RESEARCH BRIEF

LGBTQ+ Educator Experiences Under Shifting Political Climates (2020–2025): A Longitudinal Qualitative Study

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past five years, LGBTQ+ educators, particularly Black and LGBTQ+ educators, have navigated rapidly changing and directly antagonizing political conditions that have reshaped their visibility, safety, and advocacy within schools. This longitudinal study (2020–2025) draws on in-depth interviews with four educators originally interviewed in 2018–2020 and re-interviewed in 2025. Findings reveal both continuity and regression in the climate regarding LGBTQ+ advocacy in schools, with educators consistently maintaining a deep commitment to student care while adapting their visibility strategies to increasingly volatile policy environments.

In Part 1, we provide background on the shifting national landscape regarding LGBTQ+ support and its implications for Black and LGBTQ+ teachers.

In Part 2, we introduce the theoretical framing behind educator visibility, identity, and advocacy as intertwined forms of pedagogical labor.

In Part 3, we present longitudinal evidence through thematic analysis, participant-based comparisons, and analytic synthesis demonstrating how political regression reshapes daily practice, emotional labor, and institutional trust.

Finally, in Part 4, we offer implications and recommendations for educational leaders, policymakers, and institutions seeking to protect and sustain LGBTQ+ educators, especially Black and LGBTQ+, whose presence serves as a dual-stabilizing force for students during periods of civic uncertainty.

PART 1 – BACKGROUND

Between 2020 and 2025, educators across the United States faced intensified political scrutiny around LGBTQ+ content, visibility, and curriculum. Policies such as expanded 'Don't Say LGBTQ+' laws and heightened disciplinary actions produced school climates marked by fear, self-censorship, and administrative caution. The 2020–2025 period reflects profound shifts in the experiences of LGBTQ+ educators, particularly Black and LGBTQ+ educators who navigate both identity-based and political precocity. Their resilience, care, and adaptive advocacy continue to sustain LGBTQ+ students in environments where belonging is politically contested. Their persistence underscores a systemic need: institutions must move from symbolic inclusion to meaningful structural protection.

This study thus contributes to a growing body of research illustrating how marginalized educators sustain student well-being despite fluctuating and increasingly antagonistic political climates. It highlights the need for policy and institutional protections that move beyond symbolic gestures to substantive action. GSAs, inclusive curriculum, explicit administrative protections, and purposeful hiring of queer educators of color are not merely optional enhancements; they are infrastructures of survival for students whose social worlds remain fraught with risk.

The participants in this study, Black and LGBTQ+ educators in K–12, offer insight into how these policy shifts are reflected in their daily practices. Across all participants, there is a consistent through-line of a continued commitment to LGBTQ+ student well-being and identity affirmation. However, the mode of advocacy has shifted: from visible and vocal inclusion to quieter, more strategic, and localized (i.e., school-based) efforts characterized by emotional labor and adaptive creativity. Their experiences highlight the connection between national rhetoric, local policy enforcement, and student belonging.

PART 2 – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This report is grounded in the following theoretical foundations:

1. ***Educator Visibility as Pedagogical Practice*** — Black and LGBTQ+ educator visibility functions as an act of care, representation, and resistance. While this visibility challenges both racist and heteronormative/homoantagonistic norms, it also carries significant risk (safety, employment, etc) (Brockenbrough, 2016; Diaz & Kosciw, 209; Turner, 2020)

2. ***Advocacy as Adaptive Labor*** — Educators adjust their advocacy strategies based on the local and national political climates, shifting between overt and covert forms of support. This adaptive work reveals the

intersection of identity and pedagogy (Abreu, et al., 2016; Snapp & Moody, 2024; White, et al., 2018).

3. ***Policy Climate as Structural Determinant*** — Federal laws, election outcomes, and shifting legislation function as structural forces that directly shape what [Black] LGBTQ+ educators can say, teach, or visibly embody, making political cycles a determinant of both safety and pedagogical possibility (Green & Travis, 2022; Proulx, Fisher, & Coulter, 2024; Russell & Fish, 2023; Sadhwan & Maguire, 2023).

