

Promoting LGBT Inclusion in Education: The Role of School Policies and Implementation in Schools

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Abstract

This research explores the role of school policies in promoting LGBT inclusion in education and the strategies that schools can use to effectively implement these policies. The findings indicate that non-discrimination policies, gender-neutral restrooms and facilities, inclusive curriculum, staff training, and support for LGBT student groups are effective ways to promote LGBT inclusion in schools. The study also suggests that schools should develop a comprehensive plan, involve all stakeholders, provide training, regularly review and update policies, monitor and enforce policies, and celebrate diversity to effectively implement these policies. These strategies can help create a safe and inclusive environment for LGBT students, promote acceptance and understanding, and ensure that all students are protected from harassment, bullying, and other forms of discrimination.

Introduction

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) students face various forms of discrimination in their daily lives, particularly in educational institutions. The struggle for acceptance and equality has been a long-standing battle for the LGBTQ+ community. Even in the modern era, discrimination and prejudice against LGBT students persist in various aspects of life, including school and universities. This essay will discuss the various types of discrimination faced by LGBT students, including verbal and physical harassment, social stigma, and exclusion from educational programs and activities [1]-[4]. The paper will also provide insights into the effects of such discrimination on the mental health and academic performance of LGBT students.

Before promoting LGBT inclusion in education, it is essential to understand the challenges that LGBT students face in schools. Studies have shown that LGBT students are more likely to experience bullying, harassment, and discrimination compared to their heterosexual peers. This can have a significant impact on their mental health, with LGBT students being more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. Moreover, LGBT students may feel isolated and excluded from the school community, which can lead to lower academic achievement and disengagement from school [5]-[9]. For example, a study found that LGBT students were more likely to miss school due to safety concerns. Therefore, promoting LGBT inclusion in education is not only essential for the well-being of LGBT students but also for creating a positive learning environment for all students.

Verbal harassment, including name-calling and homophobic slurs, is one of the most common forms of discrimination faced by LGBT students. According to a survey conducted by GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network), almost 85% of LGBT students have reported experiencing verbal harassment in school. Verbal harassment can have long-lasting effects on an individual's mental health, leading to low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety [10]–[13]. Physical harassment, including violence and assault, is another form of discrimination faced by LGBT students. According to a national survey conducted by GLSEN, almost 25% of LGBT students reported experiencing physical harassment in school. The survey also revealed that more than 10% of LGBT students were physically assaulted due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBT students also face social stigma and exclusion from their peers, teachers, and school staff. Social stigma refers to the negative attitudes and beliefs that people hold about individuals who do not conform to traditional gender roles and sexual orientations [14]–[17]. Social stigma can create a hostile environment for LGBT students, leading to their isolation and exclusion from social activities.

LGBT students also face discrimination when it comes to educational programs and activities. Many schools and universities do not provide resources and support systems for LGBT students, making it difficult for them to access opportunities that are available to their peers. This discrimination can take various forms, including the denial of academic opportunities, such as scholarships and internships, and exclusion from extracurricular activities [18]–[21].

Policies to promote LGBT inclusion in education:

Non-discrimination policies:

Non-discrimination policies are an essential tool for ensuring that all students feel safe, supported, and valued in their learning environments. These policies are designed to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, ensuring that all students are protected from harassment, bullying, and other forms of discrimination. The creation and implementation of non-discrimination policies is a crucial step towards fostering an inclusive and equitable environment for all students [22]–[25].

Sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are all deeply personal and integral aspects of a person's identity. Unfortunately, discrimination based on these characteristics remains prevalent in many areas of society, including schools. Discrimination can manifest in many forms, including verbal harassment, physical violence, exclusion, and denial of services or opportunities. These forms of discrimination can be devastating to students, leading to negative impacts on mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being [26]–[29]. Non-discrimination policies work to mitigate these harms by providing clear guidelines for behavior and consequences for violations. By explicitly stating that discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression is prohibited, schools send a message that such behavior will not be tolerated. This can help create a culture of respect and inclusivity, where all students feel welcome and supported.

However, the mere existence of non-discrimination policies is not enough. Schools must also work to ensure that these policies are enforced and that students are educated on their rights and responsibilities. This can involve training for staff and students, providing resources for reporting discrimination, and actively addressing instances of discrimination when they occur [30]–[33]. It is also important to note that non-discrimination policies are not a panacea for all forms of discrimination. In some cases, students may still face discrimination despite the existence of such policies. However, non-discrimination policies can serve as an important tool for addressing discrimination and providing a foundation for a more inclusive and equitable learning environment [34]–[37].

