy surrounding inclusion of sexuality education with young children, 71% of parents thought sexuality education generally was important knowledge for their child; a finding supported by other research in the field (Berne et al., 2000; Depauli & Plaute, 2018; Ollis et al., 2012). In Robinson et al.’s research, parents’ reactions towards the inclusion of sexuality and gender diversity in the education of their young children were mixed, with some parents who desired a positive attitude towards sexuality and gender diversity demonstrating concern that their values may not be instilled by education programs.

Earlier quantitative research with 177 Sydney-based parents examined attitudes to sexual health education (Macbeth et al., 2009) and reported similar results, with 97% of parent participants viewing the inclusion of ‘homosexuality’ as appropriate content for sexual health classes, particularly for students in the upper primary years. Moran and Van Leent’s (2022) research found that Queensland parents’ perspectives of primary school sex education considered that education about gender and sexuality diversity was important, although this perspective was only mentioned briefly in their analysis.

Ferfolja and Ullman undertook a qualitative pilot study which informed the national research reported herein. The study was conducted with Australian parents (i.e. parents who live in Australia) and their perspectives on the inclusion/exclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in the curriculum in state of New South Wales (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2017a; Ullman & Ferfolja, 2016). Reporting from a focus group of a sub-cohort of parents (6) from the study living in a relatively progressive region of Sydney, NSW, the researchers found that these parents were cognisant of the marginalising experiences of GSD students in schools. They also found that the parents felt that sex education in schools was highly heteronormative, limited and biologically based and failed to meet the needs of GSD young people and their families. Participants also reported that schools were not particularly inclusive of gender and sexuality diversity in their resourcing, teaching or community engagement. Across the six sites of data collection in NSW, all parent participants felt that gender and sexuality diversity-related content should be included in the curriculum in some capacity.

## Parents of GSD youth and school

Research on parents of GSD youth's experiences with school education is still in its infancy in comparison to related research areas in this field (Birnkrant & Przeworski, 2017; Goodrich, 2009; Gray et al., 2016; A. Hillier & Elisabeth, 2019; von Doussa et al., 2020). A number of studies point to challenges faced by parents of GSD children and the various negotiations they undertake at home and in educational contexts in relation to their child's transitioning (Barron & Capous-Desyllas, 2017; Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017; Gray et al., 2016; Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2018; Riggs & Due, 2018; Riley et al., 2013). For instance, Riley, Sitharthan, Clemson and Diamond (2011), Conley (2011), and Ferfolja and Ullman (2021) highlight how parents have concerns around safety at school for their child, particularly in relation to dealing with school-based bullying. Parents also desire clearer school-based guidelines and policies for gender variant children, believing that schools generally lack such support and knowledge about the needs of transgender and gender diverse (TGD) young people (Birnkrant & Przeworski, 2017; Ferfolja & Ullman, 2021; Katz-Wise et al., 2017; Neary, 2021; Riley et al., 2013) and in some instances provide limited accommodations for the child's needs (Birnkrant & Przeworski, 2017), including advocating for basic requirements such as appropriate washroom access (Herriot et al., 2018). Moreover, parents undertake considerable work to encourage acceptance and ensure the well-being of their TGD child at school (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2021; Goldstein et al., 2018) and are required to advocate to ensure appropriate access to resources and facilities (Birnkrant & Przeworski, 2017; Riley et al., 2013). The ability to advocate successfully is impacted by "economic, socio-cultural and symbolic capital" that is recognised by the school, which can provide potent forces when negotiating with institutions and professionals (Neary, 2021).

## Conclusion

There is a common perception that including content about gender and sexuality diversity in the school curriculum will incite parental and community backlash due to a presumed conflict with parents' desires for their children's education. Parents play an important part in curriculum and policy development, and thus, can drive significant educational change. Despite this, little is known about how or what parents think about gender and sexuality-diverse subjects or related content in the K-12 curriculum. Additionally, at the time of application of this research, relatively few studies had examined how parents of school-aged, gender and/or sexuality diverse children navigate the schooling context with/for their child and what lessons their experiences can offer educators. The research reported herein aims to contribute to addressing these gaps.

## Chapter 3: Design Overview

### Aims

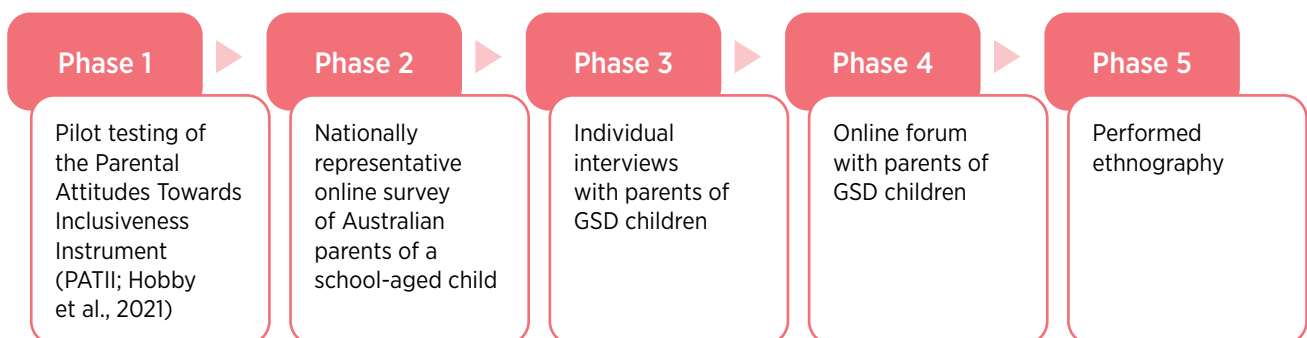
The specific aims of this research were to:

1. Develop and validate a new, multidimensional measure of parental attitudinal reasons for supporting or opposing a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive schooling curriculum, the Parental Attitudes Towards Inclusiveness Instrument (PATII).
2. Use nationally representative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of parents' perspectives regarding the inclusion/exclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in school curriculum and practices to inform curriculum and policy development.
3. Investigate parental narratives pertaining to their navigation of the state school system for their GSD child; and,
4. Use the narratives of parents to write and film a performed ethnography for an online professional development resource, which incorporates national trend data, for pre- and in-service teachers and broader school communities.

### Research Design

This five-phase research project used a mixed-methods design that combined descriptive and multivariate trends from a national survey with the narrative richness provided by qualitative parent accounts (Greene, 2007). Project instrumentation and recruitment materials were developed in consultation with the project's Advisory Committee, which included key academic researchers within the field of relationships and sexual health education (RSE), including gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive education; representatives from peak parenting associations, including a state-based Parents and Citizens Association and the Australian Council of State Schools Organisation; a Health and Physical Education key learning area national curriculum advisor, a gender and sexuality youth service sector representative, and a culturally and linguistically-diverse (CALD) parent representative. Figure 1 graphically depicts the five phases of the project.

Figure 1: GSDS mixed methods research design



## **Phase 1: Development and Pilot Testing of the Parental Attitudes Towards Inclusiveness Instrument (PATII)**

Given the absence of a reliable and valid instrument within the literature to assess parental support for and barriers to a national, gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive school curriculum, a new multi-dimensional measure, the PATII (Hobby et al., 2021; Ullman et al., 2023), was developed by the research team. A pilot validation of the PATII was conducted with an international sample ( $N = 998$ ) prior to the Phase 2 national survey, to ensure the most condensed, valid, and reliable form of the PATII was included in Phase 2 (Doody & Doody, 2015; Hassan et al., 2006; Leon et al., 2011).

## **Phase 2: National Survey of Australian Parents**

In the second quantitative component, Australian parents of school-aged children were recruited to participate in an online survey using the Qualtrics platform. The original survey, developed in consultation with our Advisory Board and informed by our aforementioned pilot research with parents (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2017a; Ullman & Ferfolja, 2016) was designed to measure:

- Child and parent-level demographic data;
- Parental attitudes regarding the purpose and best providers of relationships and sexual health education (RSE) and their desired involvement in their child's RSE education;
- Parental beliefs in the importance of various general and gender and sexuality diversity-specific topic areas being included within the RSE curriculum and the schooling stage at which such content should be taught;
- Parental stances on whether or not gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive education should be included in the wider curriculum beyond RSE;
- Parental reasons for supporting or opposing a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum as measured by the PATII, as developed during Phase 1;
- Parental perceptions of discrimination and bullying experienced by their GSD child.

Data from our final survey convenience sample ( $N = 2093$ ) was weighted using a population panel of Australian parents to generate estimates, and associated results, which can be described as nationally representative. Additional detail on this process is outlined in the section "Data Weighting" located within the full outline of Phase 2 later in this chapter.

## **Phase 3: Qualitative Interviews with Australian Parents of Gender and/or Sexuality Diverse Children**

In the first qualitative component of the study, online and face-to-face interviews were conducted with a sub-sample ( $n = 13$ ) of Australian parents from Phase 2, those with GSD children (self-identified and/or whose peers perceived them to be GSD). The aim of the interviews was to investigate these parents' experiences with, and traversing of, the public education system for their GSD child. Given that the online forum (Phase 4) was an unfamiliar data collection strategy, participants were offered the opportunity to participate in an online or face-to-face qualitative interview with the research team. The purposes of this were twofold; firstly, to provide parents with an alternative pathway to participate in the qualitative component of the research, and secondly, to provide a buffer should the forum not generate the required narrative data for the proposed performed ethnography.

#### **Phase 4: Forum with Australian Parents of Gender and/or Sexuality Diverse Children**

In the second qualitative component, a further sub-sample ( $n = 16$ ) of Australian parents from Phase 2, those with GSD children (self-identified and/or whose peers perceived them to be GSD), participated in an online discussion forum about their and their child's experiences navigating public schooling.

#### **Phase 5: Performed Ethnography**

Using analysis of the qualitative data, a performed ethnography entitled, *What Parents Want. Talking about Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools* was written by the chief investigators (Ferfolja/Ullman) and the international partner investigator (Tara Goldstein). An accompanying educational resource was also developed comprised of written training materials for the professional learning of pre- and in-service teachers. The performed ethnography and accompanying materials have not been included in this report. They are available on the researchers' website *Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools* ([www.westernsydney.edu.au/glds](http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/glds)) and are freely available for the professional development of educators.

#### **Advisory Committee**

The Advisory Committee was composed of: (a) significant academic researchers within the field of RSE, including gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive education; (b) representatives from peak parenting associations, including a state-based Parents and Citizens Association and the Australian Council of State Schools Organisation; (c) a national Curriculum Advisor within the Health and Physical Education key learning area; (d) a gender and sexuality youth service sector representative; (e) and a culturally and linguistically-diverse (CALD) parent representative.

The Advisory Committee was established in 2018, and the key functions were to provide direction, input, review and strategic advice on the planning, development and implementation of each phase of the research project. Communication between the research team and the Advisory Committee occurred virtually, utilising regular video conferencing and email correspondence and was maintained throughout the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Ethics

All outlined forms of data collection and associated analysis were approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number H12788). Informed consent was obtained from participants for all phases of the research project, and participation was entirely voluntary. Every endeavour was made to keep participants and their children/child's school anonymous by using pseudonyms and discontinuous narratives (Khayatt, 1992) and all stored data were de-identified. It was not anticipated that participation in the study would pose any significant risk to participants or researchers. However, all participants were provided with a list of relevant, national support service contacts in the instance that any emotional discomfort was experienced. This was particularly important for those parents who were recounting the experiences of their GSD child at school and their navigation of the schooling system for/with their child.

The advertising of the online survey was monitored by the Western Sydney University Media unit for trolling and potential malicious attacks to protect the research team and the integrity of the data collection. Advice was similarly sought from the media unit and Information Technology services at Western Sydney University in terms of the protection of potential participants from similar attacks or recognition. Additionally, the research team closely monitored the online forum to ensure the safety of participants and to remove/block any malicious offenders who may have inadvertently gained access despite the controls in place; however, no such event occurred. Throughout the duration of the project, the team monitored a dedicated email address for communication from parents, including questions or comments about the research.

## Chapter 4: Quantitative Phases

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### Phase 1: Development and Pilot of the Parental Attitudes Towards Inclusiveness Instrument (PATII)

#### Design

At the outset of the GSDS project, a search of the gender and sexuality literature revealed an absence of a sound questionnaire to capture parental perspectives regarding the array of potential benefits and risks for students and the wider school community of an educational curriculum inclusive of gender and sexuality diversity. Hence, the GSDS research team aimed to develop a series of factors and associated items that described the multifaceted reasons why parents may support or oppose such a curriculum: the Parental Attitudes Towards Inclusiveness Instrument (PATII).

The development of the PATII factors and their associated items has been detailed extensively elsewhere (Hobby et al., 2021). Briefly, the development was underpinned by:

- A review of existing empirical literature (Cameron et al., 2020; Ollis et al., 2012, 2013; Peter et al., 2015);
- The lead CIs' previous focus group research, conducted with 22 parents from metropolitan, regional, and rural areas from New South Wales, exploring parents' reasons for wanting or not wanting a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum at their child's school (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2017a, 2020b; Ullman & Ferfolja, 2016);
- The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation's *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* (UNESCO, 2018); and,
- An extensive and multi-phased review process of survey drafts conducted by the GSDS research team in collaboration with the project's Advisory Committee.

Prior to formal recruitment as detailed below, and following protocols as detailed in Rothgeb (2008), the researchers ran several pre-tests of the online instrument, including respondent debriefing with a small group of volunteer parents to check for usability, functionality, and participant understanding.

#### Participant Recruitment

The PATII was piloted with 998 parents of a school-aged child who self-identified as nationals from the United Kingdom ( $n = 795$ ), United States ( $n = 186$ ), and Australia ( $n = 11$ ), using the online participant recruitment service, Prolific. This method of recruitment was selected for the pilot phase of the GSDS project due to the emerging research (Palan & Schitter, 2018; Peer et al., 2017) which supports the use of Prolific as an accurate, high quality, and cost-effective alternative for participant recruitment. The survey was developed in Qualtrics, and a link to the survey was posted to the Prolific site. The survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete. Participants were reimbursed for their participation as per the terms and conditions of Prolific services and the requisite number of surveys were collected in under a week.

## Measures

### Demographic Items

A number of demographic details were collected by Prolific, including parents' age, year of birth, sex, nationality and employment. Additionally, the GSDS research team collected information regarding religiosity and confirmation of parent having a school-aged child.

### Parental Attitudes Towards Inclusiveness Instrument (PATII)

The pool of items associated with the PATII factors generated via the development process described above were administered to the participants. Initially, the items and their factors covered a vast array of possible reasons that parents may support or oppose a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum, with the draft version containing 11 Supports factors, seven Barriers factors, and a total of 179 items. Participants responded to the items on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). In constructing a new questionnaire, it is typical to generate many factors and items to allow for the removal of items and/or factors that are problematic, irrelevant, or statistically unsound. Further detailed information regarding the development of the PATII and its validation can be found in Hobby et al. (2021).

The final pilot PATII model consisted of 48 items across two sets of factors. The Supports domain contained five subscales: a) "Oppression" captured support related to the historical societal injustice faced by gender and/or sexuality diverse persons; b) "Equality" related to support founded in the belief that the education system must legally provide for the equity and inclusion of gender and/or sexuality diverse people; c) "Wellbeing" encapsulated support given parents' sense that a diversity-inclusive curriculum would have a direct impact on reducing the discrimination and violence faced by gender and/or sexuality diverse individuals; d) "Parental Capability" harnessed support due to parent's own perceived lack of capacity to accurately teach their child about gender and sexuality diversity; e) "Personal Importance" spoke to support spurred by parents' care for gender and/or sexuality diverse family, friends, and school community members.

The Barriers domain contained three subscales: a) "Religious Values" related to opposition to a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive schooling curriculum based on a belief that parents' own religious values would be incompatible with such a curriculum; b) "Suggestibility" referred to opposition based on the belief that exposure to gender and sexuality diversity content within the curriculum may make young people vulnerable to changing their own gender or sexuality; c) "Appropriateness" captured opposition due to parental fears that inclusive content would not be matched to the developmental levels of students.

### Providers of Education

Five items were included in the pilot study to canvas who parents thought were the most appropriate providers of relationships and sexual health education for their child, specifically: parents, religious/faith leaders, classroom teachers, external experts, or a whole-school effort involving many stakeholders (parents, schools, teachers, and students).

## Findings

Data were first screened and subsequently analysed using the most current statistical methods (McDonald's omega, exploratory structural equation modelling), with the PATII undergoing a detailed process of validation. The final pilot version of the PATII consisted of 48 items measuring parental reasons for supporting or opposing a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum. The five first-order Supports factors included: (a) Oppression, (b) Equality, (c) Wellbeing, (d) Personal Importance, and (e) Parental Capability. The three first-order Barriers factors included: (a) Religious Values, (b) Suggestibility, and (c) Appropriateness.

Table 1 provides a summary of the statistical results in relation to reliability, construct validity, criterion validity, and measurement invariance. These pilot study results verified that the final version of the PATII demonstrated:

- a) Reliability – the items within each factor were determined to be measuring the same construct.
- b) Construct validity – the factors were determined to be measuring the constructs they were designed to measure.
- c) Criterion validity – the factors were related to an external measure, the providers of education items, as theoretically predicted; and,
- d) Measurement invariance – the factors and their items were interpreted equivalently across parents, irrespective of whether they were male or female, a UK or U.S. national (Australian respondents were not able to be included due to the very small sample size), or religious or not.

Table 1: PATII Pilot Testing Results

	Criteria required	Requirements Met?	Explanation
<b>Reliability</b>	McDonald's omega values > .70	Yes	McDonald's omega values were > .85
<b>Construct Validity</b>	Goodness-of-fit estimates: CFI and TLI > .90 and RMSEA < .10	Yes	CFI = .98, TLI = .97, and the RMSEA = .04
	Factor loadings > .30 and cross loadings < .30	Yes	Factor loadings ranged from .55 to .98 and all cross loadings were < .30
	Factor intercorrelations < .80	Yes	The highest factor intercorrelation was .762
<b>Criterion Validity</b>	Correlations with providers of education items as theoretically expected	Yes	E.g., Parents who supported a gender and sexuality diversity -inclusive curriculum were more likely to endorse a whole-school approach to RSE
<b>Invariance</b>	Change in CFI and TLI < .01 and RMSEA < .015	Yes	The changes in CFI, TLI, and RMSEA for tests of invariance across sex, religiosity, and nationality groupings were < .01 and < .015

Taken together, these four elements – reliability, construct validity, criterion validity, and measurement invariance – supported the soundness of the first iteration of the PATII in measuring parental attitudes towards a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum (see Hobby et al., 2021 for a detailed description of this process). Furthermore, the pilot study enabled the most succinct, reliable, and valid version of the PATII to be included in Phase 2 of the GSDS project where it was re-validated with the national sample of Australian parents. The findings of this re-validation are presented in the next section, *Phase 2*.

## Phase 2: Australian National Survey of Parents

### Design

The second quantitative component comprised an online, national survey which was developed and administered using the Qualtrics platform. The survey included both closed (multiple or dichotomous forced choice) and open-ended (text response) items.

### Participant Recruitment

To recruit a national sample of Australian parents, paid targeted diversity sampling advertising through the social media platforms of Facebook and Instagram were initially utilised (see Figure 2 for representative examples of these). This initial cohort was increased with a further  $n = 514$  participants recruited via Qualtrics double-opt-in market research panels. This supplementation was undertaken in order to meet the GSDS project's original aim of approximately 2000 participants for sufficient power for multivariate statistical analyses (MacCallum et al., 1996). The final GSDS sample comprised  $N = 2093$  Australian parents.

Figure 2: Paid Facebook and Instagram Advertising



## Measures

### Demographic Items

Child and parent-level demographic data was collected in relation to age, stage of schooling, and gender and/or sexuality diversity identification of the parent's oldest child, and parental gender<sup>16</sup>, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background<sup>17</sup>, cultural background, religious beliefs, languages spoken, and level of education as per the Australian Census items (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016a). Additional demographic items sought detail on parental age, geographic location, and identification as gender and/or sexuality diverse.

### Definitions and Substantive Items

Both at the outset of, and approximately mid-way through the substantive item section, participants were provided with definitions for a series of key terms used within the survey to standardise their meaning. The key terms defined included: gender diverse; trans/transgender; sexuality diverse; heterosexual; gay; lesbian; bisexual; queer; questioning; gender and/or sexuality diverse/diversities/diversity (GSD); and gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum. The definitions provided within the survey are presented in Appendix A.

Related substantive items interrogated parents' beliefs regarding the purpose and best providers of relationships and sexual health education (RSE) and their desired involvement in their child's RSE education (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2017a; Ollis et al., 2012; Peter et al., 2015; Ullman & Ferfolja, 2016). The importance of an omnibus of general and gender and sexuality diversity-specific topic areas within the RSE curriculum, and judgements regarding the schooling stage at which such content should be taught, were then canvassed. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's document, *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* (UNESCO, 2018) underpinned the content areas included within these sections of the survey. The next area probed parental attitudes regarding whether gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive education should be incorporated in the curriculum beyond Health and Physical Education. The perceptions of parents of gender and/or sexuality diverse children of their child's experiences of harassment and discrimination were also explored. The PATII multi-dimensional measure of parents' support for/perceived barriers to gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum (Hobby et al., 2021; Ullman et al., 2023) comprised the last in the series of the substantive survey items.

### Data Screening

Prior to proceeding to the main analyses, the data was screened for completeness and the presence of patterned responses. Responses with more than 40% incomplete data across the entire survey ( $n = 3119$ ) and highly patterned responses on the PATII ( $n = 9$ ) were removed from the data set. The remaining sample ( $N = 2093$ ) was further screened for normality, including skewness and kurtosis values, and means and descriptive statistics were produced. All data screening was conducted in IBM SPSS Statistics 26 (IBM Corp, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Our research was interested in how parents identified their gender as male (masculine), female (feminine) or a different identity, as opposed to their biological sex. This phrasing was used as it was considered the most accessible and understandable, catering to all possible levels of familiarity with gender terminology.

<sup>17</sup> "The Australian Government defines Indigenous Australians as people who: are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent; identify as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin; and are accepted as such in the communities in which they live or have lived. In most data collections, a person is considered to be Indigenous if they identified themselves, or were identified by another household member, as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. For a few data collections, information on acceptance of a person as being Indigenous by an Indigenous community may also be required." See: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/profile-of-indigenous-australians>

## Data Weighting

To be able to draw inferences about a population based on responses from a population subset requires a probability sample – a sample in which each element of the population has a known, non-zero chance of selection. However, as is the case with the GSDS sample, many survey samples utilise a non-probability opt-in mechanism. Hence, there may be different rates of response across participant characteristics, such that many sample surveys yield subsets that imperfectly cover their target populations despite the best possible sample design and data collection practices (Valliant et al., 2013). To reduce the extent of any biases in the quantitative sense, that is, differences between the true population value and that observed in the attained sample introduced through non-coverage and non-response, weighting can be applied.

With this in mind, and to ensure that the results from the GSDS survey data were nationally representative of Australian parents, the research team engaged the Australian National University's Social Research Centre (SRC) to undertake weighting of the GSDS survey sample data. Approaches to weighting that simply utilise demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and location to weight non-probability samples have been demonstrated to decrease accuracy across other important variables (Yeager et al., 2011). As such, the SRC employed an alternative, rigorous, and multi-phased approach that utilised a probability sample as a reference to estimate the selection mechanism for the non-probability GSDS sample, and to align the GSDS sample as closely as possible to the probability sample on substantive survey items.

The SRC's online panel, *Life in Australia*<sup>TM</sup> (Kaczmirek et al., 2019), was the reference sample used to weight the GSDS data. *Life in Australia*<sup>TM</sup> was recruited via random probability-based sampling methods that covered both online and offline populations. Weights for the *Life in Australia*<sup>TM</sup> panel were then derived via:

- a) the computation of a base weight for each respondent as a product of their panel weight, accounting for the initial chances of selection and subsequent allocation to key demographic benchmarks (Elliott & Valliant, 2017; Valliant et al., 2000); and their response propensity weight, accounting for participant non-response to, or withdrawing or retirement from the panel, and new participant recruitment (Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983); followed by
- b) the adjustment of the base weights to match national benchmarks to ensure the estimates from the *Life in Australia*<sup>TM</sup> data set were nationally representative of Australian adults aged 18 years and over (Deville et al., 1993). Several Australian Bureau of Statistics (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016b, 2017, 2019) benchmarks for key demographic parameters (age by highest education, gender by state, household structure, dwelling tenure, language spoken at home, and state or territory of residence) were utilised.