PART 3 – EVIDENCE

PART 3.1 – Thematic Comparison (2020 vs 2025) and Synthesis

Implication	Summary (Key Shifts)
Gay–Straight Alliances (GSAs) and Student Affinity Spaces	*GSAs transitioned from publicly celebrated affirming spaces to strategically discreet sustained safe havens for students and staff.*
Inclusive Curriculum and Classroom Practices	*Curricular inclusion moved from explicit representation to carefully embedded albeit overt affirmations.*
School and District Leadership Responses	*Leadership transitioned to silence or symbolic visibility without substance, intensifying educators' sense of isolation and professional vulnerability.*
Representation and Purposeful Hiring	*While representation moved from being strategically empowering to strategically risky, educators remain committed yet cautious.*
Legislative and Political Contexts	*Policy has evolved to an essential*

	direct determinant of educator behavior, curriculum, and emotional well-being.
Resilience, Emotional Labor, and the Practice of Care	*Care shifted from open affirmation to protective resistance, demonstrating both resilience and the effect of politicized climates.*

3.1.1. Gay–Straight Alliances (GSAs) and Student Affinity Spaces

2020:

In 2020, GSAs functioned as openly visible affirming spaces—critical hubs where LGBTQ+ students could experience belonging, peer connection, and adult mentorship. Educators described GSAs as protective structures that directly countered hostile school climates, providing both community and continuity for youth navigating identity development.

2025:

By 2025, GSAs still exist but often in altered forms. Participants reported that some GSAs were rebranded, kept quieter, or integrated into broader "diversity clubs" to avoid administrative scrutiny or political backlash. Even where the space remained intact, staff advisors described the need for heightened caution around promotion, meeting content, or advocacy initiatives.

Key Shift:

GSAs transitioned from *publicly celebrated affirming spaces* to *strategically sustained safe havens*. While still essential, operation of these spaces are now dependent on discretion rather than institutional endorsement.

3.1.2. Inclusive Curriculum and Classroom Practices

2020:

Educators in 2020 described frequent administrative pushback for teaching LGBTQ+ history, literature, or identity-related content. Even historically factual materials (e.g., Bayard Rustin documentaries) were deemed "too political," signaling an early policing of queer-inclusive curriculum.

2025:

By 2025, curriculum censorship intensified across many states, leading educators to embed affirming content more subtly. Affirmation took the form of coded language, inclusive examples within broader lessons, or arts-based pedagogy that signaled support without triggering administrative monitoring. This shift reflects heightened professional risk combined with enduring commitment to authentic representation.

Key Shift:

Curricular inclusion moved from *explicit representation* to *carefully embedded affirmation*, shaped by heightened political and institutional constraints.

3.1.3. School and District Leadership Responses

2020:

Participants noted inconsistent leadership support in 2020, with many administrators appearing hesitant to explicitly name LGBTQ+ identities in diversity conversations. Leadership silence created climates where teachers were left to navigate conflicts alone, signaling that LGBTQ+ inclusion was peripheral rather than foundational.

2025:

By 2025, educators describe a phenomenon they termed **"performative pacification."** Administrators often issue polished, legally cautious

statements about belonging or respect, but rarely enact structural protections, training, or policy updates. This creates a paradox: LGBTQ+ inclusion appears acknowledged rhetorically but unsupported materially.

Key Shift:
Leadership transitioned to silence or *symbolic visibility* without substance, intensifying educators' sense of isolation and professional vulnerability.

3.1.4. Representation and Purposeful Hiring

2020:
In 2020, participants emphasized the power of representation, particularly as Black and LGBTQ+ educators whose presence expanded students' imaginations of possibility. Visibility itself was understood as a form of resistance and identity affirmation.

2025:
By 2025, representation remains crucial to students, but educators report significantly increased risk associated with being openly visible. Political climates have made identity disclosure, advocacy, and even casual self-reference more fraught. Participants now weigh safety considerations, professional stability, and community context before deciding how visible to be.

Key Shift:
Representation moved from being *strategically empowering* to *strategically risky*. Educators remain committed but engage in visibility with heightened calculation.