In conclusion, non-discrimination policies are an essential tool for ensuring that all students feel safe and supported in their learning environments. By explicitly prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, these policies send a clear message that such behavior will not be tolerated. However, it is important that these policies are actively enforced and that students are educated on their rights and responsibilities. Ultimately, the creation and implementation of non-discrimination policies is a crucial step towards fostering an inclusive and equitable environment for all students.

Gender-neutral restrooms and facilities:

Gender-neutral restrooms and facilities have become increasingly popular in schools as a means of promoting inclusivity and ensuring that all students feel comfortable and accepted. These policies allow students to use restrooms and facilities that align with their gender identity, rather than being limited by traditional gender categories. This is particularly important for transgender students, who may feel uncomfortable or unsafe using facilities that do not align with their gender identity [38]–[41].

Gender-neutral restrooms and facilities can take many different forms, depending on the needs of the school and the student population. Some schools may choose to convert existing restrooms to be gender-neutral, while others may build new facilities specifically for this purpose. In some cases, schools may also designate certain existing restrooms as gender-neutral, while still maintaining traditional gender-specific facilities [42]–[45].

Regardless of the specific approach, the goal of gender-neutral restrooms and facilities is to provide a safe and inclusive space for all students. By allowing students to use the restroom or facility that aligns with their gender identity, schools are sending a message that all students are valued and respected. This can have a profound impact on the mental health and well-being of transgender students, who may otherwise feel isolated or excluded.

It is important to note that gender-neutral restrooms and facilities are not just beneficial for transgender students. They can also be helpful for students who do not conform to traditional gender norms, such as non-binary or genderqueer students. Additionally, gender-neutral facilities can be helpful for students with disabilities or other health concerns, who may need assistance from a caregiver of a different gender [46]–[50]. Of course, implementing gender-neutral restrooms and facilities is not without challenges. Some parents or community members may be resistant to the idea, citing concerns about safety or privacy. However, these concerns can be addressed through careful planning and education. Schools can provide information on the benefits of gender-neutral facilities, as well as addressing common misconceptions or concerns.

In conclusion, gender-neutral restrooms and facilities are an important tool for promoting inclusivity and ensuring that all students feel safe and accepted. By allowing students to use facilities that align with their gender identity, schools can create a more welcoming and supportive environment for all students [51]–[54]. While there may be challenges to implementing gender-neutral facilities, the benefits are clear, and schools should work to ensure that all students have access to facilities that meet their needs.

Inclusive curriculum:

Inclusive curriculum is an important step towards creating a more accepting and diverse learning environment for all students. Schools can develop curricula that are inclusive of LGBT individuals and their contributions to history, literature, and culture. By doing so, schools can educate students about the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities, promote acceptance and understanding, and help to combat homophobia and transphobia.

An inclusive curriculum that takes into account the experiences and perspectives of racial minorities and the LGBT community is essential for creating a learning environment that is equitable and welcoming to all students [55], [56]. Such a curriculum recognizes the diverse backgrounds of students and the societal structures that have created inequalities based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity. It includes diverse perspectives, experiences, and contributions of people from various races, ethnicities, and gender identities, as well as an understanding of how discrimination and bias affect different communities. An inclusive curriculum promotes critical thinking, empathy, and respect for diversity, and it prepares students for the diverse society in which they live.

To develop an inclusive curriculum, it is crucial to engage with members of racial minority and LGBT communities and incorporate their perspectives and experiences into the teaching materials. This can be done through involving diverse speakers, incorporating literature and media that reflect the experiences of these communities, and creating opportunities for students to discuss and reflect on issues related to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Additionally, teachers can provide resources and support for students who may feel marginalized or discriminated against. An inclusive curriculum fosters a sense of belonging and promotes positive attitudes towards diversity, which can benefit students throughout their lives.

Including LGBT individuals in the curriculum can take many different forms, depending on the subject matter and grade level. For example, in history classes, teachers can discuss the contributions of LGBT individuals throughout history, such as the Stonewall Riots and the fight for marriage equality. In literature classes, teachers can include works by LGBT authors, such as James Baldwin or Audre Lorde. Additionally, schools can offer elective courses focused specifically on LGBT studies or queer theory.