To further enhance the representativity of the utilised benchmarks for the GSDS survey data, the SRC administered a collection of survey items to a sub-population of Australian parents of school-aged children within the *Life in Australia*<sup>TM</sup> panel. The items included demographic characteristics and a set of substantive questions from the GSDS survey related to the core focus of gender and sexuality diversity-inclusion in schools. An initial assessment by the SRC determined that there was sufficient overlap in characteristics between the *Life in Australia*<sup>TM</sup> and GSDS respondents to conduct the calibration process.

In the case of the GSDS sample, the probability of selection could not be calculated due to the non-probability selection mechanism utilised. Instead, weights were determined using data from both the probability (*Life in Australia*<sup>TM</sup>) and the non-probability (GSDS) samples to estimate probabilities of selection for the latter sample, had it been part of the random sampling process (Elliot, 2009; Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983). Specifically:

- a) the *Life in Australia*<sup>TM</sup> and GSDS samples were combined and, using item responses common to both samples, propensity weights were derived from a model predicting membership in the GSDS sample (Elliot, 2009; Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983). The propensity weights were formed into classes to reduce bias (Cochran, 1968);
- b) the propensity class weights for the GSDS sample were adjusted to align with the population distributions from the *Life in Australia*<sup>TM</sup> sample. Given the number of variables available in the dataset, many different sets of adjustment variables were trialled in an effort to align the GSDS sample as closely as possible to *Life in Australia*<sup>TM</sup> using regression calibration (Deville et al., 1993). The final adjustment characteristics were demographic (gender, location, language spoken at home) and substantive (attitudes towards gender and sexuality diversity inclusion in the Health and Physical Education curriculum) variables that were most divergent between the two samples and most related to the GSDS survey's key outcomes. The final adopted solution yielded low average bias across common variables while still achieving an acceptable level of variability in the weights.

All analyses subsequently presented in this report are based on weighted estimates from the GSDS data; accordingly, these estimates can be considered as nationally representative of Australian parents of school-aged children attending government schools. We have used robust statistical methods to derive weights that align our results with the target population as closely as possible and that enable inferences to be made with respect to the population. As is the case with any survey, though, some level of bias will always remain.

## Quantitative Findings (Phases 1 & 2)

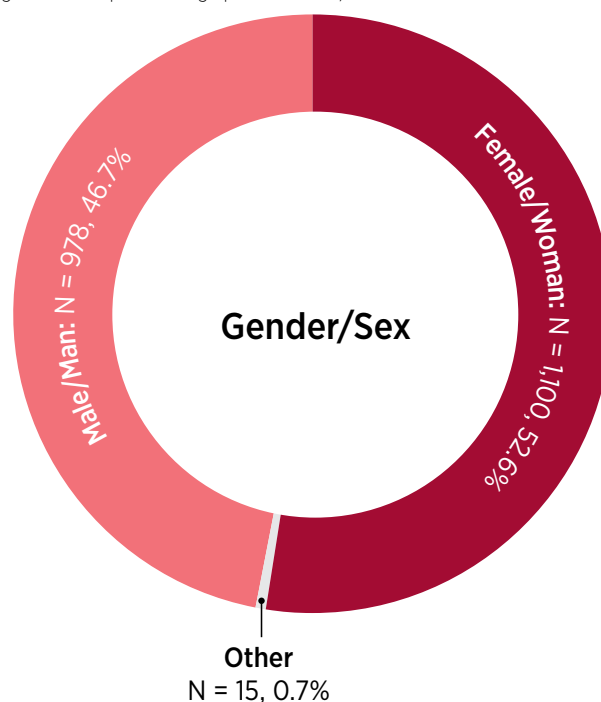
### Participant Demographics

This section presents the demographic composition of the GSDS sample using the weighted estimates. A total of  $N = 2093$  Australian parents of a school-aged, public school-attending child participated. Overall, the sample characteristics, which are presented in more detail below, are broadly representative of the demographic characteristics collected at the population level in the national Census conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Importantly though, although the sample data was weighted to produce nationally representative estimates utilising a population of Australian parents of a school-aged child from the *Life in Australia*<sup>TM</sup> panel, it should be noted that the ABS data is not parent-specific, nor is there available nationally representative, baseline population data specific to Australian parents of a school-aged child attending a public school. Hence, any comparisons between the GSDS sample demographic profile and available comparison data should be interpreted with this in mind.

Our final parent sample consisted of 52.6% who identified as female/woman, 46.7% who identified as male/man, and .7% who reported a 'different identity'. The most recent 2021 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022b) included, for the first time, three response options for indicating sex: male, female and non-binary, although it did not collect information on gender. Findings released from the census thus far indicated that females comprise 49.3% and males 50.7% of the population; however, an addendum released in September 2022 indicated that .17% of participating Australians selected non-binary sex (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022a). It is worth noting, however, that – given that analyses of the open-text item which accompanied the non-binary option pointed to individuals' potential misunderstanding of the terminology – “the ABS does not support the use of the non-binary sex category to estimate the prevalence of any specific group in the community” (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022a).

Figure 3: Participant Demographics – Gender/Sex



**NB:** Of the 15 individuals who did not identify with the male/female binary, seven (0.3%) identified specifically as "non-binary".

Furthermore, 14.8% of the parent sample identified as gender and/or sexuality diverse; the vast majority, 85.2%, identified as cisgender and heterosexual. There exists a lack of robust population estimates for gender and/or sexuality diverse Australians. ABS data only captures same-sex relationships where persons are cohabitating. A synthesis of other, limited population-based studies available found that a significant proportion of Australians (approximately 19% of females and 9% of males) reported same gender attraction and this does not account for ‘queer’, ‘pansexual’ or ‘asexual’ and gender diverse identities which were not investigated in the research.

In terms of age, the majority of the parents who were sampled reported being 35 to 44 years of age (44.6%), with 29.3% aged between 45 and 54 years, 19.1% aged 18 to 34 years and 6.9% aged over 55 years. These figures are commensurate with the 2021 Census data which reported the median age of Australians to be 38 years of age (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022b).

The majority of the sample (66.4%) reported residing in one of Australia’s major cities, with most respondents located in New South Wales (29.4%), Victoria (28.9%), and Queensland (22.0%). Such estimates were aligned with current population counts in which the majority of Australians reside on the East coast, with NSW having the largest number of residents (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022b).

Figure 4: Participant Demographics – Age in years

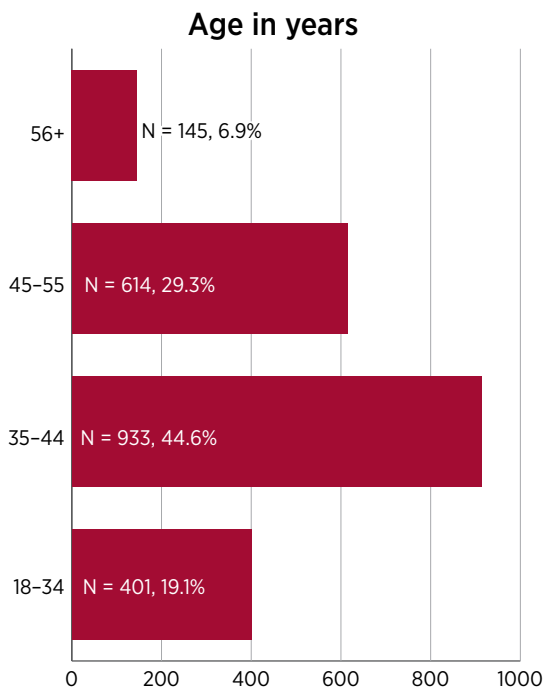


Figure 5: Participant Demographics – Location, by Australian State

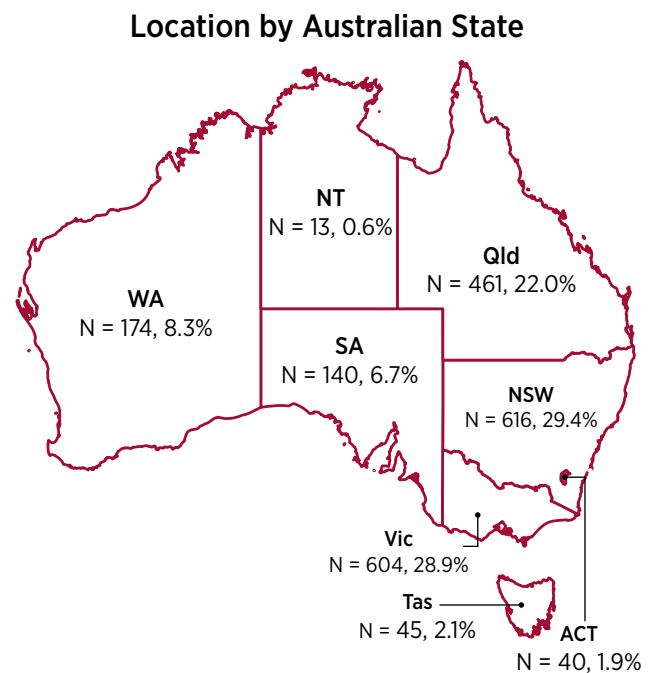


Figure 6: Participant Demographics - Stage of Schooling

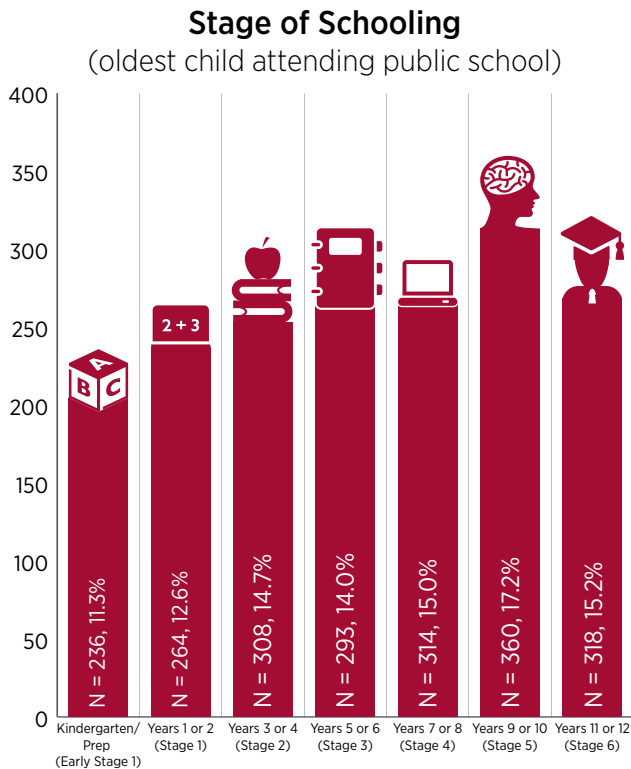
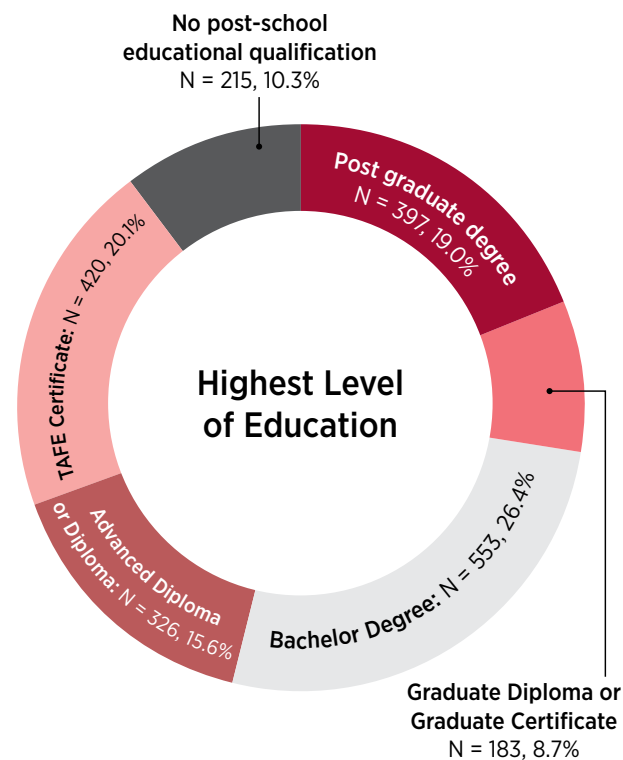


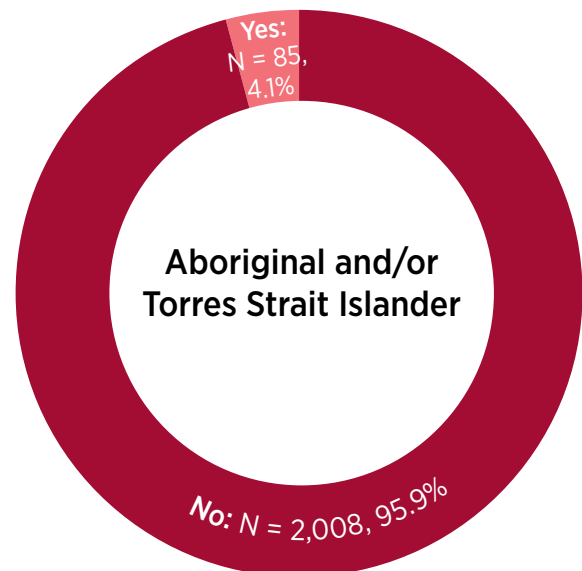
Figure 7: Participant Demographics - Highest Level of Education



Parents were asked to indicate the current schooling stage of their oldest child attending an Australian public/government school. There was fairly even representation across the stages of schooling, with the smallest cohort being Kindergarten/Preparatory (Early Stage 1) at 11.3% and the largest cohort being Years 9 or 10 (Stage 5) at 17.2%.

Parents were asked to report their highest level of educational qualification. The vast majority of the sample (89.7%) reported possessing some type of post-school educational qualification, which was higher than the 68% of Australians aged 15 to 74 years who had or were studying for a non-school qualification in the most contemporary Survey of Education and Work (SEW; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Furthermore, total tertiary training at the Bachelor degree level or above was 45% for the sample, again higher than the 31% national average reported in the SEW (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

Figure 8: Participant Demographics - Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



The cultural background of the sample was explored, with 4.1% identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This estimate was slightly higher than the most contemporary national estimate; 3.2% of the national population identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022b). Furthermore, 29.2% of the sample reported speaking a language other than English (LOTE) at home and 35% identified as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), which encapsulated LOTE, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity and country of birth. The 2021 Census reported that 22.3% of the total population of Australians identified as speaking a LOTE, with the percentage increasing to 29.5% in the greater capital cities, and 27.6% of the total Australian population reported being born overseas, with Australia increasingly trending towards greater multicultural diversity (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022b).

The sample surveyed was approximately evenly split in terms of religious identification, with 49.4% reporting no religion and 50.6% reporting some type of religious belief. Of that cohort, 39.2% endorsed the Christian faith and 11.4% identified with other religious faiths including Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism. In the 2021 Australian census, 93.1% of the population responded to the religious affiliation question. Of those who responded, 38.9% reported having no religion, 43.9% reported being Christian and 17.2% reported holding another religious belief. Recent data from Roy Morgan’s 2020 “Single Source” survey has also demonstrated the steady and significant decline in religious beliefs amongst Australians, with 45.5% describing themselves as having no religion (Roy Morgan, 2021).

Figure 9: Participant Demographics – Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)

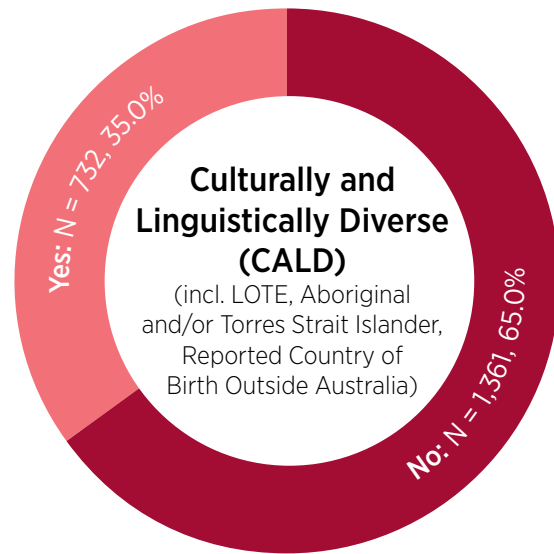


Figure 10: Participant Demographics – Household speaks Language Other than English (LOTE)

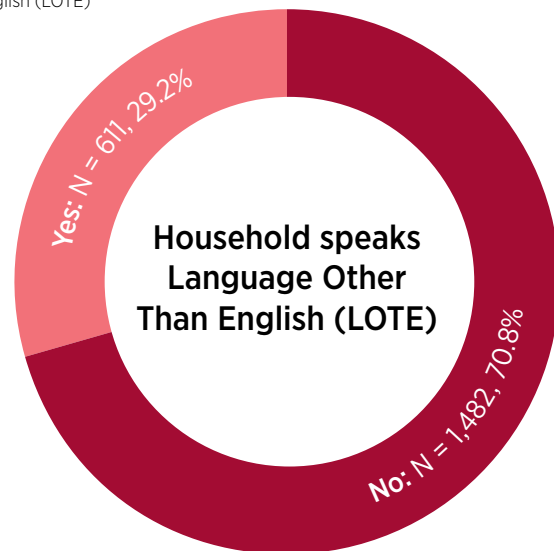
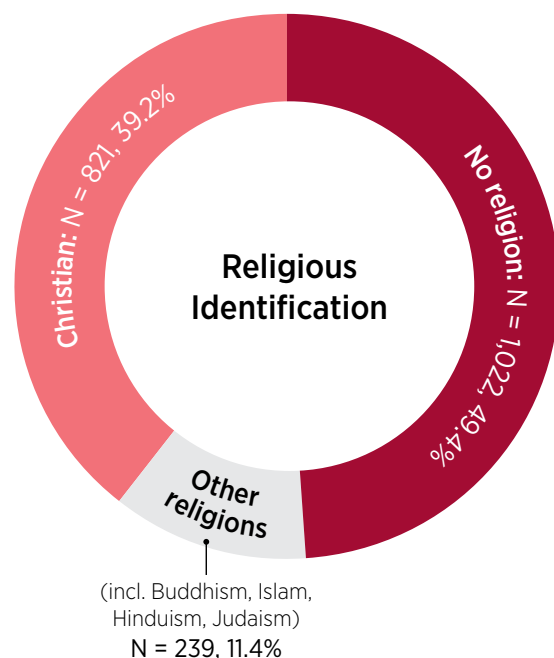


Figure 11: Participant Demographics – Religious Identification



## Attitudes Towards Relationships and Sexual Health Education (RSE)

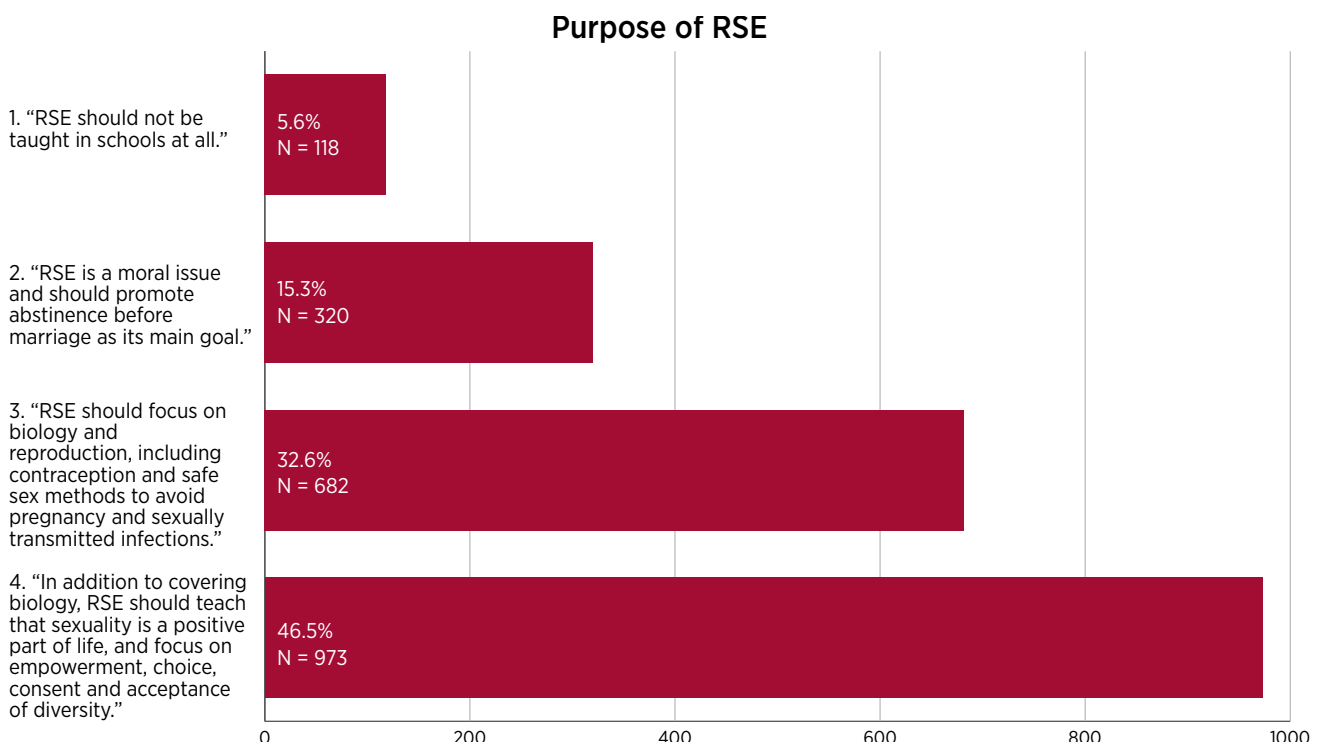
Relationships and Sexual Health Education (RSE) is a key focus area within the national *Australian Health and Physical Education* (HPE) curriculum. Before proceeding to questionnaire items that specifically targeted beliefs regarding gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum, parents were asked to provide their views on a number of issues related to RSE.

### Purpose of Relationships and Sexual Health Education (RSE)

The sample were asked to indicate which of four statements best described their beliefs regarding the purpose of RSE. These statements ranged in approach from RSE should not be taught at all, to three possible iterations of RSE that posited an abstinence-only focus, a focus on biology and reproduction, and lastly the most inclusive and comprehensive option that included choice and diversity.

Significant differences between parental endorsement of the differing conceptualisations of the purpose of RSE were revealed by chi square analysis  $\chi^2(3, N = 2093) = 565.24, p < .001$ , with follow-up binomial tests targeting the exact nature of the differences. As can be seen from Figure 12, the response option with the highest level of endorsement (46.5%) was the most expansive purpose of RSE that “focuses on empowerment, choice, consent and acceptance of diversity” and this level of support was significantly higher ( $p = .006$ ) than the next largest level of endorsement for a biological and reproductive purpose of RSE. Approximately 15% of parents felt that RSE should be abstinence only in its focus; obtaining significantly less support ( $p < .001$ ) from parents than a purely biological purpose of RSE. Lastly, only 5.6% of parents believed that RSE should not be taught at all in schools; this was a significantly ( $p < .001$ ) smaller proportion of parents who endorsed an abstinence only purpose.

