

Parents under pressure: Findings from a national study of the parents of gender and/or sexuality diverse (GSD) students

Analysis of 123 online forum posts from parents of a gender and/or sexuality diverse (GSD) child identified six main ways these parents engage in additional labour as they navigate the schooling system.

1. Educating the Educated



Parents had to personally educate teachers and schools about GSD issues, as schools had little knowledge of how to support GSD children and often did not take the initiative to find solutions to problems exacerbated by their policies or systems.

2. Seeking External Support

Parents report that finding support for their GSD children is laborious, and often financially burdening. The Australian Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools Association recommend a 1:500 ratio of counsellors to school students.¹ However, no state meets this. In NSW the current ratio is 1:743.²



3. Checking In



Parents of GSD students report regularly 'checking in' to support and advocate for their child, through meetings, phone calls, emails and letters. This additional labour goes above and beyond what is typically required or expected of parents of school children.

4. Addressing Marginalisation and Abuse

Parents struggle with GSD students being held responsible for 'causing' victimisation by their peers, due to their visible or articulated differences. Parents would like to see schools take responsibility for teaching acceptance of diversity.



5. Dealing with Bureaucracy



Parents report experiencing schools' delayed responses to their requests for their GSD child. This was due to poor communication among staff and bureaucratic impediments.

6. Curriculum Surveillance and Monitoring

Parents report monitoring the curriculum and recommending inclusive content to protect their children, as framings of the body, gender and sexuality identity within the formal curriculum is often particularly sensitive for GSD students.



References:

1 Australian Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools Association (2021). Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Submission 8. Accessed from https://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0015/241080/sub419-mental-health.pdf

2 Tania Ferfolja, Jacqueline Ullman (2023, under review). Australian parents of gender and sexuality diverse children: labouring through the schooling experience, School of Education, Western Sydney University

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