By including LGBT individuals and their contributions in the curriculum, schools can help to normalize sexual orientations and gender identities that may be outside of the traditional norm. This can help to combat discrimination and create a more accepting and inclusive learning environment for all students, including LGBT students who may feel isolated or excluded.

Inclusive curriculum also provides an opportunity for teachers to educate students about the harmful effects of homophobia and transphobia. By discussing the history of discrimination against LGBT individuals and the ongoing fight for equality, teachers can help to raise awareness about the importance of acceptance and understanding. This can help to create a generation of students who are more empathetic and compassionate towards their LGBT peers.

Of course, implementing inclusive curriculum is not without challenges. Some parents or community members may be resistant to the idea, citing concerns about age-appropriateness or moral values. However, schools can address these concerns by providing resources and training for teachers, communicating with parents and community members about the benefits of inclusive curriculum, and providing alternative assignments for students who may feel uncomfortable with certain subject matter.

In conclusion, inclusive curriculum is an important step towards creating a more accepting and diverse learning environment for all students. By including LGBT individuals and their contributions in the curriculum, schools can promote acceptance and understanding and help to combat homophobia and transphobia. While there may be challenges to implementing inclusive curriculum, the benefits are clear, and schools should work to ensure that all students have access to a curriculum that is inclusive and diverse.

Staff training:

Staff training is an important component of creating an inclusive environment for LGBT students. School policies can require staff training on how to create a welcoming and supportive environment for all students, including those who identify as LGBT. This training can include a range of topics, from the use of gender-neutral pronouns to strategies for preventing bullying and supporting students who are coming out.

One important aspect of staff training is education on the use of gender-neutral pronouns. Teachers and staff members should be familiar with the use of pronouns such as "they/them" or "ze/zir" for non-binary or genderqueer students

This not only promotes inclusivity but also validates the gender identities of these students. Additionally, staff members should be trained on how to respectfully and appropriately address transgender students, including the use of their chosen name and pronouns.

Training can also include strategies for preventing bullying and creating a safe and supportive school environment for LGBT students. Staff members can learn how to recognize and respond to bullying behavior, as well as strategies for addressing bullying when it occurs. They can also learn how to create safe spaces for LGBT students, such as Gay-Straight Alliances or other student-led groups that promote acceptance and support.

Another important aspect of staff training is learning how to support students who are coming out. Staff members can be trained on how to provide emotional support to students who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity, as well as how to refer students to resources such as counseling or LGBT support groups. This can help to create a safe and supportive environment for students who may be struggling with their identity or facing discrimination from peers or family members. Training can also help to build empathy and understanding among staff members who may not be familiar with LGBT issues or may hold biases and prejudices. Through education and training, staff members can gain a better understanding of the challenges that LGBT students may face, and learn how to be better allies and advocates for these students.

Of course, implementing staff training is not without its challenges. Staff members may be resistant to training or may not feel comfortable discussing LGBT issues. In these cases, it is important for school leaders to communicate the importance of this training and to provide resources and support for staff members who may need additional training or education.

In conclusion, staff training is an important component of creating an inclusive environment for LGBT students. By providing education and training on issues such as gender-neutral pronouns, strategies to prevent bullying, and how to support students who are coming out, schools can create a safe and welcoming environment for all students. While there may be challenges to implementing staff training, the benefits are clear, and schools should work to ensure that all staff members are equipped with the knowledge and tools they need to support LGBT students.

Support for LGBT student groups:

Support for LGBT student groups is a vital component of creating an inclusive school environment. One way schools can do this is by adopting policies that support the formation of LGBT student groups, such as gay-straight alliances (GSAs). GSAs provide a safe and supportive space for students to express themselves and receive support from their peers, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity [57]–[61]. By allowing students to form GSAs, schools are sending a clear message that they value and support their LGBT students. These groups can help to create a sense of community and belonging for LGBT students, who may otherwise feel isolated or

marginalized. Additionally, GSAs can serve as a resource for students who may be struggling with their identity or facing discrimination from peers or family members.

In addition to allowing the formation of GSAs, schools can also provide resources and support for these groups. This can include providing meeting spaces, funding for events or activities, and access to supportive staff members or counselors. By providing these resources, schools can help to ensure that LGBT students have access to the support and resources they need to succeed.

However, it is important to note that the formation of GSAs can also be met with resistance or pushback from some members of the school community. Some parents or community members may object to the formation of these groups, citing religious or moral objections. In these cases, it is important for school leaders to communicate the importance of these groups and to provide support for students and staff members who may face discrimination or harassment.