3.1.5. Legislative and Political Context

2020:
Participants in 2020 described the political landscape as fluctuating, tied closely to local elections, national rhetoric shifts, and ongoing debates

around LGBTQ+ rights. While concerning, policy impacts on educators felt uneven and varied by district.

2025:

By 2025, participants universally describe intensified legislative oversight, curriculum restrictions, bathroom/identity policies, and politicized school board climates. Many referenced the national political resurgence post-2023 as contributing to a widespread *chilling effect* across districts. Educators explicitly link political rhetoric, characterized by morale and law reversals, to shifts in community behavior, parental complaints, and administrative caution.

Key Shift:

Policy evolved from a *background factor* to a *daily, direct determinant* of educator behavior, curriculum, and emotional well-being.

3.1.6. Resilience, Emotional Labor, and the Practice of Care

2020:

In 2020, educators framed their work as deeply relational, focused on providing visibility, mentorship, and culturally responsive care. Emotional labor was present but manageable within relatively stable institutional contexts.

2025:

By 2025, emotional labor has intensified substantially. Educators now navigate anticipatory stress, political threats, parent hostility, and heightened surveillance, all while continuing to serve as trusted adults for LGBTQ+ youth. Many describe their care practices as intentional, adaptive, and quietly radical in the face of restrictive environments.

Key Shift:

Care shifted from *open affirmation* to *protective resistance*, demonstrating the resilience of LGBTQ+ educators and the emotional costs of teaching within politicized climates.

PART 3.2 – Participant-Based Comparison and Synthesis

The longitudinal perspective across participants, all Black and LGBTQ+ educators who were interviewed in 2020 and 2025, provides a detailed view of how each educator's experiences, strategies, and emotional landscape shifted over time. While all participants share common themes, adaptation, resilience, and shifting visibility, their stories also reveal distinct trajectories shaped by institutional context, locality, leadership response, and political climate.

Participant	2020 Summary	2025 Summary	Key Change
W.S. (A)	Visibility as direct resistance; representation as disruption.	Visibility carries greater risk; more cautious advocacy.	*Shift from open visibility to calculated presence.*
M.F. (B)	Faced disciplinary action for inclusive curriculum (e.g., Bayard Rustin).	Continues affirmation through arts and subtle strategies.	*Shift from overt curriculum inclusion to embedded affirmation.*
Q.T. (C)	GSAs as affirming spaces; strong sense of student reliance.	Stable support within higher education; curriculum unchanged.	*Local political systems have greater role to play combating national rhetoric/mandates*
M.F. (D)	Leadership silence equated to harm; lacked explicit allyship.	Administrators now use polished but hollow statements.	*Shift toward frustration with performative inclusion.*

W.S. (Participant A)

2018:

In 2018, W.S described his visibility as intrinsically political and affirming for students:

> *"As a gay Black man, you feel that connection [with a possible LGBTQ+ student] and commonality that there is "something" there. And you just want to make sure that support is there no matter what. Last year, a student of mine who was referred to me by his grandmother after he told her that he was gay was having issues knew he could come to me and have lunch and have that connectivity that he needed. And now his behavior has greatly improved. It's because he just feels normal with me!."* (W.S., 218)

His emphasis on representation framed visibility as a pedagogical act, one that challenged restrictive norms and expanded students' understanding of who belongs in academic and intellectual spaces.

2025:

By 2025, W.S.'s reflections reveal how political regression reshaped the stakes of visibility:

> *"The renewed political efforts... have created a chilling effect... while I have not and I never will, many educators understandably feel less secure in being visible advocates."* (K.W., 2025)

This shift demonstrates the pressures Black and LGBTQ+ educators faced under heightened legislative scrutiny. While his commitment to advocacy

endures, his methods have become more guarded and strategically calibrated to institutional climate.

Key Change / Continuity:
W.S.'s experience illustrates a transition from *public-facing visibility* to *protective, cautious visibility*. The political climate's intensification has not diminished his resolve; it has only reshaped how he enacts it.