Figure 12: Purpose of Relationships and Sexual Health Education (RSE)

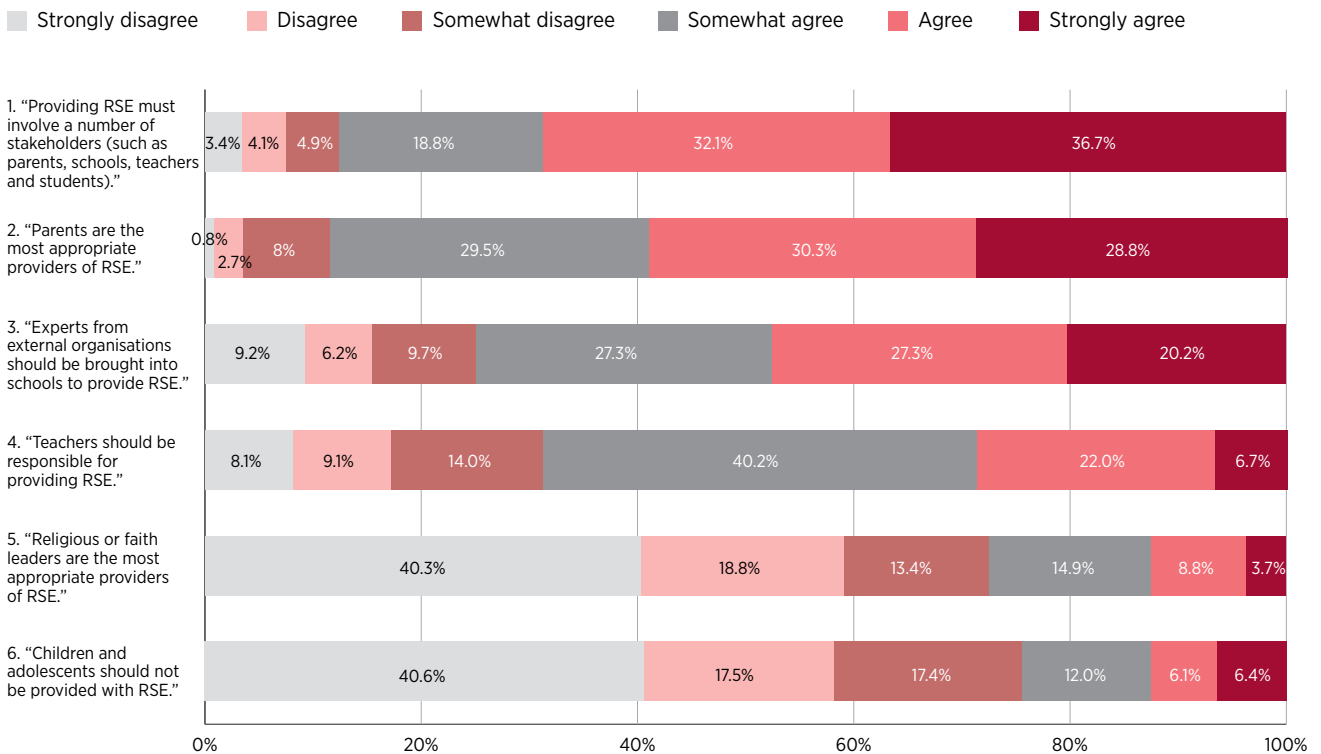


## Providers of Relationships and Sexual Health Education (RSE)

Parents were presented with a series of statements proposing various possible providers of RSE and they were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that each suggested provider was the most appropriate, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. Figure 13 shows that, overwhelmingly, parents were most likely to agree or strongly agree that “providing RSE must involve a number of stakeholders (such as parents, schools, teachers and students)”, with 68.8% of the national sample favouring this holistic partnership approach. Only 12.5% of parents were in agreement or strong agreement with the notion that religious or faith leaders were the most appropriate providers of RSE or that young people should not be provided with RSE.

Paired samples t-tests demonstrated that parental support for a whole-school approach to the provision of RSE was significantly higher than their support for parents as specific providers of RSE ( $t = .249, p = .013; d = .05$ ). Participating parents indicated statistically significantly decreasing levels of support for each of the proposed providers, with religious or faith leaders receiving significantly less support than classroom teachers ( $t = 31.08, p < .001; d = .68$ ). Interestingly, there was no significant difference between parental support for religious or faith leaders and the belief that RSE should not be taught at all, both of which received the lowest mean levels ( $t = .116, p = .907; d = .003$ ) of support across the cohort. This statistical detail is provided in Appendix B.

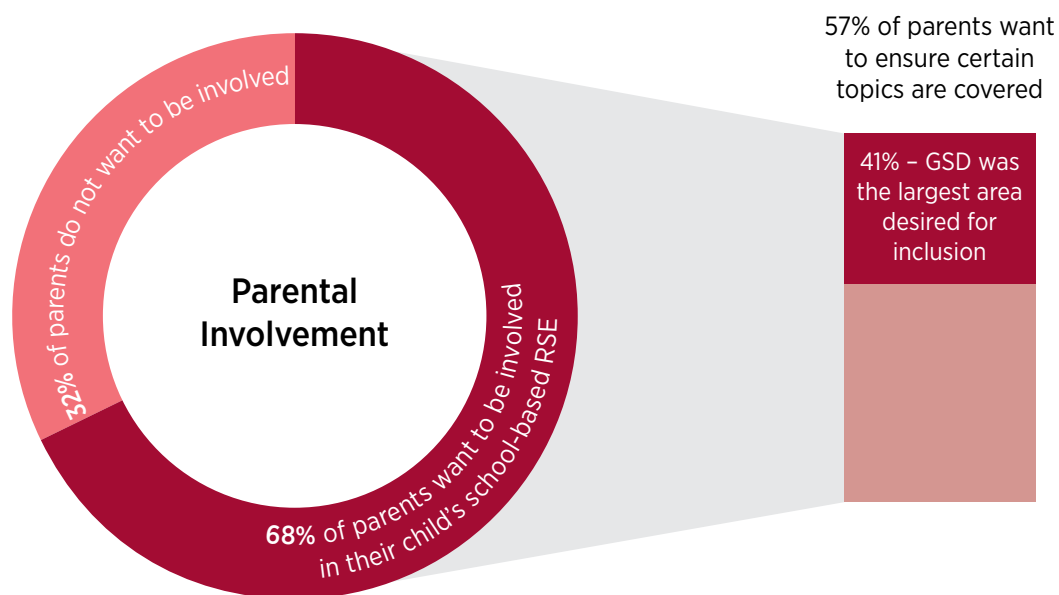
Figure 13: Providers of Relationships and Sexual Health Education (RSE)



## Parental Involvement in RSE

Parents were asked how involved they would like to be with their child's learning in RSE at school (Figure 14). Of the 2085 parents who responded to this item, 68.4% ( $n = 1427$ ) indicated they would like to be involved, while 31.6% indicated that they had no desire to be involved. Of those parents who indicated that they would like to be involved, a further  $n = 1203$  parents (84.3% of this cohort, or 57.4% of the total sample) responded that they would like to ensure certain topics are covered in the RSE curriculum. An open-text response option completed by  $n = 1163$  parents revealed that the largest area desired for inclusion in school-based RSE by parents ( $n = 463$ , 40.7% of this cohort or 22% of the total sample) was gender and/or sexuality diversity.

Figure 14: Parental Involvement in RSE



Furthermore,  $n = 551$  parents (38.6%, or 26.4% of the total sample) provided open-text, narrative examples of areas of the RSE curriculum for which they would like the opportunity to withdraw their child. Of this cohort,  $n = 168$  (8% of the total sample) wanted the opportunity to withdraw their child from areas of RSE discussing gender diversity, gender fluidity or transgender identities. Moreover,  $n = 103$  (4.9% of the total sample) wanted the opportunity to withdraw their child from areas of RSE discussing same-sex relationships, same-sex attraction, and/or same-sex sexual practices. A further sub-sample  $n = 67$  (3.2% of the total sample) wanted the opportunity to withdraw their child from areas of RSE which were delivered or influenced by religious or faith leaders, focused on abstinence-only education, or were not inclusive of gender and sexuality diversity.

## RSE Curriculum Content and Stage for Inclusion

Next, parents were asked about the importance of particular content areas being included within their child's school based RSE curriculum. The 18 content areas covered the six broad domains of family, relationships, biology, reproduction, sexuality, and societal norms and were drawn from UNESCO's (2018) *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education*. Importantly, these content areas were presented to parents in two ways for their response. The first was via a statement which failed to articulate the inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity and which was written in a general manner (e.g., "There are healthy and unhealthy relationships") in order to gauge baseline levels of parental support for the RSE content area. The second statement was specifically inclusive of gender and sexuality diversity (e.g., "There are healthy and unhealthy relationships, including some GSD relationships") to determine explicit levels of support for diversity inclusion in each RSE content area that was examined. Respondents were asked to rank their sense of importance of each pair of 18 RSE content areas from "not important" to "high importance".

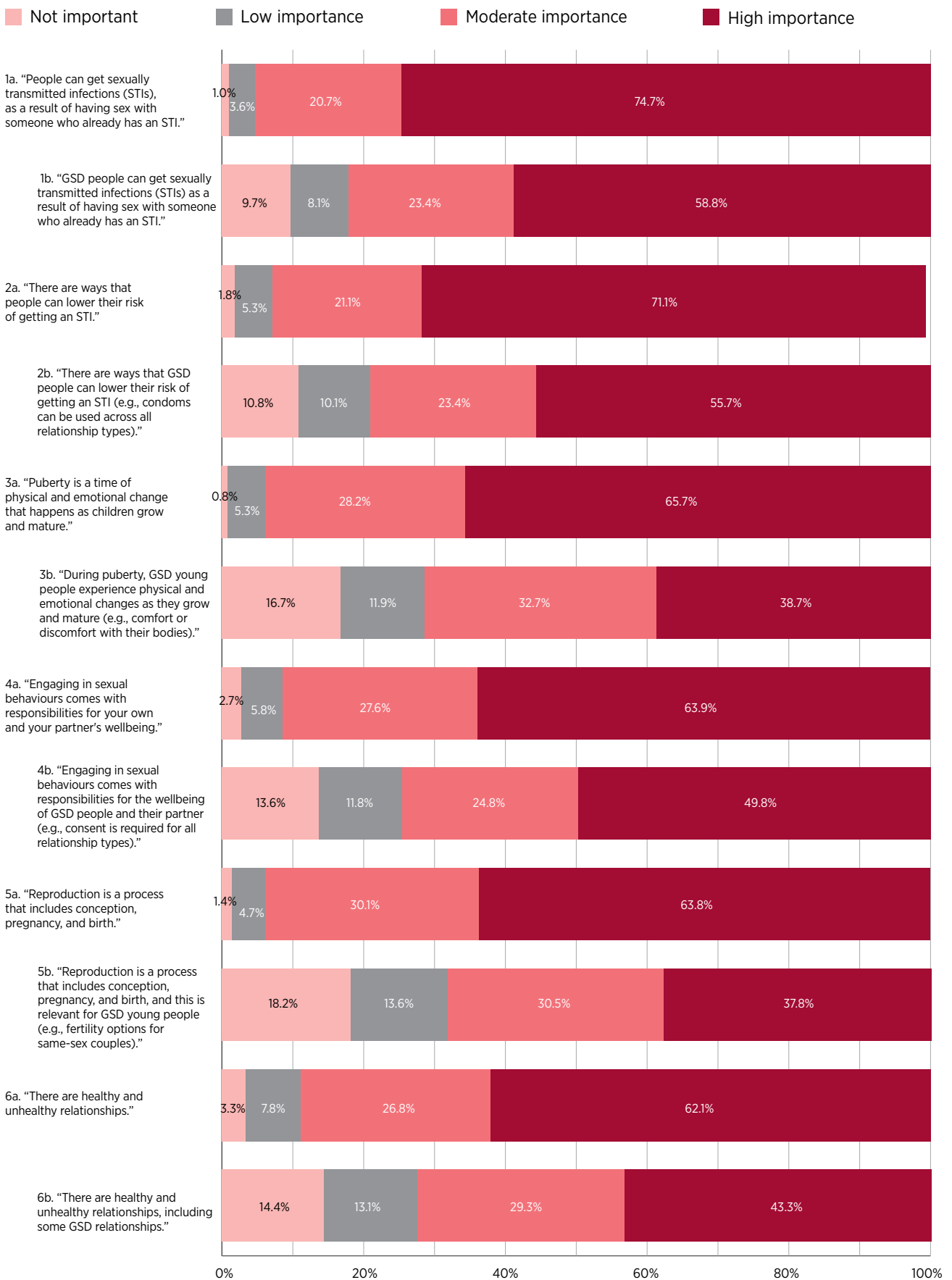
As can be seen from Figure 15, over 85% of the parent sample felt that the general RSE content areas relating to sexual health and safety, reproduction, and pregnancy prevention were of "moderate" or "high importance" for inclusion in school-based RSE. Although they were ranked as less important in greater percentages than the aforementioned content areas, the areas relating to the psychosocial factors of school-based RSE, including family types, gender roles, and social norms, were still, on the whole, considered to be of "moderate" or "high importance" for inclusion in school-based RSE by the majority of parents.

When it came to parents' consideration of the overtly gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive RSE content areas, support for their importance was, overall, lower than that for their general RSE content area counterparts. Nonetheless, across the 18 gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive content areas, between 60.6% and 82.2% of parents reported that these were of "moderate" or "high importance" to their child's education. In particular, parents felt that the content areas referencing sexual health and safety specific to gender and/or sexuality diverse people were of highest importance for inclusion in their child's school based RSE.

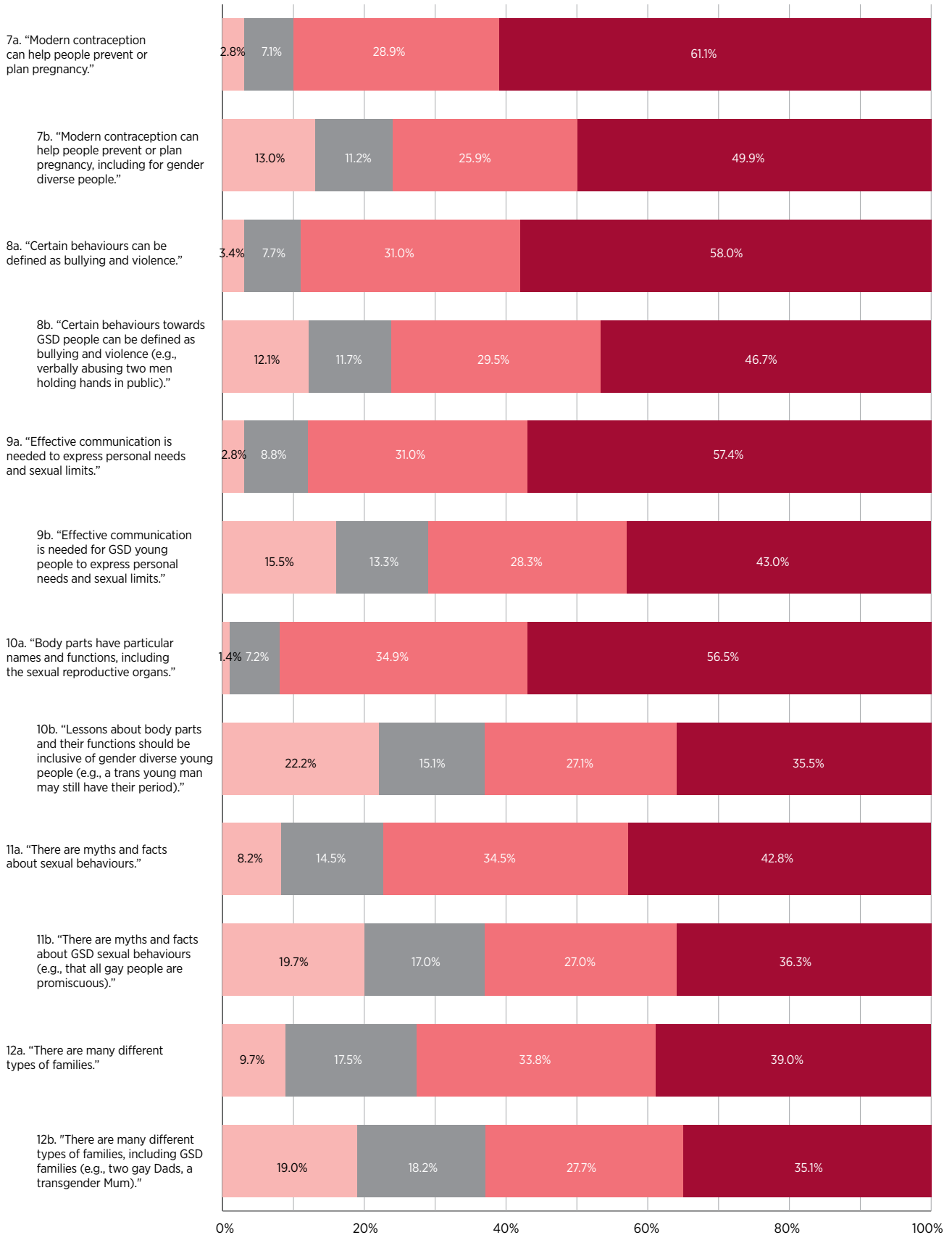
The largest difference between the general RSE content areas and the overtly gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive RSE content areas was apparent for content areas covering puberty, body parts, and reproduction, with more than 15% difference in parents' ratings of gender and sexuality diversity inclusions in these areas as "not important".

Seventeen of the 18 articulated gender and sexuality inclusive specific content areas were rated by parents as statistically significantly less important than their standard counterpart as demonstrated by paired samples t-tests. Of note, parents rated the overtly gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive content area which explicated the difference between sex and gender (See item 17b "*There is a difference between biological sex [identity based on physical characteristics such as a penis or vagina] and gender [a personal sense of how we see ourselves as a man, woman, or neither]*") as significantly more important than its general, non-inclusive equivalent. This statistical detail is provided in Appendix B.

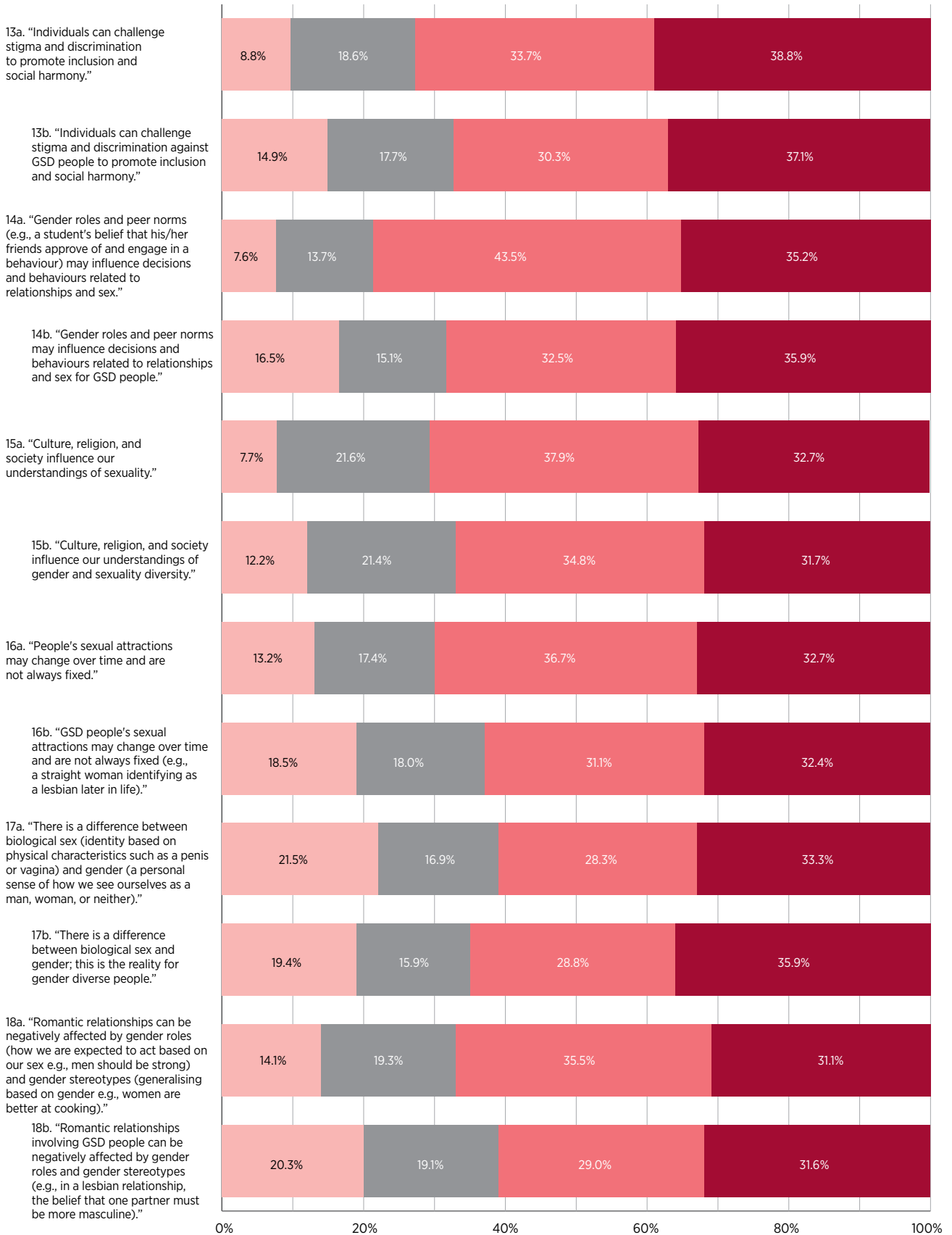
Figure 15: Importance of Relationships and Sexual Health Education (RSE) specific content areas



■ Not important    
 ■ Low importance    
 ■ Moderate importance    
 ■ High importance



■ Not important    
 ■ Low importance    
 ■ Moderate importance    
 ■ High importance



The next section of the survey presented RSE content areas in a summarised form to parents, via six broad domains: (1) the human body and its development, (2) bullying/discrimination, (3) sexual and reproductive health, (4) relationships and families, (5) sexuality and safe sexual behaviour and (6) gender. While the previous set of items focused on parents' sense of importance of the subject matter, in this set the focus was on when the content should be introduced to children/adolescents. Parents were asked to indicate at which stage of schooling they supported each of these six broad RSE topic domains being introduced to their child, beginning from Early Stage 1 (Foundation/Kindergarten) to Stage 6 (Years 11 and 12). Parents also had the option of indicating that the broad content area should not be taught at all to their child in school. As with the RSE topic areas discussed above, these six domains were presented to parents in two ways; the first was a general version (e.g., "The human body and its development") and the second version was specifically inclusive of gender and sexuality diversity (e.g., "The human body and its development for GSD people"). The summative findings for these items are presented in Figures 16–21.

Overall, parents supported the introduction of both the general and specifically gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive RSE broad content domains to their child by Stage 4 (Years 7 and 8), with parents wanting many of the six broad content areas introduced by the end of primary school (Stage 3 [Years 5/6]). Across the six broad content domains, only 1.4% to 4.1% of parents did not want the general, diversity-exclusive RSE broad content areas taught at all. Furthermore, the broad, diversity-exclusive RSE content area, "Understanding gender" was seemingly the most controversial topic for parents, as reflected in the highest percentage of parental desire for total exclusion from the curriculum (16.2%). However, the large majority (83.8%) of parents wanted gender to be discussed in RSE at school, and 72.5% of parents wanted this introduced in the curriculum by the end of Stage 4 (Years 7/8).

Parents wanted four of the six overtly gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive RSE broad content domains introduced in schools at a significantly later stage than their general RSE counterparts as revealed by paired samples t-tests. Importantly, there was no significant difference between the stage at which parents thought the ex-/inclusive gender and sexuality diversity areas of "Sexual and Reproductive Health" and "Sexuality and Safe Sexual Behaviour" should be introduced. Overall, at least 80% of Australian parents wanted each of the six gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive RSE broad content areas included in their child's RSE. As many as 88.3% of Australian parents endorsed the inclusion of overtly gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive RSE content which recognised the negative impact of "discrimination/bullying of GSD people" in the national curriculum. This statistical detail is provided in Appendix B.

