



Welcoming Schools Seal of Excellence

Benefits of Earning the Seal of Excellence

Achieving the Seal of Excellence provides multifaceted benefits for students, educators, families, and school communities.

- + Overall school climate reflects safety and belonging for students across identities.
- + Students actively lean into upstander behaviors and bullying interventions.
- + Students trust educators and feel safe in the classroom, seeing themselves reflected in lessons and books.
- + Educators are confident and equipped to support students using an anti-bias, anti-racist framework.
- + Families and trusted adults are engaged in school activities that embrace themes of love and respect.

Welcoming Schools Seal of Excellence

The Welcoming Schools Seal of Excellence is a recognition for schools dedicated to improving school climate through the Welcoming Schools Approach. Attaining the Welcoming Schools Seal of Excellence is the most effective and proven path to improving the overall school climate to ensure all students are in safe and affirming classrooms.

Schools gain the Seal of Excellence by achieving and exceeding required benchmarks for professional development, inclusive school policies, family engagement, and bullying intervention with direct 1:1 support from Welcoming Schools Staff. The Seal of Excellence is nationally recognized and a public display of school inclusion to the broad school community.

Achieving the Seal of Excellence

To achieve the Seal of Excellence, schools must demonstrate nine key benchmarks through action and documentation (detailed in the following pages). The benchmarks represent the key aspects of school climate that enrich the lives of students and lead to stronger outcomes. The Welcoming Schools Approach is an intersectional, anti-racist lens dedicated to actionable policies and practices. We uplift school communities with critical tools to embrace family diversity, create LGBTQ+ and gender-inclusive schools, prevent bias-based bullying, and support transgender and non-binary students.

Each benchmark applies practices and principles that contribute to what it means to be a welcoming school. Educators become more confident when they can enact classroom practices that interrupt hurtful stereotypes and biases. Actively and consistently interrupting bias-based bullying allows students to reach their full potential. Adults in a school community set the tone for the school climate through values and actions. Therefore, leadership, professional development, and family involvement are key benchmarks. Long-term, sustainable, institutional change occurs when all members of the school community have a shared understanding and commitment to create a school where all students feel welcome.

Time, Commitment, and Support

Planning and implementation of the Seal of Excellence takes between 2-3 years to complete. Welcoming Schools Staff will consult the school's Leadership Team to ensure benchmarks are met, guide the scope and sequence of student-facing lessons, and support policy development. Leadership Team members are encouraged to be available to fully participate and guide the work for the course of the implementation.

Celebration & Banner Presentation

Following the successful completion of all benchmarks, the school is encouraged to host a school and community-facing ceremony where the Welcoming School Seal of Excellence Banner is presented along with congratulatory words from the Leadership Team and Welcoming Schools Staff.

[Request your Seal of Excellence consultation](#) from the Welcoming Schools Staff today by emailing us at welcomingschools@hrc.org

Seal of Excellence Implementation Guide

Schools earning the Welcoming Schools Seal of Excellence will demonstrate and document the following benchmarks:

1. Policies and Procedures

Policies, regulations, and/or procedures are in place and enumerated to include all aspects of diversity, including actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

Accepted Supporting Documentation: Full policy text or handbooks, parent and student forms, etc.

Examples of Policies & Procedures:

- + Handbook section enumerating a dedication to an inclusive curriculum and instructional strategies.
- + Anti-bullying and/or nondiscrimination policies that specifically enumerate sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression as protected categories.
- + Policies or signage noting that all-gender restrooms and private changing areas are available to all students.
- + Updated forms used in your school (registration, attendance, class lists, seating charts, etc.) that affirm the names and pronouns of students and caregivers.
 - Gender-inclusive language referring to children's guardians is utilized on school forms ("Parent", "guardian", "caregiver").
- + Dress code policies are gender neutral and equally enforced for students of all gender identities and expressions, and are free from racial bias.
 - Dress code policies describe appropriate clothing without assigning clothing options to particular genders.
- + A documented procedure is in place for anonymous bullying reporting, and all students, staff, and families are informed of this process.

2. Leadership Team

A Welcoming Schools Leadership Team is established or integrated into an existing committee. The Leadership Team will include a cross-section of the school community, including administration, classroom teachers, and non-instructional staff. The team will meet monthly during the academic year.

Accepted Supporting Documentation: Committee roster, meeting agendas, meeting schedule and/or minutes.

Examples of Established Committees:

- + Social and Emotional Learning
- + DEIB
- + Professional Development
- + Culture & Climate Team
- + General Leadership Team*
 - **This team would incorporate a section of their monthly agenda to review policies, practices, and updates relevant to the Welcoming Schools program.*

3. Professional Development

School staff must complete the following Welcoming Schools modules:

- + Embracing All Families (**Elementary only**)
- + Creating LGBTQ+ Inclusive Schools
- + Creating Gender Inclusive Schools
- + Preventing Bias-Based Bullying
- + Supporting Transgender and Non-Binary Students
- + Intersectionality: School Practices with an Intersectional Lens

Module delivery will take place over a period of 2-3 years and must be delivered by an authorized Welcoming Schools Facilitator. **If your school or school district is not actively engaged with Welcoming Schools, [click here to learn how you can book a training today!](#)**

Accepted Supportive Documentation: Sessions reported by the Welcoming Schools Facilitator in the Welcoming Schools data reporting system.