M.F. (Participant B)
2020:
In 2018, M.F. recounted direct disciplinary consequences for supporting the LGBTQ+ figures at his school:

> *"Supporting LGBTQ+ students is just the right damn thing to do; I was willing to help facilitate a support group and send my students out of school resources even if it meant losing my job for it."* (M.F., 2018)

Such reprimands signal how curricular inclusion was policed, and the framing Black and/or queer history itself as contentious or inappropriate. M.F. 's account exemplifies how LGBTQ+ support was treated inherently political and/or inappropriate.

2025:
By 2025, M.F. emphasized a heightened political awareness among students alongside increased pedagogical constraint:

> *"Students are aware that LGBTQ+ identities are being debated politically... I am aware; and I still embed messages of affirmation into daily practice."* (M.F., 2025)

This embedding reflects a shift toward subtle, symbolic affirmation strategies that allow him to circumvent scrutiny while still nurturing student identity.

Key Change / Continuity:

M.L. 's pedagogical stance remains deeply affirming, but his methods now rely on the implicit messaging, and relational interactions rather than explicit curricular and supportive content. His story reflects adaptation, not a retreat/backtrack from his aims to support students.

Q.T. (Participant C)

2018:

In 2018, Q.T. highlighted the essential role of GSAs in creating belonging and relational safety:

> *"It makes it so the kids feel freer and it also makes it so that parental pushback or involvement is irrelevant and unneeded. These kids feel safer in that it's fine even if 'mom' has no idea what's going on. And I feel great in that in when they have nobody else, they at least have me If they can't be themselves at home, they know they have me—and they have our GSA."* (Q.T., 2018)

Her perspective underscores how LGBTQ+ educators and peers serve as anchors, trusted adults and individuals whose mere presence stabilizes students lacking affirmation in familial or community settings.

2025:

By contrast, her 2025 reflection portrays a rare sense of stability within education:

> *"While we have some pushback and political pressure, these ideals have not been supported by college administration... I have not been asked to change my curriculum or methods of support."* (Q.T., 2025)

The consistency of support suggests that some institutions, while still under ideological pressure, maintain greater autonomy and insulation. Q.T.'s experience stood in stark contrast to the heightened constraints experienced by other interviewees.

Key Change / Continuity:

Q.T. 's role and identity remain stable across time; what changes is not her practice, but the widening gap between supportive and non-supportive environments. The continuity of support suggests that protective policies and cultural norms can meaningfully shield Black and queer educators, and students, pushing back against national regression.

A.G. (Participant D)

2018:

In 2018 A.G. critiqued leadership's failure to explicitly include LGBTQ+ identities in diversity initiatives, and the role of conservatism in said exclusion:

> *"The school is STILL a very conservative school, located in a very conservative, religious, Catholic, majority-White part of the city. They have this attitude towards the kids that if you [the kid] don't bring it [being LGBTQ+] up, then we [the staff] won't. They are not going out of their way to create programs for these kids because in THEIR minds, they KNOW that NONE of the kids are going to be LGBTQ+! It's very sad how*
> *against how against the idea of being inclusive they are"* (A.G., 2020)

Her statement points to a crucial distinction between generalized diversity discourse and the explicit naming required to protect marginalized identities.

2025:

By 2025, her critique escalates, reflecting deepened frustration:

> *Some schools talk about diversity, but they mean race, not sexuality. Until leadership says LGBTQ+ out loud, the silence is the message. What we get is a kind of performative pacification: polished statements that don't become real support."* (A.G., 2025)

Here, A.G. captures the shift from passive silence to *active performance*, where institutions adopt polished rhetoric without implementing substantive protections or policy changes, particularly for LGBTQ+ students.

Key Change / Continuity:

The consistency of A.G.'s critique over time highlights that leadership's reluctance to meaningfully support LGBTQ+ educators is not new; however, by 2025, it feels more institutionalized and strategic. His experience illustrates the widening gap between stated values and lived realities.

Summary:

This analysis compares verbatim excerpts from the 2018-2020 interviews and the 2025 follow-up interviews. The data reveal both continuity and regression in LGBTQ+ educator advocacy under changing political climates.