Figure 16: RSE Broad Area Comparison #1

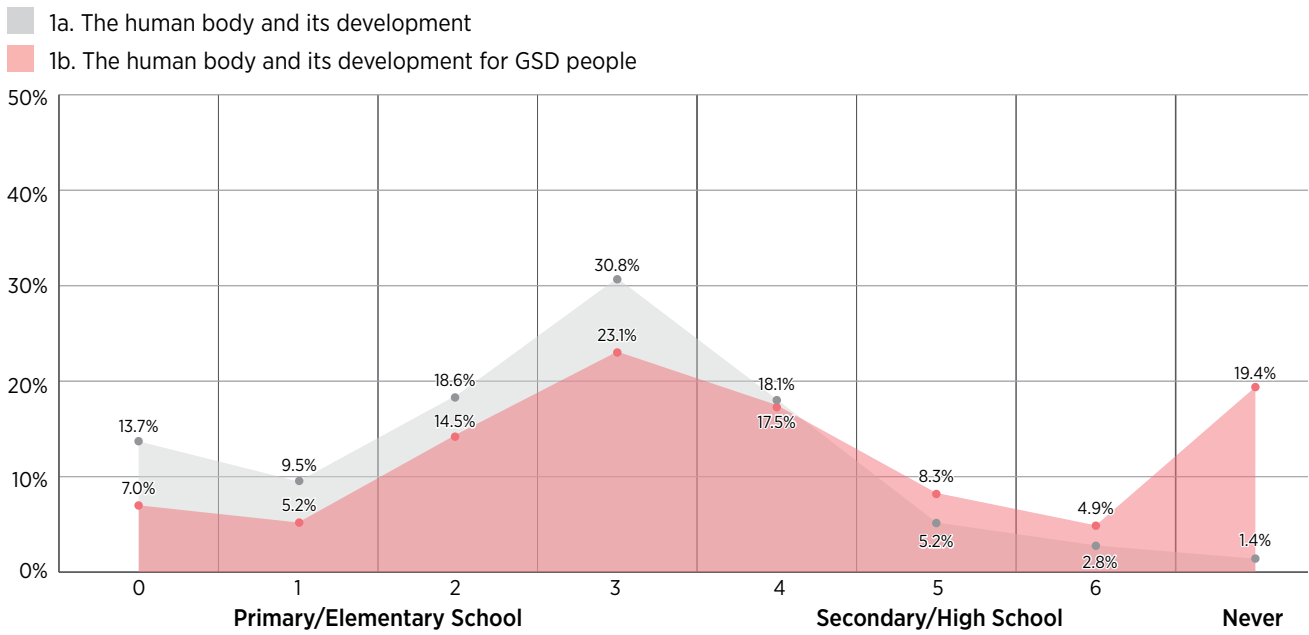


Figure 17: RSE Broad Area Comparison #2

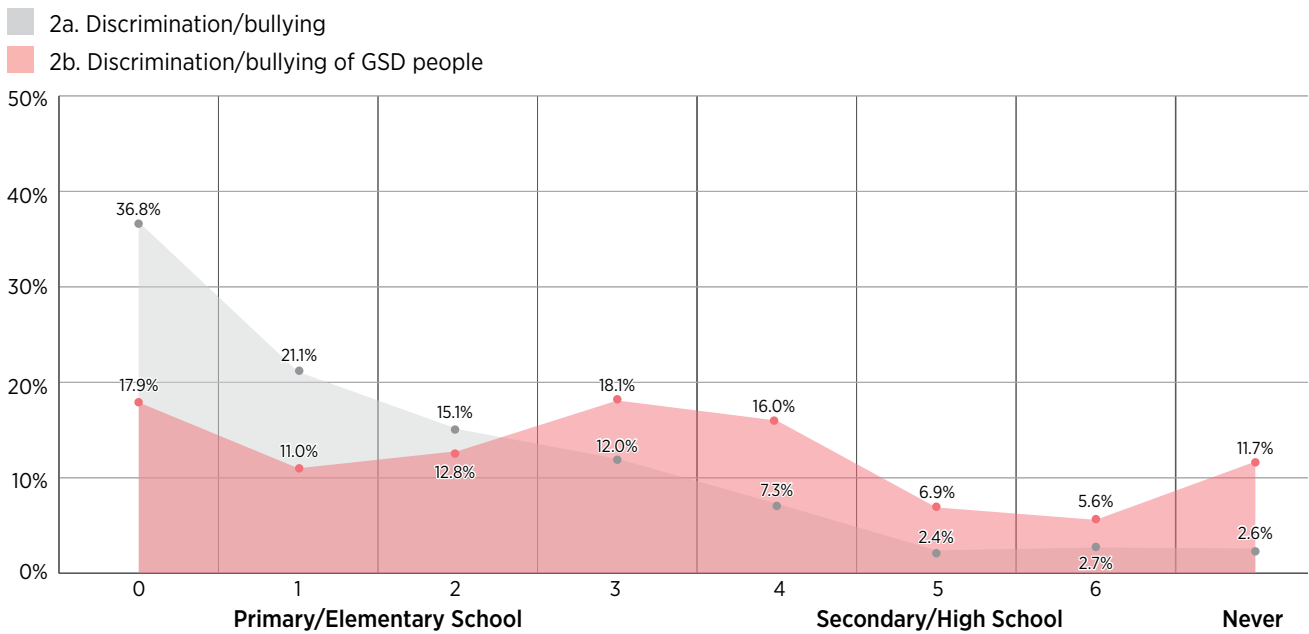


Figure 18: RSE Broad Area Comparison #3

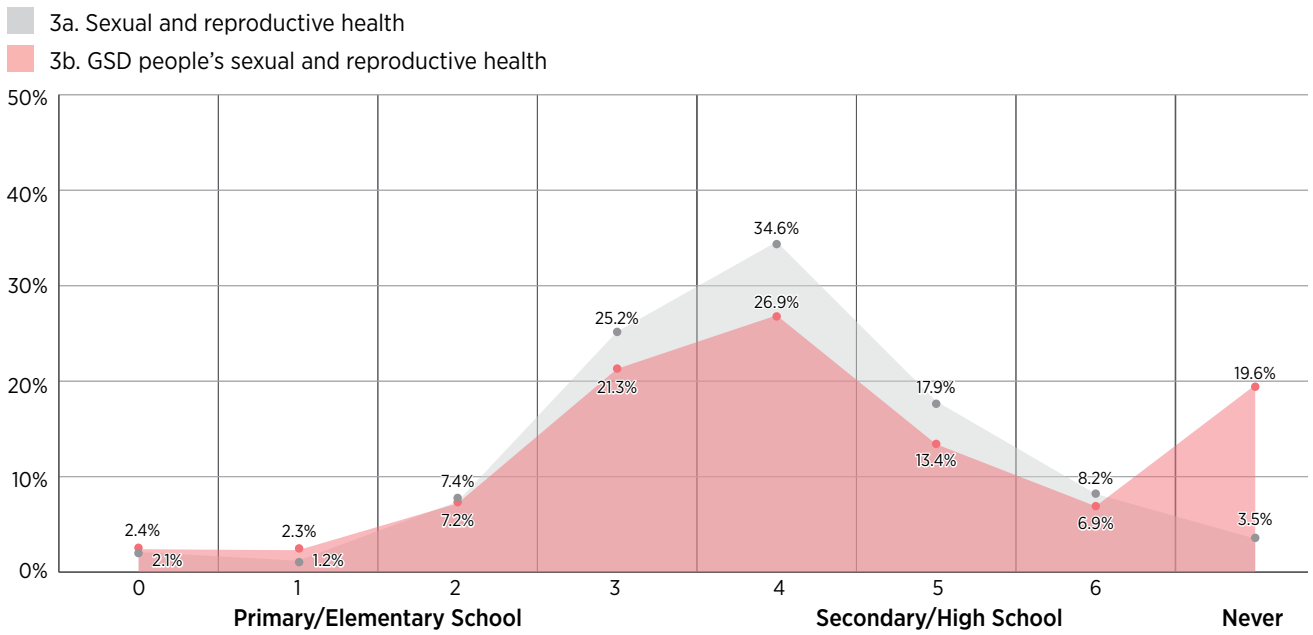


Figure 19: RSE Broad Area Comparison #4

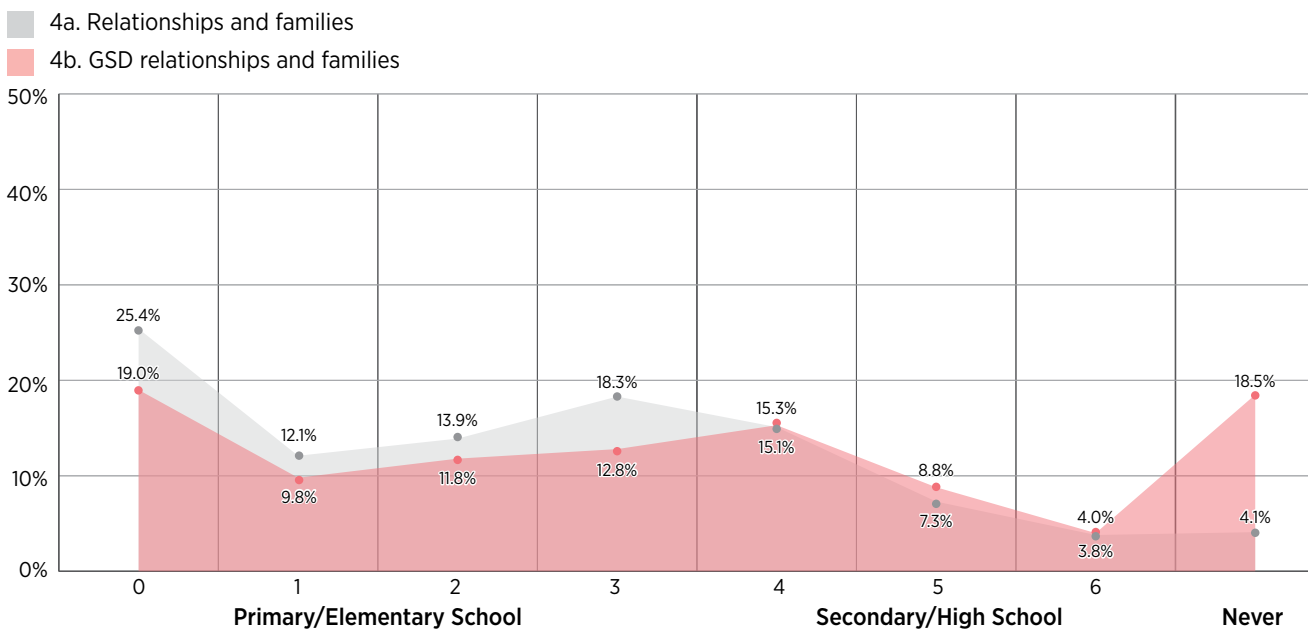


Figure 20: RSE Broad Area Comparison #5

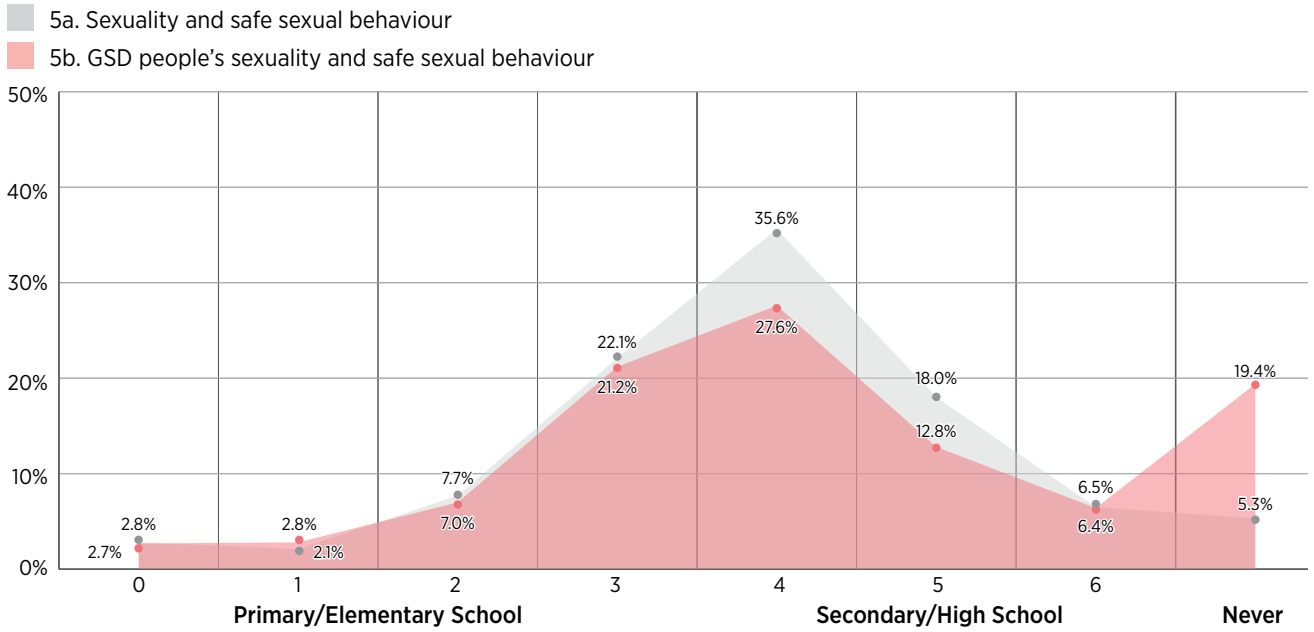
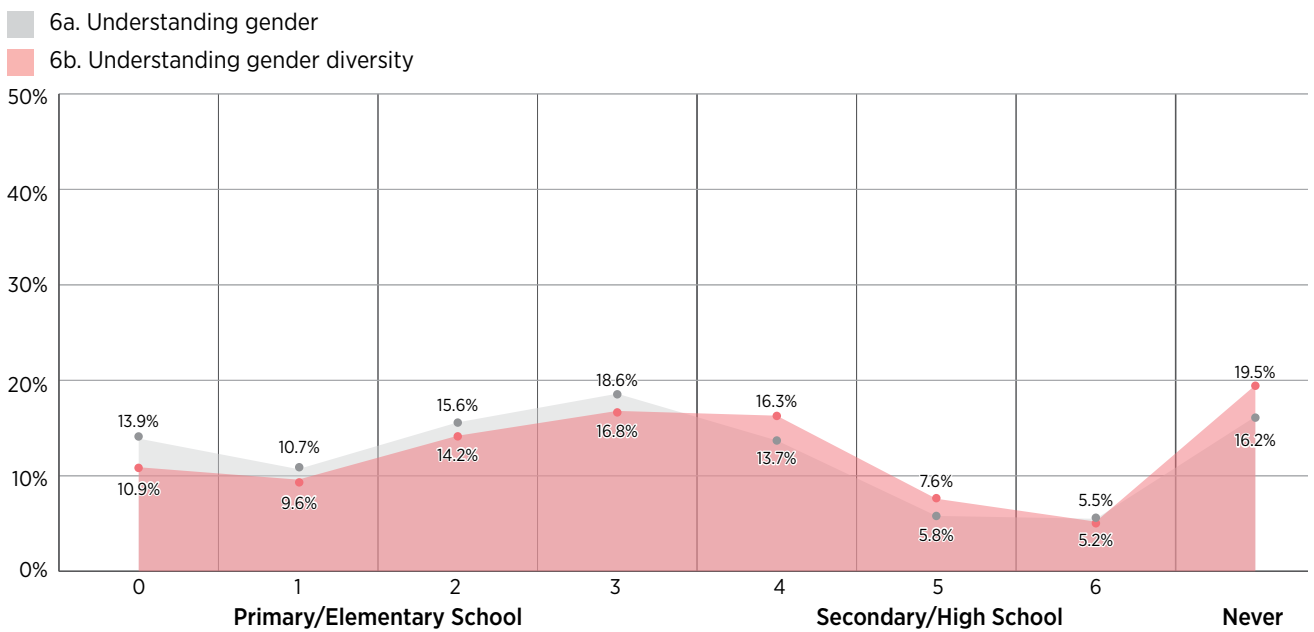


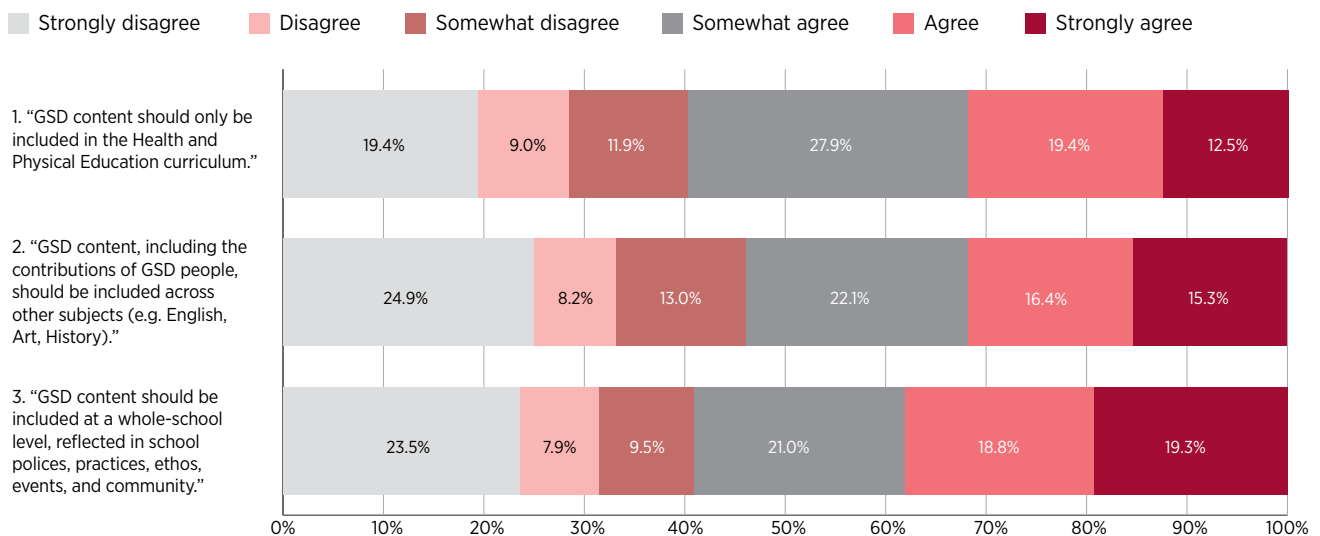
Figure 21: RSE Broad Area Comparison #6



## Gender and Sexuality Diversity Inclusion Across the Curriculum

Parents' attitudes towards gender and sexuality diversity inclusions were explored in regard to varying levels of integration within the curriculum: a) within RSE, which is underscored by the national Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum; b) beyond RSE and the HPE curriculum, embedding inclusion in other curriculum areas such as Art, English, and History; and c) a comprehensive, whole-school approach underpinned by an inclusive school culture. A total of  $n = 2002$  Australian parents responded to these items and their views are depicted in Figure 22.

Figure 22: Attitudes Towards Gender and Sexuality Diversity Across the Curriculum



Broadly, the majority of Australian parents wanted a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive schooling curriculum for their child in some format. Specifically, 59.8% of Australian parents desired gender and sexuality diversity education within the HPE curriculum, 53.8% of Australian parents felt gender and sexuality diversity should also be represented in the wider curriculum beyond HPE, and 59.1% of parents believed that gender and sexuality diversity should be incorporated at a "whole-school level, reflected in school policies, practices, ethos, events, and community." Paired samples t-tests showed that parental endorsement of a whole-school approach to inclusion was significantly higher than their endorsement of inclusion within other areas of the curriculum. This statistical detail is provided in Appendix B.

Additional detail on the above foci of the survey research (participant demographics and weighting; purpose and providers of RSE; and curriculum content/stage of inclusion) can be found in an open-access online publication (see Ullman et al., 2021). Further, parents' views on the inclusion/exclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in the wider school curriculum were analysed by state/territory location. While this data is beyond the scope of this report, which focuses on the national sample, please see the researchers' website *Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools* ([www.westernsydney.edu.au/glds](http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/glds)) for more information and to access the state-based *Snapshot* reports.

## **Parental Attitudes Towards Inclusiveness Instrument (PATII)**

### **Revalidation of the Measure**

The PATII, which was first developed in Phase 1 of the research and detailed earlier in this chapter, was re-validated in the national sample of Australian parents (Ullman et al., 2023). As with the other research findings reported herein, results associated with parents' scoring on the PATII can be considered nationally representative given the extensive weighting process as previously outlined.

The original version of the PATII was operationalised as a first-order (FO) model. This FO model was tested during the re-validation phase, alongside a reconceptualised higher-order (HO) model of the instrument. The development and testing of a HO model of the PATII was supported by a) the original theoretical conceptualisation of the PATII as having a Supports and Barriers subset of FO factors; and, b) the correlational findings from the Phase One pilot study that supported the presence of four clearly grouped Supports factors and three clearly grouped Barriers factors that could be encapsulated by overarching HO factors, and "Parental Capability" as a standalone FO factor. Furthermore, that a HO model is more parsimonious than a FO model and permits the researcher to better determine the nature of error proffered additional support for the testing of a HO version of the PATII (Byrne, 2005; Rindskopf & Rose, 1988).

## PATII Factor Loadings

Using the most current statistical methods, the PATII underwent a detailed process of re-validation, documented extensively elsewhere (Ullman et al., 2023). The final version of the HO PATII is depicted in Figure 23 and consisted of the original 48 items measuring parental reasons for supporting or opposing a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum. Four of the original FO factors were encapsulated by a HO Support factor: a) Oppression, b) Equality, c) Wellbeing and d) Personal Importance. Three of the original FO factors were summarised by a HO Barriers factor: a) Religious Values, b) Suggestibility, and c) Appropriateness. Parental Capability was retained at the FO level.

Figure 23: Higher Order PATII Model

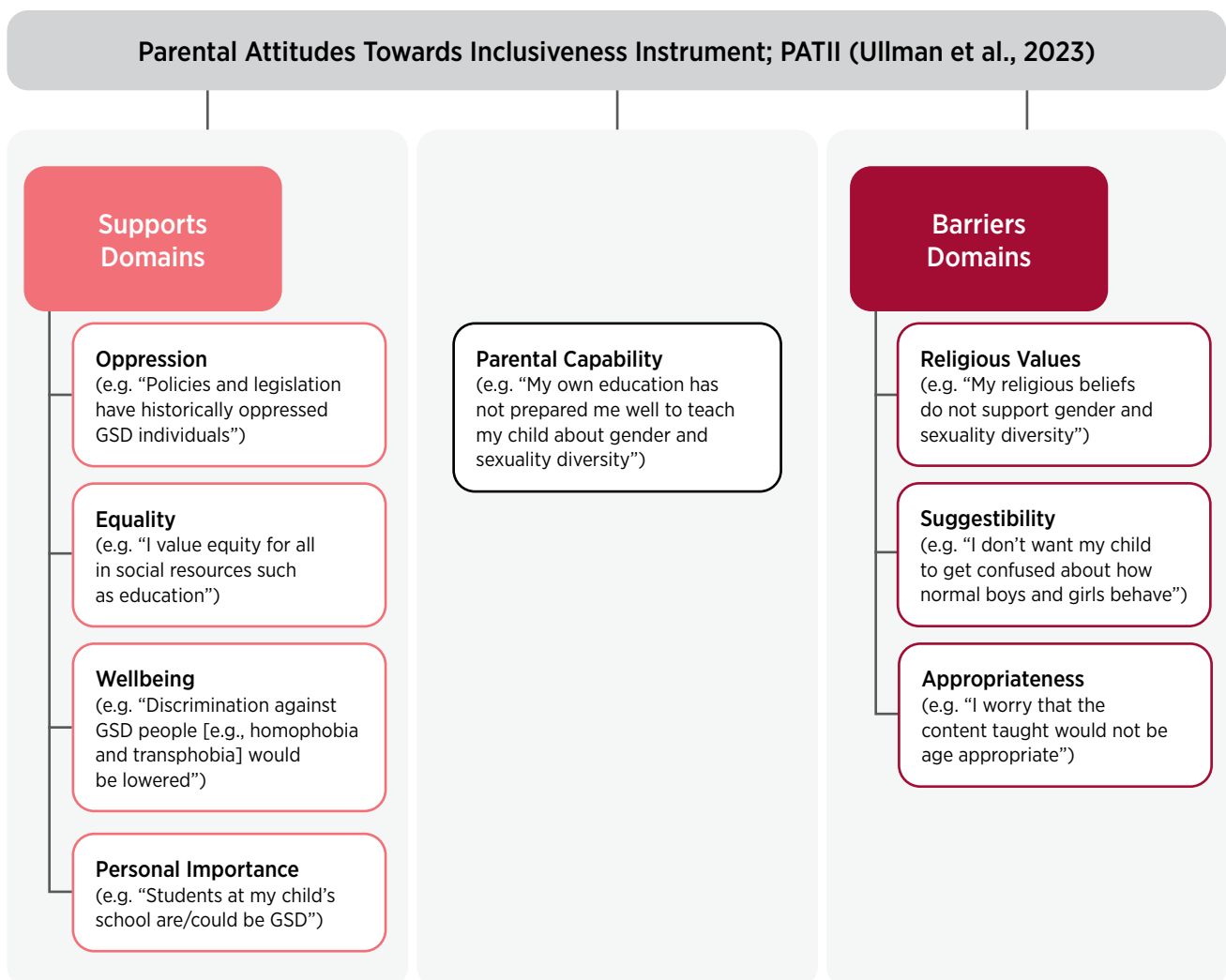


Table 2 provides a summary of the statistical results in relation to reliability, construct validity, criterion validity, and measurement invariance. Results from the re-validation of this original measurement instrument verified that the final version of the PATII demonstrated:

- a) Reliability – the items within each factor were determined to be measuring the same construct;
- b) Construct validity – the factors were determined to be measuring the constructs they were designed to measure;
- c) Criterion validity – the factors were related to an external measure, the providers of education items, as theoretically predicted;
- d) Measurement invariance – the factors and their items were interpreted equivalently across parents, irrespective of whether they were female or male, religious or not religious, or CALD or not CALD.

