

Transgender students more likely than cisgender peers to seek support from school staff, study finds

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Transgender students are more likely to seek support from school staff and less likely to seek support from their parents when compared to their

cisgender peers, according to a study from researchers at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and New York University.

The study, [published](#) in *JAMA Pediatrics*, found among students who felt depressed or anxious, transgender students were 74% less likely than their cisgender peers to seek help from parents than from adults in schools.

It also found transgender students were 25% less likely than cisgender students to seek [support](#) from friends compared to adults in schools, and 48% less likely to seek support from siblings than from adults in schools.

The study evaluated data from the 2021 Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey, a survey of 92,316 [high school students](#) backed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and administered by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. In that survey, 3,957 students identified themselves as transgender.

Mollie McQuillan, assistant professor of educational leadership and policy analysis at UW–Madison and lead author of the study, says the findings show the urgent need for adequate training for school staff on how to best support [transgender youth](#).

"We know schools are often sites of shame, victimization, and bullying for transgender students—but now we also know of their potential to serve as vital sites for support," she says.

"Like all students, trans and nonbinary students need support from multiple sources. Our results point to the critical role of PK-12 school staff in affirming and supporting trans and nonbinary students, especially when mental health concerns emerge."

McQuillan says the findings also highlight the danger of restrictive

education laws related to transgender students.

"In the last five years, anti-LGBTQ+ state bills have dramatically expanded in number," says McQuillan, who co-authored [a study on the proliferation of such bills](#) earlier this year. "These bills dissolve and prevent school environments in which transgender students can seek and receive support that could save their lives."

McQuillan co-authored the new study with Joseph Cimpian, professor of economics and [education policy](#) at NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, and UW-Madison School of Education doctoral students Erin Gill and Benjamin Lebovitz.

Cimpian says the study breaks new ground in understanding transgender students' well-being.

"Our study confirms the higher rates of victimization for trans youth that we suspected from prior work, but our study also shows how trans youth are turning to teachers and other school staff for support, which is new," he says.

In addition to its findings about [social support](#), the analysis found [transgender](#) students reported over twice the risk of bullying, skipping school due to feeling unsafe, and feelings of not belonging at school compared to their cisgender peers.

Transgender students also faced greater risk of anxiety and reported two to three times the risk of depression, self-harming behavior, considering suicide, planning suicide, and attempting suicide compared to cisgender students.

More information: *JAMA Pediatrics* (2024). [DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2024.3079](#)

Provided by University of Wisconsin-Madison

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