In conclusion, support for LGBT student groups is an essential component of creating an inclusive school environment. By allowing the formation of GSAs and providing resources and support for these groups, schools can help to create a sense of community and belonging for LGBT students, while also promoting acceptance and understanding among the broader school community. While there may be challenges to implementing these policies, the benefits for LGBT students are clear, and schools should work to ensure that all students feel supported and valued.

Strategies that schools can use to implement these policies effectively:

Develop a plan:

Developing a comprehensive plan is an essential step for schools to effectively implement policies that promote LGBT inclusion in education. By creating a plan, schools can ensure that their policies are implemented in a consistent and systematic way, and that they are achieving the goals of the school community.

The plan should outline specific actions that will be taken to promote LGBT inclusion in education. This may include policies such as non-discrimination policies, gender-neutral restrooms and facilities, inclusive curricula, staff training, and support for LGBT student groups. These policies should be tailored to the needs of the school community and should be based on best practices and research in the field of LGBT inclusion in education.

In addition to outlining specific actions, the plan should also include a timeline for implementation. This will help to ensure that the policies are implemented in a timely and effective manner, and that the school community is aware of the progress being made. The timeline should be realistic and take into account any logistical or financial constraints that the school may face.

Finally, the plan should outline the resources that will be needed to implement the policies. This may include funding for staff training, materials for inclusive curricula, or support for LGBT student groups. It is important for schools to allocate resources to these policies in order to ensure their success and to demonstrate a commitment to LGBT inclusion in education.

In conclusion, developing a comprehensive plan is crucial for schools to effectively implement policies that promote LGBT inclusion in education. By outlining specific actions, a timeline for implementation, and the resources that will be needed, schools can ensure that their policies are implemented in a consistent and effective way, and that they are achieving the goals of the school community.

Involve stakeholders:

Involving all stakeholders in the planning and implementation process is a critical step in promoting LGBT inclusion in education. When schools involve teachers, administrators, students, and parents in the process, they create a sense of ownership and buy-in. This helps to ensure that everyone has a say in how the policies are implemented, and that they are tailored to the specific needs and concerns of the school community [62]–[65].

Including teachers and administrators in the planning and implementation process is particularly important, as they are often the ones responsible for implementing the policies on a day-to-day basis. By involving them in the process, schools can ensure that the policies are feasible and practical, and that they are aligned with the overall educational goals of the school.

It is also important to involve students in the planning and implementation process. LGBT students in particular may have unique insights and experiences that can inform the development of policies. Including them in the process can also help to ensure that the policies are well-received by the student body and are effective in creating a safe and inclusive environment.

Parents should also be included in the planning and implementation process. This can help to address any concerns or questions they may have about the policies, and can also help to create a supportive home environment for LGBT students. By involving parents, schools can demonstrate their commitment to promoting LGBT inclusion in education, and can foster a sense of partnership and collaboration between the school and the broader community.

In conclusion, involving all stakeholders in the planning and implementation process is essential for promoting LGBT inclusion in education. By involving teachers, administrators, students, and parents, schools can ensure that their policies are tailored to the specific needs and concerns of the school community, and that they are aligned with the overall educational goals of the school. This creates a sense of ownership and buy-in, and helps to ensure that the policies are effective in promoting LGBT inclusion in education.

Provide training:

Providing training for staff is a critical step in promoting LGBT inclusion in education. Staff training ensures that educators and other school personnel are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively implement the policies and create a safe and supportive environment for LGBT students.

The training should focus on creating a safe and inclusive environment for LGBT students. This can include providing information on the unique challenges faced by LGBT students, such as discrimination and harassment, and strategies for addressing these challenges. It can also include training on how to create a supportive and welcoming environment, such as using inclusive language and promoting a culture of respect.

Another important aspect of staff training is teaching educators how to recognize and respond to incidents of harassment or discrimination. This includes training on how to respond to incidents of bullying or harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity, as well as how to support students who are experiencing these challenges. Staff should also be trained on how to report incidents of harassment or discrimination to the appropriate school authorities and how to support students who have experienced these incidents.