Table 2: Higher Order PATII Re-Validation Testing Results

	Criteria required	Requirements Met?	Explanation
<b>Reliability</b>	McDonald's omega values >.70	Yes	McDonald's omega values were > .91 for FO and HO factors
<b>Construct Validity</b>	Goodness-of-fit estimates: CFI and TLI > .90 and RMSEA < .10	Yes	CFI = .98, TLI = .97, and the RMSEA = .02
	Factor loadings > .30 and cross loadings < .30	Yes	Factor loadings ranged from .34 to .97 and all cross loadings were < .30
	Factor intercorrelations: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Significant and strong <i>within</i> HO factors</li> <li>2. Significantly negative <i>between</i> HO factors</li> <li>3. Supportive of Parental Capability remaining as standalone FO factor</li> </ol>	Yes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Factor loadings ranged from .71 to .94 between FO factors and their HO Supports factor and from .72 to 1.00 between FO factors and their HO Barriers factor</li> <li>2. Correlation between the HO factors was -.73</li> <li>3. FO Parental Capability only moderately correlated (.39) with HO Supports factor</li> </ol>
<b>Criterion Validity</b>	Change in CFI and TLI < .01 and RMSEA < .015	Yes	The changes in CFI, TLI, and RMSEA for tests of invariance across gender, religious beliefs, and CALD groupings were < .01 and < .015

	Criteria required	Requirements Met?	Explanation
Invariance	Correlations with providers of education items as theoretically expected	Yes	<p>Parents who supported a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum were more likely to suggest classroom teachers, external experts, and a whole school approach as the most appropriate providers for/ approaches to teaching RSE.</p> <p>Parents who opposed a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum were more likely to support parents and religious/ faith leaders as the most appropriate providers of RSE</p>

### Attitudes Towards Gender and Sexuality Diversity-Inclusive Curriculum

Responses from parents to the HO PATII items were further analysed to ascertain parental levels of endorsement for reasons to support or oppose gender and sexuality diversity inclusion within government (public) school curriculum. Each of the FO factors of the PATII are represented by six items with a response range of 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), with items averaged within each factor to produce mean scores.

As can be seen in Table 3, overall, parents were more in favour of ( $M = 4.10, SD = 1.29$ ), than opposed to ( $M = 3.27, SD = 1.50$ ), a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive schooling curriculum. A paired samples t-test revealed that the difference between the Supports high-order factor mean and the Barriers higher-order factor mean was statistically significant ( $t(2092) = 14.76, p < .001$ ).

In examining the nuances underlying parental approval of an inclusive school curriculum, the Equality factor, capturing a belief in increasing fairness for students no matter their gender or sexuality was the most widely supported by parents ( $M = 4.67, SD = 1.13$ ). A paired samples t-test demonstrated that parental endorsement of Equality was significantly higher than the next most supported factor, Wellbeing, encompassing a belief in protecting and enhancing wellbeing for all young people including those who are gender and/or sexuality diverse ( $M = 3.93, SD = 1.57$ ). Parents also supported a diversity-inclusive curriculum for reasons of Personal Importance at statistically similar levels to their belief in Wellbeing. Personal Importance represented the notion that inclusion is personally relevant to parents when thinking about their child, other children, and parents at their child's school who are or could be gender and sexuality diverse ( $M = 3.92, SD = 1.30$ ). Parents furthermore supported an inclusive curriculum for reasons of Oppression at statistically similar levels, because they feel it would counter the higher rates of bullying and harassment experienced by gender and/or sexuality diverse young people ( $M = 3.89, SD = 1.50$ ). Parental endorsement of Parental Capability, referring to concern about their capacity to speak with their child about gender and sexuality diversity was endorsed at statistically significantly lowest rates across the sample ( $M = 2.87, SD = 1.47$ ).

Across the group of Barriers factors, parents were most likely to resist the inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in the curriculum due to their concerns regarding the age/developmental Appropriateness of the content for their child ( $M = 3.83, SD = 1.64$ ). Paired samples t-tests revealed that parental concerns about Appropriateness were significantly more endorsed than the second most-endorsed Barrier factor held by parents, which related to the belief that their child may be susceptible to altering their gender and/or sexuality given exposure to gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive content (Suggestibility;  $M = 3.28, SD = 1.69$ ). Australian parents were least likely to oppose an inclusive national curriculum due to the incongruence of such content with their Religious Values ( $M = 2.69, SD = 1.63$ ).

Parents' reasons for supporting or opposing a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum as measured by the PATII were further analysed by state/territory location. Please see the researchers' website Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools ([www.westernsydney.edu.au/gsds](http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/gsds)) for more information and to access the state-based Snapshot reports which illustrate these findings.

Table 3: Support for and Opposition to a Gender and Sexuality Diversity-Inclusive Curriculum

	Mean	SD	Comp Group	t-value	p-value
<b>1. Supports</b>	4.10	1.29	3	14.76	< .001
1a. Oppression	3.89	1.50	2	28.75	< .001
1b. Equality	4.67	1.13	1c	32.14	< .001
1c. Wellbeing	3.93	1.57	1d	4.65	3.21
1d. Personal Importance	3.92	1.30	1a	1.47	0.07
<b>2. Parental Capability</b>	2.87	1.40			
<b>3. Barriers</b>	3.27	1.50			
3a. Religious Values	2.69	1.63			
3b. Suggestibility	3.28	1.69	3a	22.32	< .001
3c. Appropriateness	3.83	1.64	3b	27.22	< .001

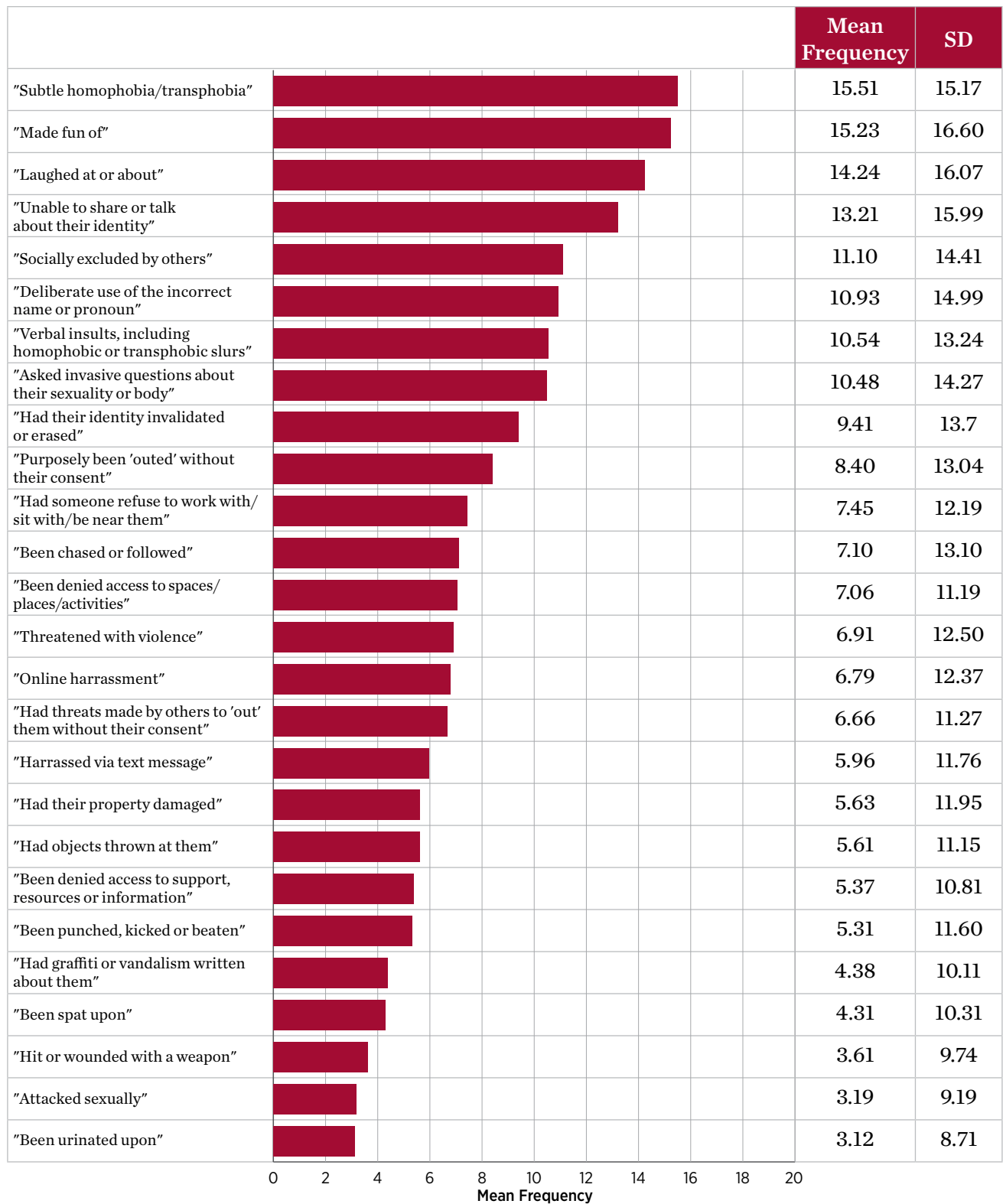
## Child GSD Identity and Discrimination

Parents were asked “Does your child or adolescent identify as, or do others in their school think they may be, GSD?”. A total of  $n = 1956$  responses were recorded, with 20.2% ( $n = 396$ ) reporting that their child/adolescent either self-identified as or was perceived by others to be, GSD. These 396 parents of a GSD child were then asked about their child’s school-based experience of stigma, harassment, discrimination and/or bullying in relation to their actual or perceived diversity. A total of 392 parents responded, with 21.9% ( $n = 86$ ) reporting direct knowledge of their child having experienced gender and sexuality diversity-related harassment; and a similar 21.9% ( $n = 86$ ) reporting suspicions that their child had experienced harassment due to their actual or perceived gender and/or sexuality diversity.

The survey then explored the types of stigma, harassment, discrimination and/or bullying experienced by their GSD child at school. Parents were presented with 26 separate examples of harassment and asked to indicate how many times over the past year (0 to 50 times) their child had experienced each example at school and in relation to their actual or perceived gender and/or sexuality diversity. The mean frequencies of each type of harassment experienced by GSD children are presented in Figure 24.

Parents of GSD children reported that their child most often experienced subtle homophobia/transphobia (e.g., ‘that’s so gay’ or ‘but what are you really?’), with an average of 15.51 occurrences in the past 12 months at school. Australian parents furthermore reported that their GSD child was “made fun of”, “laughed at or about”, or was “unable to share or talk about their identity” on average between 13 or 15 times in the past year at school.

Figure 24: Experiences of school and gender and sexuality diversity-based harassment



## Chapter 5: Qualitative Phases

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### Design rationale – Online discussion forum and in-depth interviews

The qualitative components of this study involved two data collection points including (1) face-to-face in-depth interviews ( $n = 13$ ) and (2) an online forum/discussion with self-identified parents ( $n = 16$ ) of GSD young people or those whose peers perceived them to be GSD. The aims of the interviews and forum were to examine these parents' experiences of the public school system (K–12) with, and on behalf of, their GSD child. The data collected from the qualitative components provided nuanced understandings of parents' perspectives and experiences in a relatively under-researched area in Australia and generated critically important rich data for the creation of a performed ethnography<sup>18</sup>. The inclusion of in-depth interviews, which are a more familiar data collection method than the use of an online forum for performed ethnography production, safeguarded the successful creation of the performed ethnography. The performed ethnography, entitled *What Parents Want. Talking about Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools*, was written by the chief investigators Tania Ferfolja, Jacqueline Ullman and international partner investigator and playwright, Tara Goldstein.

In addition, the performed ethnography playscript has been developed into a short film of the same name, forming part of a professional learning package for K-12 pre- and in-service teachers. The film and the playscript are freely available for educator use from the website *Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools (GSDS)* ([https://westernsydney.edu.au/gsd/educator\\_resources](https://westernsydney.edu.au/gsd/educator_resources)) or in the case of the film only, on the YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/@genderandsexualitydiversit2500/videos>.

For the sake of clarity, this section of the Report will address the recruitment and participant information separately for the interviews and online forum but will combine the analysis and results sections to reduce overlap of thematic findings.

### Phase 3: In-depth Interviews and Recruitment

Thirteen in-depth interviews were undertaken to provide nuanced understandings of the experiences of the parents interviewed and to safeguard the acquisition of rich data that was critical for the development of the performed ethnography. Participants were recruited in a pre-survey phase via targeted advertising and in the second, post survey phase, via the survey. It should be noted that recruitment of participants occurred during the fallout from the Safe Schools Coalition Australia moral panic, where issues – particularly related to schools' provision of gender-affirming services for trans/gender diverse students – were being publicly criticised within the Australian media. The researchers were anecdotally advised via numerous sources that parents of GSD young people were experiencing heightened anxiety and fear about the implications of these 'debates' on their children and were generally reluctant to be involved in related research because of what was occurring in the broader social milieu at that time.

18 Performed ethnography uses the voices of research participants to create a verbatim performance script.

A semi-structured interview schedule was used. This provided structure to ensure all questions were asked and responded to, yet also provided flexibility for discussion around the topic (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). It also permitted the researchers to explore appropriate leads as raised by the participants and to develop rich dialogue which encouraged participants to relate their experiences and understandings in detail (Hesse-Biber, 2007). As pointed out above, the flexibility of semi-structured interviews allows for considered exploration of issues that may be sensitive, while enabling greater power sharing between the researcher and researched. This approach also enabled participants to explore their experiences and build trust and rapport with the researchers. As mentioned, this was particularly important given the years leading up to this research were shrouded in public moral panic around the Safe Schools Coalition Australia initiative (see Law, 2017 for a detailed overview). Additionally, a protracted and often divisive public 'debate' in relation to marriage equality and offensive public commentary about transgender people, including transgender children and young people had been rife in the popular media. As a result, parents of gender and sexuality diverse children were particularly cautious about engaging with research of this nature, resulting in some recruitment difficulties.

As with the online forum, the interviews sought to understand what was occurring for the participants' children in public school education in relation to their gender and sexuality diversity and explore how parents navigated the schooling experience with/for their child. The interview questions sought information on the parents' perspectives of their child's experience of their gender and sexuality diversity at school in terms of curriculum content, the types of support received, and positive and/or negative experiences. Additionally, data was sought in relation to parents' perceptions of their social experiences within the broader school community (e.g., reactions from/interactions with other parents) and what, if any, changes were needed at school to foster a positive experience for GSD students. Questions from the interview schedule are available in the semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix C).

The interviews were conducted via the online ZOOM platform except for one, which was undertaken in a public place at the request of the interviewee. Participants granted permission to have their interviews recorded. The interviews lasted up to 60 minutes, were digitally recorded with the participants' consent and were professionally transcribed. Transcriptions were uploaded into the qualitative program NVivo in preparation for analysis. All potentially identifying information relating to individuals, location, school, teachers and so forth, was omitted from the transcript to maintain participants' confidentiality. Pseudonyms have been applied to all participants.

The interviews, along with the online forum posts, provided data that contributed to the creation of the performed ethnography and subsequent teacher professional development resources. These are available via the project website ([www.westernsydney.edu.au/glds](http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/glds)).

## Participant Demographics

All interview participants identified as mothers, other than one who identified as a father (and who joined for a portion of one of the interviews with his partner, the child's mother, who was the primary interview participant). They resided across a number of regions in Australia, including New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania. Four participants did not reveal where they lived. All participants had at least one GSD child attending a public school at the time of the research. The majority of parents ( $n = 10$ ) disclosed that their child was gender diverse and identified as either transgender, gender non-conforming or non-binary. One parent reported having a queer daughter, one a gay son and another a bisexual son.

## Phase 4: Online Forum and Recruitment

The online forum collected data from parents of gender and sexuality diverse young people and aimed to collect data about their experiences of negotiating the public school system (K-12) for/with their child. To identify and recruit potential participants, the online survey contained an item which asked participants whether their own child identifies as gender and/or sexuality diverse (e.g. as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, etc.) or if others in their school thought they might be gender and/or sexuality diverse. Participants who responded in the affirmative were then automatically directed to a new page containing an online form which invited them to contribute to the qualitative phase of the research, namely the online forum. This enabled respondents to volunteer confidentiality as the online form was separate from their survey responses.

The forum was hosted in WordPress and was a purpose-built, closed, monitored, user-directed social media site. The use of an online forum, which draws its insights from the field of netnography (Kozinets, 2010), or ethnographic research which occurs in online settings, was initially selected for data collection as research into this method demonstrates it can provide a safe space for engagement and simultaneously promote well-being through social engagement (Hampton et al., 2011; Hawkes et al., 2013). The approach speaks to the increased perception of anonymity, increased self-disclosure and sense of belonging provided by online interactions (Scott & Orlikowski, 2014), particularly for individuals who have experienced stigmatisation or isolation (Drabble et al., 2003).

The WordPress site also hosted a number of publicly available pages which provided participants with a description of the research project, inclusive of approved information and consent material; researcher information; and relevant national and local support contacts and material for parents and their children from a range of non/government organisations, delivering support and reciprocal benefit to the parent participants. The site had restricted login access. Potential participants were required to register through the site, providing their name, location and contact information alongside a summative statement outlining their motivation and interest in the project which partially served as a screening tool. Once a potential participant's identity had been verified, they were allocated a username and password which they could then change. Participants were also advised to refrain from volunteering information that would potentially identify themselves or their child. Similarly, they were asked not to name schools, teachers or specific locations.

To protect participants, a screening questionnaire and a list of blocked words were used in an initial endeavour to omit potentially malicious responders. In-built notification settings allowed for administrators' real-time surveillance of site activity to delete offensive posts and users should they appear. However, the blocking of posts that used particular words proved unworkable as it obstructed genuine responses on multiple occasions. As a result, the research team chose to monitor the site closely instead for the duration of the forum. No malicious responders gained entry.

### **Online forum questions**

The forum was open for six weeks across November/December 2019. During this time, the researchers, who were clearly identifiable in the threads, posted a series of questions to engage the participants. Each question headed a separate thread and directed the online conversation. Additionally, the researchers posted probing questions when clarifications were required of participants and to stimulate dialogue. The specific questions that headed each thread in the online forum are available in Appendix D.

### **Participant Demographics**

157 survey respondents registered their interest in the forum via a concluding item in the online survey; 16 chose to actively participate. All 16 forum participants identified as mothers of their children. They came from a variety of Australian states, including the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and Queensland. All participants were parenting a GSD child enrolled in a state school. Thirteen of these young people were in high school and three were in primary school. The forum data, which comprised 123 entries, were uploaded into the qualitative software program NVivo for organisation to enable analysis. To ensure confidentiality, no further demographic details were sought from the participants.

### **Analysis of Qualitative Data**

The qualitative data were thematically analysed based on coding frames developed by the two lead researchers in the case of the forum and in collaboration with a qualitative research assistant in the case of the interviews. To do this, the researchers read the interview transcripts and forum threads multiple times to identify a range of key issues arising in the qualitative data then discussed these findings together. The data were recoded individually in light of these discussions and compared across researchers for consistency of understanding. The individual coding was then checked again across researchers and themes were determined (Saldana, 2021) (See Appendix E and Appendix F). For the purposes of this report, key themes across forum and interview data are amalgamated where possible (see Appendix G). Key findings related to curriculum inclusion/exclusion; GSD education and 'bullying'; Relationships and Sexual Health Education (RSE); the need for greater inclusion of GSD identities; educators' understanding (or lack thereof) about gender and sexuality diversity; parents' labour; toilets/toileting; navigating uniform requirements; bureaucracy and administration; positive and negative school experiences; and educational policy. Parents provided recommendations about curriculum and practice; teacher education and training; neutralising spaces, uniform, toilets and activities; embracing children's rights and celebrating diversity; and, providing support.

Please note: The words used in the extracts below are those used by parents verbatim as they shared their journey with their gender and sexuality diverse child at a particular point in time. A core value of this project was to validate and centre their voices. It is critical to acknowledge that language used in this space, particularly around identity, is rapidly evolving. Thus, some of the language and terms used by parents to describe their child's experience at the point of project participation has also change. As language can impact the well-being of gender and sexuality diverse people, readers are encouraged to consult with local organisations who support gender and sexuality diversity to ensure that they are using the most appropriate terminology when working with young people and their families.

## Qualitative Findings (Phases 3 & 4)

### Curriculum Inclusions/Exclusions

The degree to which parents reported the inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity across their child's educational experiences varied. In this report, consideration of curriculum inclusions/exclusions involved what was/was not taught in the classroom as well as extra-curricular activities.

The parents in this research found GSD-related curriculum inclusions were often led by either GSD-identified teachers or teachers who were knowledgeable about, or sympathetic to, this form of diversity. Continuity of support for gender and sexuality diversity was, thus, reportedly often dependent on the energy and endeavours of a particular teacher and reliant on their ongoing employment in the school. Once the teacher left the position or the student was no longer in that teacher's class, GSD-related inclusions were not necessarily maintained. Reports of whole school approaches to this form of diversity, or knowledge of, or allusion to, clear, targeted teaching about gender and sexuality diversity which was integrated into the curriculum over an extended period, were rare.

When he started high school when he was in Year 7, his year advisor was also the rainbow advisor for the school and when we met him on enrolment day he complimented [name of child]'s blue hair, apologised for the fact that his was black at the moment and said don't worry it will be purple again soon. [Laughs]. From my point of view, he was clearly queer in some way or another. ... he's now gone on to ... do further study. But while he was there, Wear It Purple was the biggest event for the year, it was huge, it was a really big deal. (Interview, Mother of bisexual son)

I do know a lot of the primary schools down here, depending on the teacher, will talk about same sex issues and gender diversity issues in relation to other units of work. Because my youngest ... he's 12, last year he came home, and he told me about how his teacher was talking about marriage equality in the classroom. They were doing it as an example of how you can get legislative change through and all of that sort of stuff with the plebiscite. (Interview, Mother of transgender teen)

Recently the school had a change of Principal, and he seems to want to embrace [the GSD student's] difference as they held a whole school concert called 'Colour Your World' and where each class presented an item. Boys were in tutus and girls were dressed up as bikers and farmers. It gave my daughter the confidence to be a ballerina in a tutu which is the first time she has been able to just be herself and not feel excluded. (Parent Forum)

Some participants reported that it was the GSD child/ren or their parents who initiated discussion or educated the school staff about inclusion. Furthermore, visibility related to this area was more likely to be apparent in secondary schools than primary schools. Although reserving GSD-inclusive conversations for older cohorts may be perceived as an ‘age-appropriate’ decision by some educators and/or school leaders, it fails to recognise that young people identify early in life as gender (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011) and sexuality diverse (Hunter, 2007) and that discrimination also begins early – in this research, one parent recognised their child’s gender diversity at two years of age.