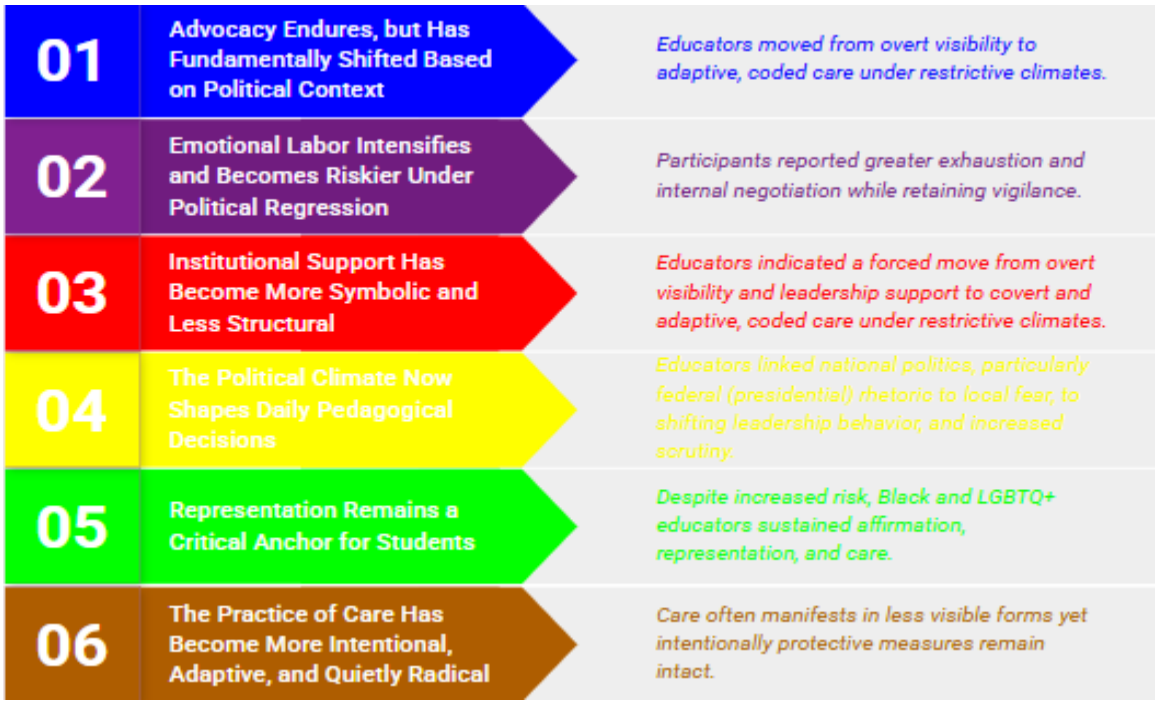
Across all participants, there is a consistent through-line of a continued commitment to LGBTQ+ student well-being and identity affirmation. However, the mode of advocacy has shifted: from visible and vocal inclusion to quieter, possibly more strategic, localized (i.e. school-based) efforts characterized by emotional labor and adaptive creativity.

The findings underscore the continued persistence of Black and LGBTQ+ educators as anchors within education, even as institutional protections

continue to waver or be eradicated. Their resilience demonstrates that visibility, though more cautious, remains a pedagogical act of care and resistance. However, what is not ignored is the idea that voting power to keep these things from happening is both paramount and a necessary undertaking.

PART 3.3 – Analytic Synthesis

Across all participants, longitudinal data illustrate five key themes:'



Across the five years of this longitudinal study, the experiences of Black and LGBTQ+ educators reveal a complex interplay between identity, policy volatility, professional risk, and relational care. When viewed through the lens of Positive Identity Development (PID) and the educator support frameworks established in the original 2020 dissertation, several overarching patterns emerge that deepen our understanding of how educators navigate increasingly politicized environments.

3.3.1. Advocacy Endures, but Has Fundamentally Shifted Based on Political Context

In 2020, participants described advocacy as a visible, often explicit component of their pedagogy, through inclusive curriculum, leading GSAs, purposeful representation, and publicly supporting LGBTQ+ youth. By 2025, that advocacy remains intact in mission but altered in method. Educators now employ subtle, coded, or embedded practices to communicate affirmation without triggering administrative or legislative scrutiny. This shift underscores a move from *declarative visibility* to *strategic visibility*, where educators assess the risks of openness while striving to preserve student support. Their resilience demonstrates that advocacy is not abandoned under pressure; it is reformulated into forms that can safely survive hostile climates.

