



# LGBTQ+ Student Programs

## ISSUE

According to data provided by the California Community College (CCC) Chancellor's office, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ+) students are experiencing a disproportionate impact in the following areas:

- Retention from fall to spring semester at the same college;
- Completion of college level Math and English in the first year;
- Completion of a degree or certificate; and,
- Transfer to a 4-year university.

The LGBTQ+ student population of the Riverside Community College District (RCCD) is approximately 3,101 per the CCC Chancellor's office website, though this number is likely higher as students may choose not to disclose their gender or sexuality. National data shows an upward trend of people identifying as LGBTQ+, with most recent college student rates at 10% (American College Health Association, 2016), and one study reporting rates as high as 20% for people age 18-34 (GLAAD, 2017). Additionally, approximately 70% of LGBTQ+ students across the California Community Colleges are students of color.

LGBTQ+ people encounter familial, social, economic and educational instability, which inhibits their ability to succeed academically and holistically:

- 32% of LGBTQ+ people have a household income below \$20,000, and 55% have a household income under \$40,000. (Mental Health America, 2019)
- LGBTQ+ students feel campuses are less welcoming and safe, and report a lower sense of belonging than their heterosexual and cisgender peers. (Undergraduate Student Experience in the Research University Survey, 2016)
- LGBTQ+ students experience higher rates of "academic impediments" - anxiety, depression, discrimination, drug use, eating disorders, roommate difficulties and financial stress than their heterosexual and cisgender peers. (ACHA-National College Health Assessment, 2016)
- LGBTQ+ students experience higher rates of psychological disorders, self-harm, and suicide than their heterosexual and cisgender peers. (JED Foundation, 2016)
- Among California Community Colleges, LGBTQ+ students have the highest rates of food and housing insecurity, with transgender students having the highest rate at 37%. (Hope Center, 2019)

Of note, there is a lack of direct, accessible data regarding retention and completion. We are reliant on limited local, state, and national data to assist in identifying inequities faced by LGBTQ+ students, which we know to have an impact on academic success and retention.



# LGBTQ+ Student Programs (continued)

## BACKGROUND

The California State Legislature passed two bills regarding the LGBTQ+ population to support LGBTQ+ faculty, staff and students requests for assistance:

- Assembly Bill 620 (Block, 2011) requires the CCC to collect aggregate demographic information regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression of students and requests annual transmittal of summary demographic reporting to the Legislature and posting of such summary information on the CCC Chancellor's office website.
- Assembly Bill 1018 (Reyes, 2017) mandates every community college board to develop and maintain a Student Equity Plan to receive Student Success Funding to include homeless and LGBTQ+ students in every category within the plan.
- Senate Bill 179 (2017) streamlines the process of requesting a gender change court order, an updated birth certificate, and a updated driver's license. It removes the requirement of a physician's declaration for gender marker changes and allows a "non-binary" gender marker option on these documents.

With these new bills, enhanced efforts to support the needs of the LGBTQ+ population at RCCD were furthered at the colleges.

Norco College (NC) became one of seven community colleges in this state to have a "pride" center following the first CCC LGBTQ+ Summit in 2017. This "Unity Zone" (named by the students) serves both LGBTQ+ and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students. In 2011, NC allocated physical space for students to meet. Utilizing resources provided by the RCCD Office of Diversity, NC began the process of changing the college's culture by initiating the "Ally" Safe Zone program. Deliberately, all constituent groups of the college were included in the voluntary two to three-hour trainings based on a national curriculum. For faculty, the training was also approved by the Professional Development Committee of the Academic Senate for faculty "flex" credit (a required component of the faculty contract). The Ally Training is both formal and informal, offered in a seminar format including exercises related to building empathy and understanding. Ally placards can be found in every department, faculty often include the logo on their course syllabi, and most members include the logo on their email signature. The college's very successful semester-based "Read to Succeed" program hosted its first LGBTQ+ author/book in spring 2020.

Riverside City College (RCC) has actively trained over 100 faculty, staff, and administrators in their semesterly 4-hour LGBTQ+ Ally Trainings. Student employee trainings began during the 2019-20 academic year. Speakers have been invited to the RCC campus to discuss LGBTQ+ issues. There is a Sexuality and Gender Awareness club on campus for students to participate in, and RCC students, faculty, and staff have participated in the annual CCC LGBTQ+ Summit on multiple occasions. Faculty have also begun conversations about creating an LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum. Most recently, RCC has created an LGBTQ+ Association for Student Success and Equity (LASSE), with goals to: increase awareness about the LGBTQ+ community; develop a support network for LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and staff; coordinate activities that promote visibility and equity for LGBTQ+ people; promote the successful attainment of LGBTQ+ students' educational goals; assist the college in addressing the unique needs of LGBTQ+ students; and more. RCC was also awarded a \$2000 CTA grant to pilot an LGBTQ+ Mentor Program beginning Fall 2020. This program will pair faculty and staff mentors with LGBTQ+ students to support students' educational and holistic success.

Moreno Valley College (MVC) included the creation of an LGBTQ+ "Pride Center" in its new Welcome Center Building as part of its planned Common Ground center that will also house physical space for the college's Puente, Umoja, and Undocumented Student Support Program. The college holds a Diversity Summit each spring during which LGBTQ+ groups are a regular focus. Each fall, MVC has hosted a "Drag Show", a Q&A panel, and a screening of a relevant films to educate the campus about LGBTQ+ culture and history. There is an Annual



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Diversity Conference with faculty, staff, administrators, and students. In addition, the college attends the annual CCC LGBTQ+ Summit. In the most recent Summit an MVC faculty member facilitated one of the breakout sessions. The college has hosted annual Ally trainings for faculty, staff, administrators and student employees; and plans for annual LGBTQ+ Pride month activities in May.

In 2019, Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley released a video addressing the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ students in the CCC system. In it, he stated:

1. the need for increasing the number of campus pride centers with a professional staff member
2. creating inclusive campus environments
3. mandating annual LGBTQ+ trainings for students, faculty, classified professionals, and administrators
4. offering more LGBTQ+-affirming mental health counseling
5. developing inclusive curriculum, programs, events, and activities.

In alignment with the Guided Pathways initiative and the California Community Colleges' Vision for Success, all students should receive support services that make it easier to get the help they need to succeed academically.

## ACTION

Based on the above stated challenges, legislation, and guidance, the following actions are recommended.

- Seek funding to create and expand LGBTQ+ campus resource centers at RCC, MVC, and NC to provide direct LGBTQ+ student support that reduces or eliminates any barriers to academic success and improves retention and completion rates. This should include:
  - a) Facilities
  - b) At least one permanent, full-time, qualified professional staff at each campus to develop and provide programming and services to meet LGBTQ+ students' socio-cultural needs and improve educational outcomes (\$125,000-\$150,000/staff member/year)
  - c) Wrap-around services, including those addressing mental health and basic needs insecurities
- Enhance data collection and make public annual aggregate demographic information regarding the sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression of RCCD students in total and by individual college. This data should then be used to better assess student retention and completion as well as other measures to determine and correct inequitable policies, procedures, and practices.
- Conduct biennial campus climate surveys at each campus that include LGBTQ+ students' experiences and needs
- Create and develop diversity and equity initiatives that are intersectional and include sexual orientation, gender identity, race, and ethnicity
  - a) Create a formalized, institutional program for mandatory annual training for faculty, staff, administrators, and students on LGBTQ+ issues and advocacy
  - b) Hire additional LGBTQ+ faculty and staff