There is minimal discussion at high school and no discussion at primary school. The high school discussion seems to be student led, or if they happen to have a teacher who identifies or is an ally of LGBTQI+ community. (Parent Forum)

I lent some age-appropriate books on gender diversity to the kindy teacher, and she didn’t read them. The head of year one teacher has a trans daughter and she was happy to read two of the least specific books. (Parent Forum)

The above quotes also illustrate how some parents, in their narratives, alluded to a reliance on sympathetic teachers, parents and GSD students to educate about gender and sexuality diversity; however, this is not adequate to change school culture, peer behaviour or teaching approaches more generally. Similarly, relying on parents to provide teachers with appropriate resources is problematic and highlights a significant need for targeted training and resource support for teachers about gender and sexuality diversity-related topics in schools from state and federal government departments. It also suggests a need for inclusion and visibility in initial pre-service teacher education courses.

Numerous participants reported that schools often did not provide education around gender and sexuality diversity, include reference to it, or acknowledge the existence of GSD identities in the curriculum. Those teachers/schools that reportedly did, were often indirectly accommodating the GSD child, providing peripheral or covert support rather than educating the broader school population or providing structural or systemic support; this was despite GSD students experiencing discrimination and exclusion. Unsurprisingly, classroom resources and pedagogical approaches were also viewed by these parents as exclusionary through invisibility and silences.

Yeah, there was certainly no educating the kids about transgenderism, and her friend that she made there, trans kid in the year below her at school, is still there and still having a really tough time. (Interview, Mother of transgender teen)

The school has attempted to include some books on the differences including gay parents and transgender teddy bears, but their main approach is to avoid anything that could be problematic. During the child protection sections, I was advised just to take my daughter home so she wouldn’t feel uncomfortable. Rather than be inclusive, they excluded her as they had no way of generating an instantaneous curriculum that included her. There is nothing in the curriculum or in the learning activities that makes my child feel a sense of belonging in the classroom. (Parent Forum)

I specifically asked the principal + teacher when the sex ed lessons would be taught and if they would have inclusive language. They said in year 5. My daughter is in year 1. I thought I had a long way to go. Until the other day she came home very upset because her class teacher had done a lesson on 'private parts'. The lesson was about using the correct names for genitals and to speak up if anyone tries to touch them or makes them uncomfortable. A very important lesson but not when the teacher is asking the whole class what they call their private parts and that girls have vaginas/vulvas and boys have penises. My daughter said she nearly cried in class, and I could tell by her tone she felt completely invalidated. Even if she [the teacher] had said most girls have vaginas would have been better. It is really tough having these lessons in a classroom setting for our kids. ... I also feel for the intersex kids in these sorts of classes. (Parent Forum)

Parents reported that some schools attempted inclusion, but this was peripheral, tokenistic, and covert. Although GSD children may recognise implicit endeavours by teachers around inclusion, such as incorporating the trans-inclusive flag at an assembly as mentioned below, these approaches failed to educate other students about GSD identities and experiences as there was no critical approach to the topic and no obvious inclusion in broader curriculum. These methods of coded supports do not educate students. Furthermore, when more specific teaching did occur, it was contained to specific groups of students who had direct contact with the GSD child or their siblings, and who were perceived as 'needing to know'; the implication of this, of course, that other populations did not 'need to know'. In this way, gender and sexuality diversity remained invisible and the broader school population remained uneducated about the topic.

It was on Valentine's Day they put up the trans flag on the stage. But they didn't allude to it. They didn't say anything about it. I mean I'm sure most of the kids didn't even know what it was. [Name of child] of course did, and at the time, she'd only been at the school two weeks, and she's really pleased and felt validated and so on. But actually, it didn't mean anything, because there was no content to it. They spoke ... at some other assemblies about - 'we should accept everybody', and 'everyone's different' and whatever, but there was never any conscious dealing with it. (Interview, Mother of transgender teen)

There would be acknowledgement, certainly, on the part of the teachers, but the reality was nothing - and so the answer was, well, we have this club on a Friday. So, they don't do things like Wear It Purple Day. They don't do that. They do ... allow students to wear small rainbows for Pride Month, but that's about it. So, it's really edged. You know, it's really peripheral and ... when I have asked for stuff, it's - they've kind of voiced an indication of support but it's just not embedded in the school. (Interview, Mother of queer daughter)

The school were reluctant to put that transgender education out to all the students, so it was really just [name of child]'s year group, which was year 3 at the time, and [name of siblings]'s year group which was year 5 at the time. (Interview, Mother of transgender daughter)

## GSD education and ‘bullying’

Inclusion of GSD-related topics was sometimes introduced when addressing, or teaching students about, “bullying”. In this way, gender and sexuality diversity-related education was linked to negative social experiences at school. Additionally, such discrimination was reduced to the poor behaviour of individuals during discrete instances or interactions, rather than reflecting the impact of broader structural socio-cultural inequities that are embedded in society and reflected in schools which, indirectly, promote such behaviours.

What [the teacher] did was sit the class down ... talked to them about bullying, how you had to be nice to everyone and blah de, blah de, blah, and in fact [told the class that] [name of child]’s now – [name of child] is now a boy. So ... she’d clearly gone, found some resource, done some session with the class that was about [name of child]’s transition but it was packaged in this language about bullying and so anyway, so I just went, fine, whatever. (Interview, Mother of transgender son)

I really genuinely think that there needs to be a different approach to this type of stuff. I don’t think it can be explained as bullying, especially not when there is quite serious physical assault involved. I really would’ve liked it if the school would’ve talked to the parents of the children that were involved, but they refused to do that as well. (Interview, Mother of transgender teen)

The type of stuff [bullying] that [my child] was experiencing, he probably didn’t have the capacity to see that that was bullying. He did not see bullying; he saw something very different that was much more serious. (Interview, Mother of transgender teen)

In the educational milieu, bullying is considered an important topic to address and is considered legitimate to discuss with young people. Conversely, topics related to, or inclusive/affirming of, gender and sexuality diversity are perceived by teachers as potentially inflammatory and controversial. However, subsumption of discrimination based on gender and sexuality diversity as bullying depoliticises the nature of this harassment while pathologising the individuals involved (Ringrose & Renold, 2010). Using bullying as an entry point for a discussion about gender and sexuality diversity or to introduce a student’s changed/changing gender identity may assist teachers in broaching the topic, particularly when many teachers are fearful of parental/community backlash; however, such approaches do not actively teach young people about gender and sexuality diversity and silence these issues in schools.

## Relationships and Sexual Health Education (RSE)

Even though Australia's national Health and Physical Education curriculum does appear to make space for the inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity, most parent participants reported that their GSD child was not adequately catered for in the teaching of content related to relationships and sexual health education (RSE).

I think last week they did the 'Interrelate' program; they've been doing that over [unclear] few weeks and there's a page about what boys look like and a page about what girls look like. ... I said, did she say that trans boys and trans men can have periods? He said, no actually she didn't say that. [I asked] Did they say anything about IVF? [He said] Oh yeah, they did say it because there are IVF kids as well. (Interview, Mother of transgender son)

This area is really problematic. I think a lot of work needs to happen regarding teaching about diverse identities at school, particularly at primary school. I think most teachers don't know how to do it. Sex education was awkward: girls and boys were separated (why)? and in years five and six the principals ended up outsourcing to Sexual Health and Family Planning (the implicit message being that the classroom teachers were too uncomfortable to do it). (Parent Forum)

My year 7 child has been quite annoyed by the lack of diverse content in sex education. ... My child is non-binary, and quite "out", and advocates for themself in the classroom, but the teacher just says "we deal with that later", as though it's fringe content. There's at least five or six trans and non-binary kids in their year level, so it seems like a deliberate avoidance, perhaps the health teacher is personally unable to handle the content. It's disappointing. (Parent Forum)

NOTHING – this is a problem. I have 5 kids in 4 different schools – nothing for all 5, ludicrous. I think a lot of parents don't want it taught because they believe it presents their child with options. No child would choose this, my son always says that it would be so much easier to be straight. (Parent Forum)

We got a letter home from school saying that the kids were going to have 'Life Ed' classes run by an external service provider and that parents could opt out and here is a kind of summary of what the kids are going to learn each week. I was like, oh, great, this is going to be really cool, because one of the first things that it said that the children would learn was about diversity. It actually said, bullet point, gender, and then next bullet point, diversity. I was like, oh, I want to find out what that's about. So, I rang the number for the people who were the service providers, and I went, "Your organisation is delivering some 'Life Ed' classes at my daughter's school". I just wanted to check out and see if I could get a little bit more detail around some of the topics they cover, particularly around gender diversity. She said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, do you talk about transness and gender diversity in children?" She said, "Oh, no, absolutely not, we never talk about that". She ... thought I was saying I didn't want them to, and ... she wouldn't let me interrupt, she was so emphatic about how they would absolutely never talk about gender diversity. Absolutely not, it's never a topic that we've covered, blah, blah. ... About half an hour later my phone rang, and it was her classroom teacher, again, lovely bloke, and he said, oh, now I just wanted to talk to you about next week in the Life Ed class. ... He said .... so, she's going to be giving out tampons to all of the girls and I just wanted to talk to you about what we should do for that around [name of child]. I was like, can you tell me why you're not giving tampons to the boys? Don't the

boys need to know what a tampon is? What if there were trans boys in that room or other non-binary kids? (Interview, Mother of transgender daughter)

They're doing the 'Love Bites' program ... They've done - I think it's called - 'Safe [Respectful] Relationships' training but it's not about LGBTI ... it's not specific LGBTI training. (Interview, Mother of gay gender non-conforming son)

The delivery of RSE in schools has been, historically, taught from a biological, functional, reproductive perspective that focuses on cisgender binaries and heterosexuality with limited applicability to GSD youth (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2014). There are rarely discussions about the needs of GSD young people, such as the fact that trans boys/men may have periods or that gender non-binary and trans students may experience gender dysphoria around their menstrual cycle. Limiting education to the perceived needs of cisgender and heterosexual subjects results in inadequate education for all students and, as these parents describe, significant omission in the education of GSD young people. It also fails to accommodate the increasing numbers of young people who are identifying more broadly beyond the binaries of sex and gender (Olson & Gülgöz, 2018).

There were instances of reported specific curriculum inclusions, however, these were rare, and not typically reported, particularly in terms of situations where gender and sexuality diversity were the sole focus in RSE.

The school is very careful about teaching the kids about [what it means to be trans]. So, this last term, the whole term in PDHPE the focus was on LGBTIQA kids. They talked about trans, showed trans videos, talked about pronouns. They expect the kids to be accepting and open minded. (Interview, Mother of transgender teen)

Despite the good intentions around such visibility and inclusion, teaching about gender and sexuality diversity in this manner may not be ideal as it singles out, rather than normalises, particular experiences. Integration of GSD-inclusive topics into mainstream curriculum may be more inclusive. Similarly, a whole school approach to gender and sexuality diversity where mention extends beyond the health/physical education space and is written into policy, curriculum and practice more broadly, would be more sustaining and integrated.

## Greater inclusion

Nearly all parents mentioned the need for greater inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in the curriculum and many spoke of the need for inclusion to occur within the primary school curriculum. Parents felt that this education needed to focus on the topic of gender and sexuality diversity for students more broadly, not only in situations where a child presented as GSD. They also recognised that other minority identities were acknowledged and celebrated in the curriculum and that similar approaches could be taken in relation to gender and sexuality diversity.

Do more as a curriculum, not as like you've got a transgender kid, let's address this person. Just have more - because they do stuff for culture, like I know they talk about Diwali and Ramadan and they do that as part of a curriculum thing and inclusivity, but I don't think that they identify that gender is also a broad thing and people come from - have different genders and sometimes identify in different ways. (Interview, mother of transgender daughter)

So we need to work right from the bottom, where we're teaching kids about this stuff right from the word go. I don't know if you've heard about it, but there are a couple of schools in the US where they have drag queens come in and they read story books to the kids. I mean, holy crap, that would've been the greatest thing since sliced bread for [name of her child]. It just would've been the greatest pedagogical moment of his life if that had happened at his school. Just anything at all that he could've held onto and said, look, that's someone like me, it would've helped him get through a bit better, I think. (Interview, Mother of transgender teen)

At the end of the day...they need to teach kids about gender diversity. They have to get this message. We need to have that conversation early on so it's a non-issue. (Interview, Mother of transgender teen)

## Educators' understanding about GSD

Parents highlighted how some teachers demonstrated an inadequate understanding of GSD students and their needs and, at times, inadvertently reinforced the discrimination that the young person was facing by blaming the GSD student for the harassment that they were experiencing. A lack of respect for the GSD young person's experience and identity was also identified, particularly when privacy was breached. Additionally, poor recognition of the impact of discriminatory language and its effect on GSD young people was reported.

Close family were aware that my daughter was gay, but she had made the decision to not come out at school. However, this changed when she told one person and the gossip mill kicked in. She then had an angry confrontation with another girl at school one day. She told me after this occurred, so I made an appointment with the acting principal the next day. We went in and told the teacher that my daughter was gay, the teacher said appropriate supportive and accepting words. However, the next thing that came out of her mouth was that if anyone were to ask [the daughter if she was gay] that she should deny. ...One year later in high school my daughter was having some issues with her peer group. ... I then spoke to the vice principal and explained that this was targeted at my daughter by one girl in particular and was based on sexuality for this girl. The vice principal stated that my daughter was very much declaring she was gay due to her hair (Daughter had cut her hair short and looked fabulous!) and perhaps she could not be as obvious. (Parent Forum)

I've not ever seen the slightest bit of evidence ... that teachers are willing to engage and speak about those things, and I've never seen anything come from the leadership to say that they're willing or able to engage with those things. (Interview, Mother of transgender teen)

Doesn't help that there's legislation. Everyone says, oh well, the public schools have to be trans friendly. It doesn't change the way the staff don't have a clue about it. And they don't know how to manage it. And they don't have the resources. (Interview, Mother of transgender teen)

It also seemed like they just hadn't had training as staff – or the training wasn't very effective. One of the worst things that happened was that a teacher from my son's primary school was married to a teacher at the high school that my son was supposed to go to. TWO YEARS before he was due to enrol in the high school, this high school teacher is telling his class about the trans kid in the feeder primary school who will be coming to the high school. Thanks – not. (Parent Forum)

I have been advised that the school has a very strict policy with not accepting any anti LGTBQI behaviour. However, for all of the policies and guidelines and assurances offered I feel that some of the teachers particularly the vice principal has no skill/training in this area and is very insensitive. ... At a meeting to discuss my son's mental health (he was considering suicide) the vice principal stated, "Yes kids like that can suffer from mental health issues", I found the "kids like that" reference and his dismissive attitude very offensive. There clearly needs to be some teacher training on the complexities around LGTBQI youth and simple steps that can make a huge difference to foster an atmosphere of inclusion and acceptance. (Parent Forum)

At my son's last school, he got sick of kids saying, "That's so gay". When I mentioned this at a meeting with a number of his teachers, they said, "Oh all kids say that; it doesn't mean anything." My son doesn't consider himself gay (he's a trans male attracted to girls) but he felt (and I agree) that the teachers accepting the comment represented a low level of homophobia/prejudiced thinking in the school that they weren't even aware of. I wanted to say, "No, as teachers, YOU set the standard behaviour." But I didn't. ... When my son came out (at primary school) his classroom teacher told him that the only trans kid the teacher had ever known had killed himself. (Parent Forum)

As the above quotes illustrate, parents viewed some school leaders and classroom teachers as not sufficiently knowledgeable about gender and sexuality diversity, with tangible impact on their child's experiences of school. Almost all participating parents commented that greater training (professional development) was required of staff to effectively meet the needs of, and adequately support, GSD students. However, some parents also highlighted how school counsellors also required support and training, and how there was inadequate counselling support generally in schools.

The counsellor could not support us with the gender stuff - 'not their area of expertise' - so perhaps schools need a gender counsellor on their books for when/if they need it? (Parent Forum)

The main response that I found really upsetting was our school counsellor, even though she seems like a nice person, she had very little knowledge about gender diversity. I feel that especially the counsellor should be very well informed on such topics to be able to best support their students. Which is their whole job! I was worried about our child being bullied and she said she was very busy, which I am sure she is due to lack of funding, but no parent wants to hear that their counsellor is 'too busy' and uninformed on gender identities. (Parent Forum)

## Parents' labour

The parents who participated in this research reported high levels of negotiation with teachers and senior staff which demonstrated an additional layer of labour not necessarily required of other parents whose children reflect socially normalised gender binaries and heterosexuality. This was, at times, the result of schools being inadequately prepared for GSD students. Additionally, this was often reported as the result of teachers and support staff, such as counsellors, not possessing appropriate training or knowledge in terms of how to support such diversity either in the curriculum and/or in relation to inter-peer relations.

This additional parental labour included, but was not limited to, parents having to educate the educators about gender and sexuality diversity; and, having to frequently "check in" with schools and teachers to ensure their child's general or academic well-being. Many spoke of engaging with the school in relation to the marginalisation and abuse experienced by their child. They also spoke about having to deal with bureaucracy which often involved lengthy, ongoing communication with the school. Some spoke about having to monitor the curriculum for positive inclusions for their child or, conversely, to protect their child from information which could have a negative impact on them, such as information on body parts and sexual development. There were many examples of the actions required of these parent participants

and all demanded additional time and effort which could be considerably alleviated if schools were better equipped, through policy, Departmental guidance documents and school leadership, to deal with GSD young people. Numerous parents employed experts from outside the school to support their child, themselves and even the school where the young person attended. Additionally, in an endeavour to ensure their child's well-being, some parents put in additional labour to ensure that they were well-liked, and even viewed as indispensable to the school, by volunteering their time and support. Obviously, this level of engagement and time commitment is not universally available to parents and should not be required to ensure schools' duty of care to GSD students.

We were fortunate to have enlisted the help of a youth mental health support worker, who advocated with the school and his teacher to assist with changing the attitudes of the school. (Parent Forum)

Daily communication with teachers after transition, but pretty uneventful, then regular weekly check ins, I spent a lot of time at the school, talking with parents and my child's teachers, admin staff and principal so issues were addressed immediately as they were known but none were significant. The school handled it all amazingly well. (Parent Forum)

I'm on the Facebook page ... and I read the newsletter and I stay in close contact with the teachers. I probably e-mail the Vice Principal and the counsellor once or twice a term especially when [name of child]'s having hard days because he gets really depressed. (Interview, Mother of gay gender non-conforming son)

I had to fight and fight to get my child's enrolment accepted at this school. I went through three appeals, and we had five months where there was no school in our [location] that our child could go to. (Parent Forum)

We'd done that classic lesbian thing of building a relationship with the school, volunteering to teach ethics, volunteering to help out with reading ... So, we'd made sure that we were a valuable family in the school community, and I think that really helped. (Interview, mother of transgender son)

## Toilets

Parents highlighted issues around bathroom access and amenities for their child. Many commented on the need for gender neutral toilets and/or for schools to permit young people to use the toilet aligned with their gender identity. An inability to access appropriate facilities resulted in distress and dysphoria for gender diverse children. In some instances, parents spoke of having to negotiate suitable amenities for their child because of constraints set by school staff, drawing on their investigations into legislation to support their arguments. These negotiations were often extended, putting additional pressure on both the student and parent. Parents also highlighted how bathroom selection resulted in additional discrimination via complaints coming from other members of the school parent community; these complaints misgender gender diverse young people and positioned their use of a bathroom that aligned with the gender identity as potentially dangerous to cisgender students, particularly girls, or as potentially unsafe for the gender diverse child. In other situations, well-meaning school staff erected inappropriate signage that ‘outed’ users of the amenity as transgender. The frequent mention of bathroom issues by participants illustrates a need for clearer, supportive guidance for schools as well as well-socialised school policy among staff in terms of bathroom facilities and their use.

Gender neutral toilets at every school (and not what I saw at my daughters’ school recently – a big sign up near the loos near the front office saying TRANSGENDER TOILETS). I’m sure someone very well meaning put that up – but wtf! It means anyone using the toilet is declaring to the WHOLE SCHOOL, HEY EVERYONE I’M TRANSGENDER! (Parent Forum)

One parent put in a formal complaint to the Department of Education because she didn’t want her daughter going to the female toilet with my “son”. ... The principal called me and told me that the complaint had gone to the department and that my child could not go to the girl’s bathroom until this was solved and that my child would have to use either the staff toilet or the disabled toilet (this created another set of problems!). I believe that if there were strict policies generated to ensure equity and equality that the principal would have been more confident in letting my child be who she is. I think the principal would have been able to directly address the complaint by using department policy rather than trying to problem solve it herself. If there are policies in place to ensure all children have a right to express, identify and normalise their experience without judgment, discrimination etc [then] staff would have confidence to address every situation that comes up in the school. (Parent Forum)

She was made to use the staff toilet ‘for her safety’. I asked the school if she could just use the girls’ toilets and they said no. After three terms of her feeling different and asking why she can’t just use the girls’ toilet. I wrote a stern letter to the principal and now she is allowed to use the girls’ bathroom. (Parent Forum)

One day I was there for an open day. The teacher made the whole class go to the toilet before heading to assembly. The toilets were right next to where they were standing but they made my daughter walk to the other side of the school just so she could use ‘her toilet’. (Parent Forum)

Some parents reported positive experiences around bathroom access. This occurred where schools were open to suggestions, had or knew about policies to support gender diverse students, or already had alternative toilets which were unisex or gender neutral.

She advised me that the school actually do have an informal policy to manage students of this nature. ... They have a gender-neutral toilet so that these kids can feel comfortable in a unisex or gender-neutral toilet. (Interview, Mother of gay gender non-conforming son)

Toilets were a non-issue they have a few gender-neutral toilets inside the school building and, after my child [was] teased in the communal toilets in years 1 & 2, my child refused to use those anyway so was supported by the teacher to use the gender-neutral toilets. (Parent Forum)

You know ... one parent went up to the office and said, I don't want that kid using the girls' toilets ... But the school ... created a new policy that was explicitly about supporting trans and gender diverse children at school. (Interview, Mother of transgender daughter)

My son was able to use his toilet of choice relatively quickly. These days, at high school, his gender is mostly a non-issue as a number of kids identify as trans or gender diverse. He uses boys' toilets, boys' locker rooms and is treated in every respect as a boy by teachers and staff (although many don't know he is trans anyway). (Parent Forum)

### **Navigating uniform requirements**

Akin to the issues raised around bathroom facilities was the issue of schools' enforcement of school uniforms. School regulations which gender particular elements of the school uniform create distress for the young person as well as their parents. Some participating parents described how their child was advised that they could wear the sports uniform on non-sport days – an alternative which made them stand out from other members of the school community. Other incidents where unsuitable attire was required to be worn also proved problematic for some gender diverse students. These situations marked the child as different from others, placing an unwanted spotlight on their identity and contributing to a sense of marginalisation/isolation. Some parents reported that uniform was a non-issue as it was not gender-specific and therefore posed little problem for their child. The degree to which uniform is an issue for gender diverse students, however, is illustrated by the fact that some parents felt compelled to choose their child's school based on having a gender-neutral uniform.