3.3.2. Emotional Labor Intensifies and Becomes Riskier Under Political Regression

All participants articulated a heightened emotional burden in 2025 compared to 2020. The increased presence of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric at the federal and state levels, particularly in the period following Trump's 2023–2024 political resurgence, has produced a sense of hypervigilance. Educators now regularly anticipate parent complaints, administrative observation, community backlash, or legislative repercussions. This "anticipatory stress" amplifies the daily emotional labor required to teach, affirm, and model authenticity. This is especially true for Black and LGBTQ+ educators, whose intersectional identities position them at the nexus of multiple cultural and political threats.

3.3.3. Institutional Support Has Become More Symbolic and Less Structural

Participants noted a stark contrast between the forms of support offered by leadership in 2020 versus 2025. While some administrators remain verbally supportive, their actions often fall short of substantive protection. Educators described "performative pacification," mostly through the form of polished statements or general appeals to "belonging" that avoid

naming LGBTQ+ identities directly. This shift reflects a broader organizational trend in which schools attempt to mediate public perception without committing to structural advocacy. As a result, educators have learned to expect rhetorical reassurance but little intervention, a dynamic that erodes trust and exacerbates feelings of professional and personal erasure.

3.3.4. The Political Climate Now Shapes Daily Pedagogical Decisions

In 2020, educators framed policy as a backdrop, an influential but not omnipresent factor. By 2025, policy has migrated from the background to the foreground of decision-making. Participants explicitly linked national political shifts to local administrative behaviors, parent attitudes, curricular limitations, and the overall emotional temperature of their schools. This confirms a core finding from the 2020 dissertation: LGBTQ+-affirming practice is structurally mediated. Educators now edit lessons, remove resources, change terminology, or avoid certain topics altogether because the political climate renders everyday pedagogy a potential site of conflict.

3.3.5. Representation Remains a Critical Anchor for Students

Despite the shifting political conditions, the significance of Black and LGBTQ+ educators as models of possibility has not diminished. Students continue to view them as trusted adults who embody authenticity, survival, and resilience. In both 2020 and 2025, participants reported that students seek them out for support, sometimes quietly, always urgently. This consistency affirms the dissertation's finding that such educators function as "identity anchors," i.e., central figures who help LGBTQ+ youth develop confidence, competence, and connection in school environments that often fail to affirm them.

3.3.6. The Practice of Care Has Become More Intentional, Adaptive, and Quietly Radical

Across all participants, the longitudinal narrative illustrates that care, particularly care for LGBTQ+ students, is the constant thread. Yet by 2025, that care often manifests in less visible forms: tailored one-on-one conversations, careful use of inclusive language, discreet resource-sharing, or quietly maintaining affirming micro-spaces. These adaptive practices reveal a subtle, often under-recognized dimension of queer pedagogy: **care as resistance**. Even when policy and culture restrict what can be said or shown publicly, educators continue to construct spaces of safety within the constraints they face.

PART 4 – IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The longitudinal evidence across 2020–2025 reveals a dramatic shift in the conditions under which LGBTQ+ educators, especially Black and LGBTQ+ educators, teach, advocate, and build community. These shifts demand a corresponding evolution in how educational institutions, policymakers, and preparation programs conceptualize safety, inclusion, and structural support. Below, we outline key implications and actionable recommendations informed by the data, existing research (2023–2025), and the broader legal and political landscape.