4. Planned Lessons or Activities

Annually, students in each grade level will be provided with Welcoming Schools resources embedded in content area curriculum mapping or lesson plans, such as documented educational projects, independent student projects (visual art, digital, dance, etc.), or Welcoming Schools writing prompts (poem, song, short story). The number of resources required to be implemented differs based on grade level.

Requirements For Elementary and K-8th Schools:

- + Every student receives at least three Welcoming Schools lesson plans, one of which must include participation in Welcoming Schools' National Day of Reading.

Requirements For Secondary and 6th-8th Schools:

- + Every student receives at least one Welcoming Schools lesson plan **in addition to** participating in Welcoming Schools' National Day of Reading.

Accepted Supportive Lesson Plan Documentation:

- + Scope and sequence of lessons
- + Samples of student work
- + Reflective statements by classroom teachers
- + Videos of student activities

What You Should Use: Welcoming Schools Lesson Plans

- + [Creating LGBTQ+ Inclusive Classrooms and Schools](#)
- + [Creating Gender-Expansive Classrooms & Supporting Transgender and Non-Binary Students](#)
- + [Welcoming All Families in Your School Community](#)
- + [Preventing Bias-Based Bullying](#)
- + [LGBTQ+ History and Pride](#)

5. Bulletin Boards/Newsletters

School visual displays (bulletin boards, newsletters, posters, and student artwork) portray Welcoming Schools themes throughout the school.

Accepted Supportive Documentation: Pictures of the artwork/displays.

What You Should Use: Welcoming Schools Themed Visuals

- + Posters featuring diverse people and families
- + Safe space stickers and posters
- + NEA Bully-Free Starts with Me campaign posters
- + Bulletin board displays highlighting diversity and inclusion (recommended to use WS art activities so as to include student work)
- + Welcoming Schools decals or posters

6. Family Engagement

Host at least one Family Engagement Event for families and community members, sharing the Welcoming Schools approach through panels, movie nights, book readings, or informational sessions.

Accepted Supportive Documentation Examples: Event flyers, session evaluations, pictures, videos, or agendas.

What You Should Use: Family Engagement Event Examples

- + [Family Diversity Panel Discussion](#)
- + Screening and Discussion of a Welcoming Schools film
 - o [What Can We Do? Bias, Bullying, and Bystanders](#)
 - o [What Do You Know?](#)
- + [Evening Workshop on Answering Difficult Questions](#)
- + [Family Book Bag Project Night](#)

7. Books and Resources

Books from Welcoming Schools booklists are publicly available to all students in the library/media center and classrooms.

Accepted Supportive Documentation: Book inventory, photos of books on shelves or students reading books, etc.

What You Should Use: Elementary Welcoming Schools Booklists

- + [Embracing All Families Booklist](#)
- + [Creating Gender Inclusive Schools Booklist](#)
- + [Creating LGBTQ+ Inclusive Schools Booklist](#)
- + [Preventing Bias-Based Bullying Booklist](#)
- + [Supporting Transgender & Non-Binary Students Booklist](#)
- + [LGBTQ+ History Booklist](#)
- + [Top Books for An Elementary Classroom](#)
- + [Exploring & Challenging Racism Booklist \(Pre-K - 8th\)](#)
- + [WS & American Association of School Librarians Top 12 Recommended Books](#)
- + [Welcoming Schools Pride Booklist](#)

What You Should Use: Secondary Welcoming Schools Booklists

- + [LGBTQ+ Inclusive Booklist for Middle School](#)
- + [LGBTQ+ Inclusive Booklist for High School](#)
- + [Preventing Bias-Based Bullying for Secondary Schools](#)
- + [Supporting Transgender & Non-Binary Students Booklist for Secondary Schools](#)
- + [LGBTQ+ History Booklist for Secondary Schools](#)
- + [Cultivating Gender Inclusion Booklist for Secondary Schools](#)
- + [WS & American Association of School Librarians Top 12 Recommended Books](#)
- + [Welcoming Schools Pride Booklist](#)

8. School Climate Assessment*

Welcoming Schools Climate Assessment for school staff to gauge the success of developing a more inclusive school by partnering with the Welcoming Schools program. An optional, student-facing climate assessment is also available and encouraged, but not required.

Accepted Supportive Documentation: Pre- and post-assessments.

**The Staff Climate Assessment and accompanying comparative analysis are only available to schools that sign on to the SOE program before engaging with any Welcoming Schools trainings. Schools that wish to utilize the Student Climate Assessment can do so at any point within their first year of SOE participation, including after initial staff training delivery.*

9. Additional Artifacts

Demonstration of larger community-based support.

Additional Artifact Examples:

- + Documentation of Welcoming Schools modules delivered to non-instructional and support staff.
- + Establishment of a Diversity Club or Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) with student guidance.
- + School concerts/assemblies promoting Welcoming Schools themes.
- + Integration of the Welcoming Schools approach with other social and emotional learning and/or bullying prevention efforts in the school.

Accepted Supportive Documentation: Event or club flyers, training session report within the Welcoming Schools system, videos or photos of community events.