They said my child is the first child to want to wear the uniform of the other gender. This is a primary school of over 900 students that has been operating for 130 years. I had heard from numerous mums that a child had left the school the year before as the school wouldn't let them wear the uniform that they wanted to and ... that the school were unsupportive. So firstly, I felt lied to and, secondly, I felt very alone – that – why is she the only kid in the whole history of the school that has to fight for this? (Parent Forum)

My daughter was not greatly supported when she first transitioned. They wanted her to wear the sports uniform instead of the dress. (Parent Forum)

Another thing that has bothered me is that they are doing a school dance and they chose a costume for the girls to wear that wasn't appropriate for my daughter as it was tight fitting bike shorts and a short top. So, they made my daughter be the only girl in the whole dance wear a different costume. She stands out now, I worry things like this just reinforce the idea to her that she is different and not like 'a real girl', in her words 😞(Parent Forum)

We were still trying to work out where to send him to high school and so when [high school] was eventually out of the question, which we had decided before he crossed the 'pronoun line', we narrowed our choices down to we have to send this child somewhere where they can wear shorts. So that was the first kind of absolute about school choice. (Interview, Mother of transgender son)

### **Bureaucracy and administration**

Parents also report encountering bureaucratic and administrative issues with the school, particularly in relation to gender diverse children. These problems related to difficulties with changing names and personal records on computer systems, databases, and school administrative documents which did not reflect the gender with which the student identified. Requirements for assessments were also difficult for some students to engage with because of body conscious issues. Not addressing these shortcomings created additional stress for the child and by extension, their parent(s); however, some schools were accommodating.

They said that we were the first family with a transgender child at the school. It did seem like we were working together to figure out how to support the transition. This was good because we had a voice and could make suggestions/requests. Not so good was that they didn't already know how to change the various records in the system and I had to tell them the name of another school where I know the admin staff had had to figure this out already. (Parent Forum)

The photo on the school roll was another issue. It was her old photo in the boys' uniform, and it is printed on every late note, leave class early note etc. She hated seeing it and I asked the school to change it and they said they needed to wait until the new school photos were taken. Things like that just bug me, as they make my daughter uncomfortable. (Parent Forum)

It wasn't until I went into the school and sat with the Vice Principal and the counsellor and ... they said 'well, he's not doing very well with his oral presentations'. I said I can tell you why ... because he does not like the sound of his own voice. He doesn't like people looking at him because they perceive him to be male and he doesn't like it. (Interview, Mother of gay gender non-conforming son)

[The student's dead name] would pop up on his iPad and we did tell them that. So, we met with the teacher who also happened to be the IT person and they were really good about figuring out what they needed to do about all of that. We had a meeting about school camp, and they came up with the solution that worked for them and for us, which was they put him in a separate room, not the main boys' dormitory; they put him in like a smaller dorm with two or three of his mates that they talked to us about who to choose and they had their own ensuite cabin - their own ensuite bathroom. (Interview, Mother of transgender son)

## Positive school experiences

The qualitative data from the parents revealed that parents, along with their GSD children, encountered a range of experiences navigating the school environment. Reported positive experiences reflected a receptive school culture, where gender and sexuality diversity were visible, articulated and celebrated, and where an ethos of zero tolerance towards gender and sexuality diversity-based harassment existed. Also critical for a positive experience were caring classroom teachers, support staff and leadership who were diversity-trained, and who were proactive about ensuring the inclusion and welfare of the child. These staff actively communicated and worked with parents for the best possible outcomes of the child. A nurturing educational environment which foregrounded student wellbeing also promoted the development of an encouraging and affirming student community who were educated about diversity and provided moral support and friendship to their GSD peers.

Wear It Purple was the biggest event for the year, it was huge, it was a really big deal. Extremely positive ... not just about sexuality but gender diversity and also just messing with gender norms, they encouraged them to switch uniforms and just - it was playful, it was very playful, it was making no big deal of any of this stuff, which was really nice, it was really positive. They did a screening of Gayby Baby ... that year that it was terribly controversial, and it was an afterschool and after hours one with a really big turnout from the community and stuff. It was just good, a very positive experience. ... Straight up pride in having these students at the school, in celebrating the fact that they are here and that we're proud to call them our own, that this is part of who we are. (Interview, Mother bisexual son)

It's a public school, she and one of the senior staff met with us before our child started in year seven, and so we got her name and email. She later gave me her number, I think because on that occasion I was having trouble getting my child to go to school, so could I text her and she could meet him at the office when he went in just for the afternoon, to help him go into the classroom. (Parent Forum)

My kids' high school has a very supportive environment. Posters supporting LGBTIQ people on prominent display across campus, a dedicated group/safe space for LGBTIQ students and allies, students put forward to attend a forum run by [our] local council to assist students in advocating for LGBTIQ issues in the wider community. I'm confident that if my openly bisexual daughter were to experience any significant bullying, her peers would step in to support her and the staff would take it seriously as well. (Parent Forum)

The greatest support and experience for me is having educators who allow themselves to reach out to me, and to build a strong relationship where I feel confident that they can handle anything that affects my child. My child's teacher and I ... communicate daily if needed. (Parent Forum)

But we had had Safe Schools come into my daughter's primary school that she was at the time and do PD with the - actually the entire school staff, so everyone from the tuckshop volunteers to the crossing supervisor to the grounds keeper had to do the Safe Schools PD. Our principal, and the GO, and the executive team were fantastic and have been really exemplary in how they handled it. So, I guess that's a great experience for me to have as well to really see what I'd considered to be a best practice response from a school that's got no clue, but tremendous good will and I guess maturity to look at what they don't know and find ways to learn. (Interview, Mother of transgender daughter)

## Negative school experiences

Some parents described difficulty in finding a school in which their child would be welcomed and safe. They reported how some schools appeared supportive ‘on paper’, but which, in practice, demonstrated a culture of exclusion. Some schools continued to use antiquated practices of organising activities by binary gender which resulted in exclusion for students who are gender diverse. Parents reported how the ongoing heteronormativity and cisgenderism of schools had a negative impact on their child necessitating emotional support through counselling/psychiatry outside of school.

The school that was in area was also supposed to be a Safe School and so the Education Directorate wouldn’t accept an enrolment out of area from us for a long time because they kept saying that the school that my son was accepted into was LGBTIQ supportive. This school has Pride flags out the front, teachers that are openly part of the LGBTIQ community, and supposed counselling/support etc. But they didn’t walk the talk at all. Many of the kids were openly trans and homophobic and the teachers seemed powerless to stop it. (Parent Forum)

The first negative experience my daughter had to deal with pre-transition was how gendered everything at school was. Boys’ line, boys’ lunch box tub, boys’ uniform, boys’ toilet, [the] boys leave first, etc. My child was gender non-conforming before they came out as trans. So having so much of her first year at school be categorised by gender was an issue. My daughter was not greatly supported when she first transitioned. They wanted her to wear the sports uniform instead of the dress. They refused three times to get a support worker from the Gender Centre to visit the school.

However, [name of child] is suffering with a lot of anxiety through feelings of exclusion, wider feelings of exclusion, so we’re going through a whole process of psychiatry at the moment and anti-depressant medication. This is because, even though there is the [friendship] group, the wider impacts of the school, which is very cis-het, quite heteronormative in its majority, it’s actually had quite a negative impact on her. (Interview, Mother of queer daughter)

The kindergarten teachers told the rest of the cohort that the “doctors just got it wrong in the hospital” which has resulted in two years of questions on whether my child has a penis or vagina from these children. ... I had to do a lot of the advocating on her behalf just to get her the basic rights of every other child at the school. My daughter has had to sit through “Healthy Harold” where there is only male or female, and in every carnival (swimming and athletics) there is anxiety and panic. Because her father rejects the diagnosis and is still resistant, I cannot change her birth certificate which means, on the Department system, her reports and even her name coming up on the screen computer log in section, [is] her birth name. (Parent Forum)

Book week dress ups and any other dress up days are a problem (no girl dress ups quite fit a penis and makes it limited in choice and there are no clothes in any shops in NSW [where] my daughter can buy clothes that fit her male body), swimming scheme is problematic (girls all get changed in the one change room, so my daughter currently has to go to a separate area with a teacher, generating an isolated experience which just confirms there is something wrong or different for her). (Parent forum)

## Discrimination, abuse, and questions of duty of care

The pervasiveness of cisgender and heteronormative school climates was reinforced through problematic pedagogical practices, as detailed above. However, some parents also reported outright discrimination and abuse towards their GSD child, which emanated from peers as well as some teachers, as well as a lack of duty of care in some situations. As a result of not feeling safe or included, some parents withdrew their child from mainstream public schooling, instead enrolling them in distance education or independent, alternative schooling options.

For my trans 16 Yr old son, Yr 9 & 10 was a lot of negativity. Both from teachers and students. Teachers who allowed their own personal beliefs to interfere with my child's right to identify as a male and their inability to see when their duty of care overrides that. From teachers who constantly used his birth name to those who turned a blind eye to the ridicule he faced from other students. (Parent Forum)

My contact with a past school that my child attended was quite traumatic and unsupportive. After my son came out, he experienced bullying, and threats including that a child he was due to bunk with at the upcoming camp, told him he will smother him with a pillow. When approaching the school, it was made out that if my child hadn't come out, this would not have happened, as opposed to it being addressed as bullying and a threat (in the schools' eyes it wasn't). [This eventually resulted in] a move in schools [which] was what my child needed to feel safe and accepted. (Parent Forum)

He was really, badly abused. I...like using the word 'abuse' because, well, they [the school] talk about it as 'bullying', and I don't think it's bullying. He was being physically assaulted on a regular basis at these primary schools. ... I went to the school a couple of days after he came home and he was covered in bruises, and he was just horrifically traumatised. I went to see them about [it] and they were like, well we have this bullying policy, we have a five-step process, he just needs to put his hands up and say 'stop'. I'm like, is that between kicks to the head and the stomach? Seriously, they just didn't want a bar of it. So, I just yanked him out of school. (Interview, Mother of transgender teen)

I said that I am worried about her being bullied and if she could come to you if she was, and the counsellor's response was that, 'I am very busy'. So, this didn't ease my mind. (Parent Forum)

## Educational policy

Parents did not say a great deal about policy across the qualitative data, although there was some general mention of policy inadequacies which were seen as ineffective in practice. Some parents felt that policy inadequacy, both in their specific schools as well as more broadly in their state/territory, was the result of the defunding and subsequent demise of the Safe Schools Coalition Australia initiative. Parents talked about policy needing to be realised through professional development for teachers and school workers. Additionally, the variation in policy across state government departments as well as nationally, and the need to ‘work together’, were raised as issues.

Safe Schools was great because when people said I’ve got a problem, there’s something going on at the school, I don’t know what to do, you could just say ring Safe Schools and they’ll help you. Now in the absence of Safe Schools and the kind of policy and support vacuum that is left, that really falls to parents now to do that work. (Interview Mother of transgender daughter)

I think education departments need to work across the various kind of government sectors where there is understanding of gender diversity so that policy can be developed that is consistent across government but is informed by best practice that draws on education as well as on health. (Interview, Mother of transgender daughter)

Teachers who continue to use my child’s dead name when calling the roll, even they know he is trans, saying that is school policy. Only a couple of them, but really unnecessary. (Parent Forum)

I think it’s hard to know what is ‘typical’. I’ve found that parents in my region have had similar experiences but what is happening from State to State is very different. I find that what Melbourne parents tell me, for instance, is very different from what Perth parents say, or Brisbane parents. (Parent Forum)

I have been advised that the school has a very strict policy with not accepting any anti LGBTBQI behaviour. However, for all of the policies and guidelines and assurances offered I feel that some of the teachers, particularly the Vice Principal, has no skill/training in this area and is very insensitive. (Parent Forum)

## Parent Recommendations

All parents made suggestions and recommendations during the interviews and in forum posts in terms of what schools could be doing to help support their GSD children to feel included and safe at school. For the purposes of this report, these have been categorised under the headings Curriculum and Practice; Neutralising Spaces; Embracing Rights; Providing Support; and Teacher Education, although there was considerable overlap across these areas.

### Curriculum and Practice

Parents articulated the need for greater inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity across all levels of school curriculum, beginning in the early years. There were also suggestions related to everyday teaching practice and for pedagogy to be both mindful and inclusive of diversity. Whole of school approaches were also recommended.

We can start with diverse stories and books, with not dividing 'girls' toys' and 'boys' toys' and by not saying in the kindy class – girls line up here and boys over there. (Parent Forum)

Actively include gender and sexuality diversity in the curriculum, including in Relationships and Sexuality Education (Parent Forum)

Provide explicit support for gender and sexuality diversity in a whole of school approach i.e. in policy, across curriculum, and in extra-curricular activities. (Parent Forum)

Teach for all. Consider the needs of gender and sexuality diverse students or those from gender and sexuality diverse backgrounds. (Parent Forum)

I guess when we talk about being inclusive, is do more of that. Do more as a curriculum, not as like you've got a transgender kid, let's address this person. Just have more. (Interview, Mother of transgender daughter)

We need to work right from the bottom, where we're teaching kids about this stuff right from the word go. (Interview, Mother of transgender teen)

Definitely needs to be taught in the primary curriculum. (Parent Forum)

## Teacher education and training

The importance of teacher education and training was expressed by many of the parents who participated in this research. This was often in response to situations that had arisen for the parents in navigating the school context for their child, which could have been addressed more empathically or efficiently by school staff. Education was not only perceived to be critical for classroom teachers, but for all adults who worked in schools. Additionally, pre-service teacher education was perceived as equally important.

All teachers need to foster an environment of inclusivity, not just those that have personal experience - it is not their sole responsibility. (Parent Forum)

Professional development for in-service teachers and inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity topics in initial teacher education. (Parent Forum)

Annual, mandatory education ... for teachers, for the cleaners, for the gardeners, for the Principal, for anybody who's employed in that facility who may be in contact with those kids. (Interview, Mother of gender non-conforming son)

There clearly needs to be some teacher training on the complexities around LGBTQI youth and simple steps that can make a huge difference to foster an atmosphere of inclusion and acceptance. (Parent Forum)

## Neutralising spaces, uniform, toilets, activities

Parents overwhelmingly highlighted the criticality of normalising the educational experience for their GSD child. To achieve this, parents desired gender-neutral spaces where students were not singled out as different from their peers and where there was consideration for their needs. The provision of gender-neutral uniforms and bathrooms, of not dividing students into gender binaries for activities such as sport, and providing resources that reflected GSD students were seen as ways that greater inclusion and normalisation could be achieved.

All public schools should have a gender-neutral uniform and policies in place to gender neutralise the entire physical environment, learning content and curriculum and place a greater emphasis on teaching educators on what they need to do to support the parents and siblings. (Parent Forum)

Don't separate sporting teams, activities and roles in school plays along gender binary lines. Just stop and think – and give kids some choices and honour their choices without making a big deal of it. (Parent Forum)

More books in the libraries/studied in English on the topic [of], or with characters that, celebrate/explore gender diversity and related topics. Separate toilets that are for all gender identities. All kids to wear non gendered uniforms or at least every school should have a neutral uniform option. Not separating kids by gender ever! Not having gendered buckets for lunch boxes in kindy etc. (Parent Forum)

## Embracing children's rights and celebrating diversity

Many parents were aware of the way in which schools associate gender and sexuality diversity with negative issues such as bullying and harassment rather than celebrating gender and sexuality diversity from a positive perspective. There was an awareness among parent participants that messages of support, overtly conveyed from school leadership, were imperative in the creation of an inclusive educational space for not only GSD students, but for all students. The importance of teachers' addressing homophobia and transphobia through educative practices were seen as critical for the development of a positive school culture.

Policy needs to address the lack of equitable practices currently implemented in the primary classroom to ensure the safety and basic human rights our children have to a safe learning environment where they are visible in not only policy, curriculum and learning content but where they are embraced as valuable as any other child. (Parent forum)

Celebrate diversity - do not use bullying as an entry point for discussion about gender and sexuality diversity. (Parent Forum)

Don't confuse sexuality with gender expression, don't perpetuate misinformation about child sex changes, don't encourage stories about girls not being safe in school toilets – and stand up to people who do spread (and perpetuate) all of these misunderstandings. (Parent Forum)

[Teachers] responding a lot to the casual kind of slurs, using gay as an insult and that kind of stuff was one of the things that was really important. (Interview, Mother of bisexual son)

## Providing support

Many parents talked about the lack of GSD-related resources in schools. Where such resources were available, they were used in only very limited ways by teachers (if at all). Perceived support options transcended the obvious, such as curriculum materials, and included the provision of organised social groups to ensure safe spaces for GSD students and their allies. Additionally, the importance of the employment of trained GSD-aware counsellors was mentioned by numerous participants as critical resources for GSD students and their families. Many of the recommendations made by parents in relation to support would increase visibility and acknowledge the rights of GSD young people to the school community, while serving to normalise diversity.

I'd probably like some standard resources for the schools so that ... all schools got some books about that sort of thing that became part of that curriculum. (Interview, Mother of transgender daughter)

So that the kids are actually – in the places when they're not in class, there's actually adult supervision in a fun capacity for them to be safe. ... I don't think you can rely on the kids in a school of 1000 plus, to just be good and kind and nice, because that's not going to happen. (Interview, Mother of transgender teen)

I think there needs to be a trained counsellor employed in every school who understands the issues and has regular contact with the parents, not ad hoc. ... I think there needs to be policies in place that reflect this. (Interview, Mother of gender non-conforming son)

I asked my (gay) son if he felt there was anything he would change at school, and he only said that he wished that they didn't separate things by gender for activities as he was always separated from his friends which makes him upset and anxious. He really hates sport and PE for this reason. (Parent Forum)

I feel there needs to be way more visibility. (Parent Forum)

## Performed Ethnography (Phase 5)

Using the voices of the parents from the qualitative data, a performed ethnography playscript entitled, *What Parents Want. Talking about Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools* was written by the chief investigators (Ferfolja/Ullman) and the international partner investigator (Tara Goldstein). This has been developed into a film with an accompanying teacher professional learning module. These three resources are not included in this Report. They are, however, available on the chief investigators' website *Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools* ([https://westernsydney.edu.au/glds/educator\\_resources](https://westernsydney.edu.au/glds/educator_resources)). These are freely available for the professional development of educators. The film is also available on YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/@genderandsexualitydiversit2500/videos>.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion & Recommendations

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This is an important study. It is the first research of its kind in Australia which uses a nationally representative dataset to gain an understanding of how Australian public-school (K-12) parents are positioned in relation to the inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in the school curriculum; as such, results from this research are critical to inform policy and practice. The quality and reliability of the survey data means that, unlike most research studies which require authors to frame their results as specific to their participating cohort, findings from this research can be framed as representative of the beliefs of Australian parents of public-school children and should be interpreted as such.

With this in mind, this research paints a picture of parents' views which stand in contrast to those perpetuated by the Australian media or espoused within the recent moral panics associated with discussing gender and sexuality diversity at school. Looking across the curriculum content areas presented, overall, at least 80% of parents wanted each of the six gender and sexuality diversity inclusive RSE *broad content areas* included in their child's Relationships and Sexual Health Education (RSE). This figure increased to nearly 90% of parents who endorsed the inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive RSE content in the national curriculum which recognised the negative impact of "discrimination/bullying of GSD people". These results demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of parents support a RSE curriculum which recognises the identities and relationships of GSD individuals.

Deeper analysis across 18 gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive *specific content areas* in the RSE curriculum, demonstrates that between 60.6% and 82.2% of parents reported that these specific content areas were of "moderate" or "high importance" to their child's education. In particular, parents felt that the content areas which articulated the inclusion of sexual health and safety for gender and/or sexuality diverse people were of highest importance for curricular inclusion.

These findings were echoed in the qualitative data from parents of GSD children, who reported a desire for greater inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in the curriculum and who were concerned for the health, safety and wellbeing for their children at school. Several participants shared stories of direct and indirect discrimination towards their gender diverse child and the need for greater education for the student body and increased professional development for educators around these topics. Increased awareness and education for educators and students alike were identified as a way to help curb the disturbing types of experiences that some of these children and young people experienced in schools. In some instances, to alleviate the exclusion encountered by their child, parents resorted to distance education and alternative education options, which demonstrated a perceived failure of the system to meet their child's needs.

In contrast to prevailing ideas that parents are most opposed to school-based discussions of gender diversity and the recognition of gender diverse individuals, within the survey data, parents rated the particular gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive content area which explicated the difference between sex and gender as significantly more important to the RSE curriculum than its general, non-inclusive equivalent. Likewise, over 80% of parents supported the inclusion of the RSE *broad content* curriculum area focused on "understanding gender diversity" at some stage during K-12 schooling, with most parents supporting its introduction to students by the earliest years of high school (years 7/8).

Nearly 60% of parents felt that gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive education should be delivered as part of a whole-school approach to inclusivity, represented across curriculum areas and policy and affirmed within the broader school ethos. Parents' responses from the qualitative data supported the need for inclusion and recognition extending beyond curriculum-focused classroom discussion. Parents of GSD students articulated the need for gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive policies as well as wellbeing-informed considerations with respect to GSD students' use of amenities (such as toilets/changerooms), engagement with extracurricular activities and schools' administrative processes (such as the removal of outdated school photographs and dead names).

Findings from the PATII instrumentation, included as an element of the national survey, shed additional light on these results. Analyses of the various Supports/Barriers factors of the PATII demonstrate that parents' support for a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive education stems primarily from their belief that inclusive content creates a schooling environment which is fair and equitable for students, no matter their gender identity or sexuality.

Importantly, this research offers ways forward for schools' engagement with members of the public-school parent community who may be less supportive of a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum. Across the six gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive RSE *broad content areas* included in the survey, between 12 – 20% of parents "never" wanted these introduced as elements of the curriculum. Looking at parents' endorsement of the various Barriers factors included in the PATII instrumentation, parents were most likely to resist the inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in the curriculum due to their concerns regarding the age/developmental appropriateness of the content for their child. Although parents were slightly less likely to express concerns for their child's susceptibility to alter their gender and/or sexuality given exposure to gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive content, this was a concern for some.

This knowledge makes space for communication and engagement with these members of the parent community, particularly with respect to current understandings about the origins of individuals' gender identity and sexual orientation and educators' professional capacity for pitching content to students at an appropriate developmental level. As demonstrated in other international contexts where inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity-related content in the curriculum has been vociferously contested by parents, such as Birmingham in England, school-parent dialogue can lead to accepted inclusion. Inviting parents to meet with educators to discuss proposed gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum content has the potential to shift previously-oppositional parents to a position of greater understanding and support.

Just over 12% of parents agreed with the notion that religious or faith leaders were the most appropriate providers of RSE or that young people should not be provided with RSE at all in schools. This cohort may be less amenable to connecting with school-based professionals to discuss their concerns. In states/territories where parents have the option to withdraw their child/ren from RSE, this would include gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive RSE curricular content. However, for schools taking a whole-school approach to the support of GSD students, it should be noted that the recognition and affirmation of GSD identities is part of the fabric of the school environment.

Twenty per-cent of parents who completed the survey indicated that their child/adolescent either self-identified as or was perceived by others to be, GSD, with nearly half of these parents either (a) indicating that their child had experienced gender and sexuality diversity-related harassment or (b) reporting suspicions that their child had experienced harassment due to their actual or perceived gender and/or sexuality diversity. These parents reported that their child most often experienced subtle homophobia/transphobia (e.g., hearing remarks like “that’s so gay” or “but what are you really?”), with an average of 15.51 occurrences in the past 12 months at school. Australian parents furthermore reported that their GSD child was “made fun of”, “laughed at or about”, or was “unable to share or talk about their identity” on average between 13 or 15 times in the past year at school. Once again, these negative school experiences reflect the harassment and exclusion reported by parents of GSD children in the qualitative data. Including gender and sexuality diversity in the curriculum and addressing this form of diversity from a whole of school perspective would help to reduce the discrimination and marginalisation experienced by many GSD students, normalise diversity, and make schools more inclusive for everyone. Moreover, this level of homophobia/transphobia is unacceptable, and teachers need the knowledge, skills, and institutional support to be able to be inclusive of gender and sexuality diversity more broadly.

## **Project Recommendations**

The key summative recommendations, informed by both the quantitative and qualitative phases of data collection in this research, are categorised below in terms of whether they are related to pre-and in-service teacher education, structural aspects of schooling, teacher practice, or school facilities/amenities.

### **In-service and pre-service teacher education recommendations**

- Increase in-service teachers’ awareness and understandings about gender and sexuality diversity through regular professional development programs that focus on these areas.
- Require initial teacher education providers to include gender and sexuality diversity-related understandings in their curriculum.
- Ensure Health/Physical Education teachers receive professional development about gender and sexuality diversity and its inclusion in this element of the curriculum.