Implication	Summary
Symbolic Inclusion Is No Longer Enough	*School and District Leaders must transition from Insufficient and generic equity moves to explicit LGBTQ+ protections.*
Advocating for LGBTQ+ Students Has Become Coded and Covert	*School Leaders & Wellness Teams must remain reasonably vigilant and utilize coded practices to support LGBTQ+ students.*
Policy Environment Directly Shapes Educator Visibility and Safety	*Local Policymakers must increase LGBTQ+ student and staff climate positivity and teacher risk, combating National (Federal) mandates.*
Educator Preparation Must Address Political Navigation Skills	*Teacher Education Programs must embrace equity while preparing educators for political teaching environments.*
Black and LGBTQ+ Educators Are Carrying Disproportionate Emotional and Representational Burdens	*Districts and HR/Recruitment Teams must reduce social and emotional advocacy labor through purposeful hiring and support methods.*

Implication 4.1: Symbolic Inclusion Is No Longer Enough

In 2025, educators repeatedly described leadership responses as "performative," "generic," or "noncommittal," signaling a disconnect between statements of inclusion and tangible protections. This demonstrates that belonging to a language without explicit LGBTQ+ protections not only fails to reassure educators; it increases mistrust.

Recommendations for School & District Leaders

A. **Adopt explicit, LGBTQ+-affirming administrative policies** that clearly name sexual orientation and gender identity (rather than relying on broad terms like "diversity" or "equity").
B. **Provide clear, schoolwide protocols** for responding to harassment, parent complaints about LGBTQ+ curriculum, and threats to staff visibility.
C. **Conduct annual climate audits** with anonymous educator input to assess areas of risk, suppression, or silence.
D. **Implement professional learning focused on LGBTQ+ inclusion** that moves beyond awareness toward actionable skill-building (e.g., responding to targeted political pressure, protecting queer educators, understanding FERPA/Title IX boundaries).
E. **Create internal rapid-response teams** so educators are not left to individually navigate legal or parental challenges.

Implication 4.2: Advocating for LGBTQ+ Students Has Become Coded and Covert

Educators are increasingly embedding support through subtle daily practices. While adaptive, this "quiet care" should not be the primary strategy for protecting LGBTQ+ students. Institutions must create conditions where overt care is possible and safeguarded.

Recommendations for School Leaders & Wellness Teams

A. **Protect and sustain GSAs, Queer-Straight Alliances, Pride clubs, or similar groups**, even if rebranded.
B. **Provide discreet channels for students to seek support** when staff cannot openly advertise resources.
C. **Recognize LGBTQ+ advocacy as a form of emotional labor** and incorporate it into workload/release-time discussions.
D. **Implement cross-departmental safety planning** (counseling, DEI, admin, social workers) for moments of political escalation.

Implication 4.3: Policy Environment Directly Shapes Educator Visibility and Safety

Your participants were clear: local and national political climates now dictate how much LGBTQ+ educators can show, say, or teach. In highly restrictive states, visibility carries genuine professional risk.

Recommendations for Policymakers

A. **Codify nondiscrimination protections** for LGBTQ+ educators and students at the district and state levels.
B. **Ensure protections for inclusive curriculum** under academic freedom standards, especially Black and LGBTQ+ historical content.
C. **Expand funding for LGBTQ+ student and educator supports**, including mental health services, community partnerships, and campus resource centers.
D. **Reject or revise "gag-rule" legislation** that restricts honest teaching about gender, sexuality, race, or identity development.
E. **In states with hostile climates, provide legal guidance** to districts and educators regarding their rights, liabilities, and available protections.

Implication 4.4: Educator Preparation Must Address Political Navigation Skills

Traditional teacher preparation programs do not train educators, especially [Black] LGBTQ+ educators, to navigate hostile political environments, anticipate backlash, or engage in protective advocacy.

Recommendations for Teacher Education Programs

A. **Integrate coursework on political literacy and legal frameworks**, including how national rhetoric influences school climate.
B. **Provide training on identity-affirming pedagogy** grounded in frameworks like Positive Identity Development (PID) and queer pedagogy

C. **Build partnerships with LGBTQ+ community organizations** so future teachers have external networks of support.
D. **Prepare educators to create micro-affirming spaces** even when formal policies restrict outward LGBTQ+ visibility.