## Structural recommendations

- Increase the visibility of gender and sexuality diversity across the primary/secondary school curriculum using age-appropriate content and teaching methods.
- Ensure that gender and sexuality diversity is clearly articulated and supported in the curriculum, syllabi and supporting documentation/resources for teacher guidance.
- Ensure that Relationships and Sexual Health Education is inclusive of gender and sexuality diversity to ensure that the curriculum is relevant to all students.
- Ensure school counsellors are trained to support gender and sexuality diverse students and their families.
- Include gender and sexuality diversity in school and departmental policies on student welfare, safety, gender equity and bullying.
- Acknowledge young people's identities at school (i.e. remove dead names from rolls; remove outdated photographs; use student's preferred name).
- Engage with parents locally to increase confidence in school-based approaches related to this area.
- Celebrate and acknowledge gender and sexuality diversity-related events such as *Wear It Purple Day*.

## Teacher practice recommendations

- Discourage teachers from setting up activities by binary sex/gender (i.e., male/female, girls/boys).
- Include gender and sexuality diversity in everyday teaching so that it is 'normalised' and not ignored/avoided, only introduced around issues of bullying, or only included as a one-off 'special event'.
- Address homophobia/transphobia in the classroom and playground. Recognise that comments such as "That's so gay" are derogatory towards GSD students, GSD families, and GSD school staff, and should not be accepted. The anti-social nature of such language needs to be discussed rather than being treated as a simple disciplinary issue.

## School facilities/amenities recommendations

- Ensure that all genders toilets are available for students.
- Ensure that students are permitted to use the facilities that correspond to their gender identity.
- Ensure schools have school uniform options that meet the needs of all genders in the school – uniforms should ideally be gender neutral uniforms.
- Ensure students have age-appropriate support visible in the school (e.g., school library books that are inclusive of gender and sexuality diverse characters; posters and visual stimuli).

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## Appendices

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### Appendix A. Definitions Provided within the Survey

**Gender diverse:** Gender is different from biological sex. When people refer to someone's sex, they are talking about that person's physical characteristics such as having a penis, vagina, beard, or breasts. Gender is a very personal sense of who we are, and how we see ourselves as a man, a woman, both or neither. Gender diverse is a term that includes all the different ways gender can be experienced and perceived. It can include people questioning their gender and those who identify as **trans/transgender** (someone whose gender identity differs from their biological sex assigned at birth), among others.

**Sexuality diverse:** The term sexuality diverse is often used in the context of sexual orientation, which is who you are emotionally, mentally, and/or physically attracted to. Not all people are **heterosexual** (an individual who is attracted to persons of the opposite sex or gender, also called "straight"). Some people identify as **gay** (an individual who is attracted to persons of the same sex or gender), **lesbian** (a woman who is attracted to other women), **bisexual** (an individual who is attracted to two or more genders), **queer** (an umbrella term used to describe the range of sexual orientations), or **questioning** (an individual who is unsure of or exploring their sexual identity and orientation), among others.

**Gender and/or sexuality diverse/diversities/diversity (GSD):** A term used to capture all the diversities of sexual orientations and gender expression. We will be using GSD throughout this survey.

**Gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum (GSD-inclusive curriculum):** Includes school curriculum, teaching, and learning, which supports and values gender and sexuality diversity (GSD).

## Appendix B: Detailed Statistical Comparisons\*

Table 4: Providers of Relationships and Sexual Health Education (RSE)

	M	SD	Comp Group	t-value	p-value	Cohen's <i>d</i>	CLES
1. "Providing RSE must involve a number of stakeholders (such as parents, schools, teachers and students)."	4.82	1.28	2	0.25	<b>0.013</b>	0.05	53%
2. "Parents are the most appropriate providers of RSE."	4.72	1.09	3	11.61	< <b>.001</b>	0.25	60%
3. "Experts from external organisations should be brought into schools to provide RSE."	4.18	1.49	4	13.24	< <b>.001</b>	0.29	62%
4. "Teachers should be responsible for providing RSE."	3.79	1.29	5	31.08	< <b>.001</b>	0.68	75%
5. "Religious or faith leaders are the most appropriate providers of RSE."	2.44	1.53	6	0.12	<b>0.91</b>	0.00	50%
6. "Children and adolescents should not be provided with RSE."	2.45	1.56					

Table 5: Importance of Relationships and Sexual Health Education (RSE) specific content areas

	M	SD	Comp Group	t-value	p-value	Cohen's <i>d</i>	CLES
1a. "People can get sexually transmitted infections (STIs), as a result of having sex with someone who already has an STI."	3.69	0.59	1b	18.23	< <b>.001</b>	0.40	66%
1b. "GSD people can get sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as a result of having sex with someone who already has an STI."	3.31	0.98					
2a. "There are ways that people can lower their risk of getting an STI."	3.63	0.67	2b	18.89	< <b>.001</b>	0.41	66%
2b. "There are ways that GSD people can lower their risk of getting an STI (e.g., condoms can be used across all relationship types)."	3.24	0.01					
3a. "Puberty is a time of physical and emotional change that happens as children grow and mature."	3.59	0.63	3b	26.52	< <b>.001</b>	0.58	72%

\*The figures presented in this Appendix have been published elsewhere (see Ullman et al., 2021); however, these tables have been reformatted and material has been arranged differently for publication in this report.

	M	SD	Comp Group	t-value	p-value	Cohen's <i>d</i>	CLES
3b. "During puberty, GSD young people experience physical and emotional changes as they grow and mature (e.g., comfort or discomfort with their bodies)."	2.93	1.08					
4a. "Engaging in sexual behaviours comes with responsibilities for your own and your partner's wellbeing."	3.53	0.73	4b	19.44	< .001	0.43	67%
4b. "Engaging in sexual behaviours comes with responsibilities for the wellbeing of GSD people and their partner (e.g., consent is required for all relationship types)."	3.11	1.07					
5a. "Reproduction is a process that includes conception, pregnancy, and birth."	3.56	0.65	5b	26.42	< .001	0.58	72%
5b. "Reproduction is a process that includes conception, pregnancy, and birth, and this is relevant for GSD young people (e.g., fertility options for same-sex couples)."	2.88	1.11					
6a. "There are healthy and unhealthy relationships."	3.48	0.78	6b	22.19	< .001	0.49	69%
6b. "There are healthy and unhealthy relationships, including some GSD relationships."	3.01	1.07					
7a. "Modern contraception can help people prevent or plan pregnancy."	3.48	0.75	7b	16.67	< .001	0.36	64%
7b. "Modern contraception can help people prevent or plan pregnancy, including for gender diverse people."	3.13	1.06					
8a. "Certain behaviours can be defined as bullying and violence."	3.44	0.78	8b	16.57	< .001	0.36	64%
8b. "Certain behaviours towards GSD people can be defined as bullying and violence (e.g., verbally abusing two men holding hands in public)."	3.11	1.03					

	M	SD	Comp Group	t-value	p-value	Cohen's <i>d</i>	CLES
9a. "Effective communication is needed to express personal needs and sexual limits."	3.43	0.77	9b	20.42	< .001	0.45	67%
9b. "Effective communication is needed for GSD young people to express personal needs and sexual limits."	2.99	1.09					
10a. "Body parts have particular names and functions, including the sexual reproductive organs."	3.46	0.69	10b	26.05	< .001	0.57	72%
10b. "Lessons about body parts and their functions should be inclusive of gender diverse young people (e.g., a trans young man may still have their period)."	2.76	1.16					
11a. "There are myths and facts about sexual behaviours."	3.12	0.94	11b	16.31	< .001	0.36	64%
11b. "There are myths and facts about GSD sexual behaviours (e.g., that all gay people are promiscuous)."	2.80	1.13					
12a. "There are many different types of families."	3.02	0.98	12b	13.96	< .001	0.31	62%
12b. "There are many different types of families, including GSD families (e.g., two gay Dads, a transgender Mum)."	2.79	1.12					
13a. "Individuals can challenge stigma and discrimination to promote inclusion and social harmony."	3.03	0.96	13b	7.94	< .001	0.17	57%
13b. "Individuals can challenge stigma and discrimination against GSD people to promote inclusion and social harmony."	2.90	1.07					
14a. "Gender roles and peer norms (e.g., a student's belief that his/her friends approve of and engage in a behaviour) may influence decisions and behaviours related to relationships and sex."	3.06	0.89	14b	10.14	< .001	0.22	59%

	M	SD	Comp Group	t-value	p-value	Cohen's <i>d</i>	CLES
14b. "Gender roles and peer norms may influence decisions and behaviours related to relationships and sex for GSD people."	2.88	1.07					
15a. "Culture, religion, and society influence our understandings of sexuality."	2.96	0.92	15b	5.12	< .001	0.11	55%
15b. "Culture, religion, and society influence our understandings of gender and sexuality diversity."	2.86	1.00					
16a. "People's sexual attractions may change over time and are not always fixed."	2.89	1.01	16b	7.62	< .001	0.17	57%
16b. "GSD people's sexual attractions may change over time and are not always fixed (e.g., a straight woman identifying as a lesbian later in life)."	2.77	1.09					
17a. "There is a difference between biological sex (identity based on physical characteristics such as a penis or vagina) and gender (a personal sense of how we see ourselves as a man, woman, or neither)."	2.73	1.14	17b	-4.79	< .001	-0.11	55%
17b. "There is a difference between biological sex and gender; this is the reality for gender diverse people."	2.81	1.12					
18a. "Romantic relationships can be negatively affected by gender roles (how we are expected to act based on our ex e.g., men should be strong) and gender stereotypes (generalising based on gender e.g., women are better at cooking)."	2.84	1.02	18b	6.26	< .001	0.14	56%
18b. "Romantic relationships involving GSD people can be negatively affected by gender roles and gender stereotypes (e.g., in a lesbian relationship, the belief that one partner must be more masculine)."	2.72	1.11					

Table 6: Attitudes Towards Gender and Sexuality Diversity Across the Curriculum

	M	SD	Comp Group	t-value	p-value	Cohen's <i>d</i>	CLES
1. "GSD content should only be included in the Health and Physical Education curriculum."	3.56	1.65	2	2.25	0.05	0.05	52%
2. "GSD content, including the contributions of GSD people, should be included across other subjects (e.g. English, Art, History)."	3.43	1.78	3	-0.91	< .001	-0.20	58%
3. "GSD content should be included at a whole-school level, reflected in school polices, practices, ethos, events, and community."	3.62	1.83	1	0.91	0.37	0.02	51%

Table 7: Schooling Stage for Introducing Relationships and Sexual Health Education (RSE) broad content areas

	M	SD	Comp Group	N	t-value	p-value	Cohen's <i>d</i>	CLES
1a. The human body and its development	2.38	1.48	1b	1682	-20.26	< .001	-0.49	69%
1b. The human body and its development for GSD people	3.04	1.55						
2a. Discrimination/bullying	1.38	1.53	2b	1833	-32.68	< .001	-0.76	78%
2b. Discrimination/bullying of GSD people	2.51	1.81						
3a. Sexual and reproductive health	3.65	1.22	3b	1670	-0.92	0.36	-0.02	51%
3b. GSD people's sexual and reproductive health	3.67	1.33						
4a. Relationships and families	2.00	1.73	4b	1690	-12.70	< .001	-0.31	62%
4b. GSD relationships and families	2.44	1.86						
5a. Sexuality and safe sexual behaviour	3.60	12.8	5b	1674	-1.31	0.19	-0.03	51%
5b. GSD people's sexuality and safe sexual behaviour	3.63	1.34						
6a. Understanding gender	2.45	1.68	6b	1626	-7.67	< .001	-0.19	57%
6b. Understanding gender diversity	2.68	1.69						

## Appendix C: Semi-structured interview schedule

General demographic information

Age of child

Sexuality and/or gender diversity details

School details (locale, stage, SES, rurality, ethnic composition)

Tell me about the experiences that you've had negotiating the schooling system with your child.

Specific Interview Prompts:

- What does your child experience in the current curriculum in relation to gender and/or sexuality diversity?
- What support does your child receive from their teachers/school in relation to their gender and/or sexuality diversity?
- What has been your experience with other parents at your child's school in relation to their gender and/or sexuality diversity?
- What are your positive experiences navigating the schooling environment for your gender and/or sexuality diverse child?
- What are your negative experiences navigating the schooling environment for your gender and/or sexuality diverse child?
- What change do you think would be most helpful for you/your child to foster a positive schooling experience?

## Appendix D. Online Forum Questions

\*Have you had any negative experiences navigating the schooling environment for your gender and/or sexuality diverse child? These could be in relation to things like:

- curriculum, school policy or practice;
- daily communications;
- working with particular members of the school community;
- or any other experiences you or your child may have had.

\*Have you had any positive experiences navigating the schooling environment for your gender and/or sexuality diverse child?

These could be in relation to things like:

- curriculum, school policy or practice;
- daily communications;
- working with particular members of the school community;
- or any other experiences you or your child may have had.

\*If you have made contact with your child's school around their gender and sexuality diversity, how has the school responded to you? (e.g., have educators been supportive and helpful or antagonistic and dismissive?)

Could you describe what happened (in a particular instance), or what continues to happen (if this is ongoing)?

What prompted you to make contact with the school?

If you haven't made contact with the school, could you say a bit more about this?

\*What support, if any, do you or your child receive from the teachers or the school, more broadly, in relation to their gender and/or sexuality diversity?

This support could take any form, for example:

- one-to-one and/or personalised support;
- support that targets a larger group (like your child's class or the whole school);
- referrals to external services or support;
- anything else that you or your child found to be supportive?

\*We know that kids can feel more connected to their schools when they are able to see themselves in the curriculum. Do you know what your child is learning at school in relation to gender and/or sexuality diversity (including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender diverse and other identities)?

\*What has been your experience with other parents at your child's school in relation to their gender and/or sexuality diversity?

You may have had some very positive, supportive experiences from the parent community, or some hurtful, negative ones. Or, perhaps, your child's sexuality or gender diversity is a non-issue for other parents (or they may not even know).

We would like to hear about what you've experienced and what impact this has had on you/your family.

\*What changes do you think would be most helpful for you/your child to foster a positive schooling experience?

If you could make recommendations to better support your child and other sexuality and gender diverse children, what would these be?

## Appendix E. Qualitative Coding Framework – Interviews

Demographics	
Climate of area	General information pertaining to the area in which the school is situated or where the child and their family live
School demographics	General information about school eg size, location, ethnic/religious makeup
Young person	Demographic type of information
Educators	Relating to actions / lack of action of educators
Curriculum inclusions	Teacher/school led curriculum inclusions
Curriculum silences	GSD invisible or silenced or disallowed in curriculum
Educators' understanding or lack of understanding about GSD	Where parent makes an observation about the child's teachers in terms of what they know (or don't know) about GSD and how that impacts on their classrooms, their treatment of GSD students/families and the school culture more broadly.
Misdiagnosis	Where parent describes how educators label or frame their child's gender and/or sexuality diversity as some other 'pathology' such as a behavioural issue/misbehaviour, attention seeking, a temporary phrase or some other such redirection.
Parent	
External support (parents)	Parent's access to support external to the school
Parent reactions	Parent actions/reactions in response to positive or negative school experiences – could include advocacy, parent-led inclusions, changing schools, promoting school
Parent's relationship or communications with other adults – external	What other parents have said in relation to diversity/child; support; marginalisation; relationship with adult intimate partners.
Parent's relationship or communications with school	Parent's involvement /non-involvement with school; feelings of being on the outside. How they interacted with the school
School	
Bullying	School's positioning of discriminatory behaviour as "bullying"
Education policy	Where parent refers to school policy employed or adopted in relation to their child or relevant to GSD more broadly
Market drivers	Impact of market forces on school cultures and/or curricula
Professional development	Training undertaken by teachers/schools. May be internal or external.
School affected by GSD Media	School is impacted by relevant media portrayals of GSD content/people/issues/etc

<b>School culture</b>	
School experience negative	Negative experiences of school climate. Might include what school does or what they fail to do – could include neglect, avoidance, failure to act, poor judgement etc.
School experience positive	Positive experiences of school climate. Might include how the school creates this climate. Anything perceived as supportive and positive
School Leadership	Where parent comments on actions taken (or not taken) by school leadership with regards to the support of their child and GSD inclusivity more broadly. May include commentary on school 'protocols' around GSD students, harassment - sense that school has a defined, whole school 'plan of action' (or needs one).
School's communication with parent community	Where parents describe their school's communication with the parent community around their child's GSD status (including a LACK of communication, or refusal to communicate). This is primarily associated with a gender transition.
School's communication with student community	Where parents describe their school's communication with the student body around their child's GSD status (including a LACK of communication, or refusal to communicate). This is primarily associated with a gender transition and education about this. It may also be around sexuality diversity.
What schools need to do	Parent perception about what schools should be doing
<b>Young person</b>	
Child-led inclusions	Where parent describes child-led inclusion of GSD topics via assessment tasks or classroom conversation. Inclusive of teachers'/ other students' support or resistance to these conversations or material.
Friends and peers	Experiences of the young person. Includes how they form friendships with others. May include feeling isolated or being forced into isolation through the behaviour of others
Medical interventions	Physical/Psychological/emotional interventions
Physical, verbal, emotional exclusions	Parent describes instances of physical exclusions of their child (includes assault)
Uniform and clothing	Where parent refers to the school uniform/clothing as either a site of stress or liberation for their child (or anywhere in between).
Well-being	Where parent comments directly on their child's wellbeing in relationship to their experiences of school.
Young person perceptions of gender identity	Discuss what the young person experiences of their gender identity. Experiences related to their development. Working through identity issues.

## Appendix F. Qualitative Coding Framework – Forum

Name	Description
Beyond the school	
Safe schools	Support, impact or effect of Safe Schools or by the policy debate.
Societal Education	Participant reflection on broader societal education/lack of education or awareness about GSD issues, and how this filters into school communities. [Not to be confused with 'what schools need to do'.]
State/ Federal Legislation	Mention of legislation and/or how it impacts experience of child; includes references to birth certificates. May also mention state by state variations in experience or similar.
Celebrating the dregs	When parents/child accept something as being extra-ordinary that is really more just like a basic human right.
Demographics	
Demographic climate of area	Information about area (e.g. diversity, SES, ethnicity, religion, etc.)
Demographic school	Information about the school in general (e.g. size, location, ethnic/religious make-up).
Demographic young person	Information about the young person (child) in general
Making change	Parents' and GSD students' suggestions for improvement in schools.
Normalisation	Actions/words/experiences/presentation that reinforces the normality of the GSD student. Could be from school educators or more generally. GSD student experiences normalising responses/actions/access to resources and facilities.
Parent and Family	
Impact on family	Practical/tangible impact of social reactions on family (including parents/siblings), as well as emotional labour and well-being impact as experience by parents/siblings. Emotional/tangible impact on family.
Language of emotion or war	Parent expresses feelings/emotions about what is happening for them or their GSD child (e.g. stress, worry, anger, happiness, pride) or for other GSD individuals. Uses the language of war and conflict (e.g. "battle") to describe their experiences or supporting their GSD child or describing their child's experiences of being GSD at school.
Parent labour	Time/labour invested by parents to communicate with (1) educators, (2) members of the school community, and/or (3) investigate external GSD community support in order to advocate for their child.
Parents' relationship and communications with other adults	What other parents/friends have said in relation to diversity/child; support from others; marginalisation by other parents/family/friends.

Name	Description
School	
Amenities and administration	GSD student's access to, and experiences of, physical amenities (e.g. bathrooms). Could also include administration issues (e.g. name on roll, birth certificate). Could also include others' opinions on amenities use. Suggested changes to facilities (e.g. toilets).
Culture of school	Refers to actions/words that perpetuate heteronormative culture and relationships/actions or something about the school culture. Could be positive. "It's the kind of school where..."
Curriculum inclusions	Parents describe instances where GSD topics/materials/content appears in the curriculum [either classroom or whole school.]
Curriculum silences	Curriculum invisibility and silence in relation to GSD topics.
Distance education or alternative schooling	Mention of distance education including applying to do it or undertaking it or reasons why a move to DE is needed. The success, or not, of parents keeping their GSD child in school. Movement across school/systems. Last resort placements.
Education policy and school policy	Can include educators' enactment of referral to policy (either state/local level). Includes invisibility in policy, as well as policy that is supportive.
Risk Management	Enactment of policies or school-based actions which serve to isolate/separate GSD student from others and/or reduce visibility of GSD individuals, seemingly as a form of risk management.
School experience negative	Something in the school experience that has had a negative impact on the GSD student.
School experience positive	Something in the school experience that has had a positive impact on the GSD student or felt to be positive by the parent such as a supportive environment, administration or teacher.
School's comms with student community	Where parents describe their school's communication with the student body around their child's GSD status (including a LACK of communication, or refusal to communicate). This is primarily associated with a gender transition and education about this. It may also be about sexuality diversity.
Uniform and clothing	Where parent refers to the school uniform/clothing as either a site of stress or liberation for their child (or anywhere in between).

Name	Description
<b>School Personnel</b>	
Educators lack of understanding about GSD	Parents' views on teachers/educators' lack of awareness or understanding about GSD issues. NOT to be confused with "Professional Dev."
Interactions with classroom teachers regarding GSD	Interactions with classroom teachers (about GSD issues/their GSD child).
Interactions with principals/ school leaders re GSD child	Interactions with principals/school leaders (about GSD issues/their GSD child).
Professional development	What has been done at the school to professionally develop staff around GSD
Protecting GSD child	When something is done by the teacher/educator or parent to "protect" the GSD child. This may be in earnest but may or may not be an ideal action.
School counsellor	Comments specifically about role of or interactions with the school counsellor - both positive and negative.
<b>Social Marginalisation</b>	
Bullying	Parent specifically mentions bullying - either as a behaviour or concept.
Social marginalisation, harassment or exclusion by peers _physical/verbal/emotional	This includes harassment, discrimination, and inequities experienced from peers.
Stereotyping	Positioning GSD students in a stereotypical way.
Victim blaming	GSD positioned as at fault or something contributing to negativity of others.

Name	Description
<b>Support</b>	
External support organisations (formal)	Where agencies/individuals outside of the school have been accessed by the parent, student or school OR recommended (e.g. SHINE; FPNSW). Everything except physical, medical intervention or recommendations for such. (Includes psychologists/psychiatrists.)
Friends and peer support	Instances of peer support towards GSD child or situation.
Medical interventions	Reference to physical (e.g. transition) and associated interventions (including hormones; beta-blockers).
Parents' meta support for others	Parents reaching out to others on the forum to offer support or advice.
<b>Young Person</b>	
Child as educator	
Child's Mental Health and Well-being	GSD student mental health issues OR doing well in this area. Emotional labour of the child. Where parent comments directly on their child's wellbeing in relationship to their experiences of school.
Coming out and visibility	GSD student intentionally/purposively makes themselves known as GSD to others.
Gender Identity	How the young person experiences/expresses their gender identity, include sense that their gender identity is normalised for them - don't feel or want to be seen as different. ["She's a boy."]
GSD student self-supportive	GSD student/child perceived as able to support themselves (e.g. independent or of an age/maturity that means parent doesn't have to be so involved.) GSD student acts as own advocate.
Not coming out and invisibility	GSD student does not make themselves known as GSD to others or passes as cis/straight. (e.g. trans student who wants to, or wishes they could be 'stealth')
Standing out /feeling different special case	When GSW student experiences something that makes them "stand out" or feel different. May be internalised or external (e.g. in relation to what someone else has done/said/organised). Could also include material where parent talks about their child not wanting to "stand out", but educators' actions/decisions actually have this effect.

## Appendix G. Amalgamation of Coding

Interview	Forum	Report
Curriculum Inclusions	Curriculum Inclusions	Curriculum Inclusions/ Exclusions
Curriculum silences	Curriculum silences	
Educators Understanding or lack of understanding about GSD	Educators Lack of Understanding	Educators understanding or lack of understanding about GSD
Parent reactions & Parent's relationship or communication with school	Parent Labour	Parent Labour
Bullying	Bullying	Bullying
School experience negative	School experience negative	Negative school experiences Discrimination, abuse, and questions of duty of care
School experience positive	School experience positive	Positive school experiences
Education policy	Education policy and school policy	Policy
Uniform & Clothing	Amenities and administration Uniform and clothing	Amenities, administration & uniform