Implication 4.5: Black and LGBTQ+ Educators Are Carrying Disproportionate Emotional and Representational Burdens

Across 2020 and 2025, educators described how students, particularly Black and LGBTQ+ students, gravitate toward them for safety and identity affirmation. This "anchor role" is powerful but can also be isolating without institutional supports. The longitudinal data affirm a foundational truth: **LGBTQ+ students thrive when LGBTQ+ educators can be visible, honest, and safe.** Without institutional backing, the students who rely on these educators lose consistent access to the supports that facilitate Positive Identity Development (confidence, competence, and connectedness)

Recommendations for Districts and HR/Recruitment Teams

A. **Recruit and retain LGBTQ+ educators of color** through targeted hiring, affinity groups, and leadership pathways.
B. **Include LGBTQ+ representation goals in district DEI strategic plans**, not as diversity tokens/quotas, but as essential identity mirrors for students.
C. **Offer wellness resources tailored to intersectional identity stressors**, such as affinity counseling groups or external mental health partnerships.
D. **Frame LGBTQ+ educator safety as a student outcome issue**, not just a personnel issue.

PART 5 – CONCLUSION

The 2020–2025 longitudinal comparison affirms and extends what my 2020 dissertation first illuminated: Black and LGBTQ+ educators operate as critical social supports for LGBTQ+ students, particularly those navigating the intersections of race, sexuality, gender expression, and adolescence. In 2020, these educators described their work as rooted in what my dissertation framed, via Positive Identity Development (PID), as the cultivation of **competence, confidence, and connection** with both their students and colleagues. They fostered safety, modeled authenticity, and built relationships that served as counterweights to hostile school climates.

Five years later, those commitments remain, but the political terrain surrounding them has shifted dramatically. What the original dissertation documented as *affirming visibility* has, in many contexts, become *careful visibility*. The supports examined in 2020 (GSAs, inclusive curriculum, teacher representation, leadership stances, and federal protections) are all still impactful, but they now operate under intensified scrutiny, ideological polarization, and backtracking of social justice promises (think of the figurative and literal erasure of the Black Lives Matter Plaza in our Nation's Capital).

Across interviews, educators articulated a through line: *their students still need them, perhaps now more than ever*. Yet the strategies required to provide affirmation have transformed. Instead of overt declarations of support which at one time could have been possibly embedded into instruction, now entails a greater emphasis on interpersonal relationships, and subtle signals of safety. This shift demonstrates a profound truth about LGBTQ+ educator advocacy: it is responsive, contextual, and deeply relational. What persists is not the visibility itself but the **ethic of protection** that underlies it.

The data across five years also reveal broader systemic implications. Educators consistently referenced the national political climate, colloquially deemed "Trump Era 2," as directly influencing school-level attitudes, administrative responses, and local climates of fear or caution. This echoes the 2020 dissertation's assertion that LGBTQ+ inclusive practice is never solely about teacher will; it is and will always be structurally shaped by policy, leadership, and community ideology. The chilling effects educators described then (performative leadership, censorship, and politicized oversight) are all represented; however, now the erosion of institutional conditions that once enabled fuller advocacy is more apparent.

Yet, despite these challenges, Black and LGBTQ+ educators continue to serve as cultural anchors within their schools. The longitudinal findings reaffirm what was evident in the original dissertation: their presence alone challenges narratives of impossibility for Black and LGBTQ+ youth. Through shared cultural and social relativity, they open pathways for students to imagine identities grounded in dignity rather than deficit. They do this even as the personal cost rises.

Ultimately, this longitudinal analysis affirms that the resilience of Black and LGBTQ+ educators cannot be the primary safety net for LGBTQ+ youth. Their work and care are essential, but are ultimately insufficient without systemic support (i.e., legislation and voting power). Schools, districts, state leaders, and policymakers must recognize that educator advocacy endures, but it should not endure alone. Safeguarding LGBTQ+ youth and the educators who serve them requires structural commitments that ensure safety is not dependent on individual courage. This means voting to remove those in power whose only aim is to destroy the seemingly false promises made five years ago.

As with the dissertation, the heart of this work rests in a simple, enduring truth expressed by a participant in 2020: "*At least they have me*. Five

years later, the data show that they still do. But the question that remains is whether our systems will rise to meet the moment, so that [Black] LGBTQ+ students and educators no longer have to rely on individual sacrifice to experience dignity, belonging, and possibility.

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