Training should also include education on using inclusive language. Educators should be taught how to use gender-neutral pronouns and how to avoid language that can be stigmatizing or harmful

to LGBT students. This can help to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

In conclusion, providing training for staff is an important step in promoting LGBT inclusion in education. Staff training ensures that educators and other school personnel are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively implement policies and create a safe and supportive environment for LGBT students. By focusing on creating a safe and inclusive environment, recognizing and responding to incidents of harassment or discrimination, and using inclusive language, schools can help to create an environment where all students feel supported and valued [66]–[70].

Review and update policies regularly:

Regularly reviewing and updating policies is a critical step in promoting LGBT inclusion in education. As times change, it is important for schools to ensure that their policies remain relevant and effective. This can be done by regularly seeking feedback from students, staff, and other stakeholders, and evaluating the impact of the policies.

One way to review and update policies is to conduct surveys or focus groups with students and staff to gather feedback on the policies. This feedback can help identify areas where the policies may not be working as intended, and where changes may be needed. It is important to create a safe and confidential environment for feedback, to ensure that all voices are heard.

Schools should also evaluate the impact of the policies on LGBT students. This can include tracking the number of incidents of harassment or discrimination, and assessing whether the policies have been effective in reducing these incidents. Additionally, schools should assess whether LGBT students feel safe and supported in their learning environment.

Based on the feedback received and the impact assessment, schools should update their policies as needed. This may involve making changes to existing policies, or creating new policies to address emerging issues or challenges. It is important to communicate these changes to all stakeholders, including students, staff, and parents, and to ensure that everyone understands the importance of the policies and their role in promoting LGBT inclusion.

In conclusion, regularly reviewing and updating policies is an important step in promoting LGBT inclusion in education. By seeking feedback, evaluating impact, and making changes as needed, schools can ensure that their policies remain relevant and effective in creating a safe and supportive learning environment for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Monitor and enforce policies:

Implementing policies that promote LGBT inclusion in education is an important step, but monitoring and enforcing these policies is equally important. Without proper monitoring and enforcement, policies can become meaningless, and incidents of harassment or discrimination may continue to occur.

To effectively monitor the implementation of policies, schools can create a reporting system for incidents of harassment or discrimination. This system should be easily accessible to students and staff, and should clearly outline the steps that will be taken when a report is filed. It is important that reports are taken seriously and that students feel comfortable reporting incidents without fear of retaliation [71]–[74].

When incidents of harassment or discrimination are reported, schools should take swift and appropriate action to address the situation. This can include investigating the incident, providing support to the victim, and disciplining the perpetrator. It is important that schools take a zero-tolerance approach to harassment or discrimination and that these incidents are addressed consistently and fairly.

In addition to addressing incidents of harassment or discrimination, schools should also regularly assess the effectiveness of their policies and make adjustments as needed. This can include reviewing feedback from students and staff, evaluating the impact of the policies, and making changes as necessary to ensure that the policies remain relevant and effective.

In conclusion, monitoring and enforcing policies that promote LGBT inclusion in education is essential for creating a safe and inclusive learning environment. By creating a reporting system for incidents of harassment or discrimination, taking swift and appropriate action, and regularly assessing the effectiveness of policies, schools can ensure that all students feel safe, supported, and respected.

Celebrate diversity:

Creating a culture of inclusivity is an essential part of promoting LGBT inclusion in education. Schools can celebrate diversity by embracing and highlighting the unique characteristics of their students. This can help students feel valued, respected, and appreciated for who they are, which in turn can promote a positive learning environment.

One way to celebrate diversity is to recognize LGBT history month, which takes place every October. During this month, schools can highlight the achievements of LGBT individuals throughout history and their contributions to society. This can help educate students about the struggles and successes of the LGBT community, and promote acceptance and understanding.

Another way to celebrate diversity is by promoting awareness events that focus on LGBT issues. This can include events such as Pride parades, guest speakers, or panel discussions. By promoting these events, schools can help raise awareness of LGBT issues and provide a platform for students to learn, ask questions, and share their own experiences.

Schools can also showcase the achievements of LGBT individuals, both past and present. This can be done through classroom discussions, school-wide presentations, or by displaying posters and other materials highlighting the accomplishments of LGBT individuals in a variety of fields. By celebrating these accomplishments, schools can help foster a sense of pride and self-esteem among LGBT students, and promote the idea that everyone can succeed regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

In conclusion, celebrating diversity is an essential part of promoting LGBT inclusion in education. By recognizing LGBT history month, promoting awareness events, and showcasing the achievements of LGBT individuals, schools can create a culture of inclusivity that values and celebrates the unique characteristics of their students. This can help promote a positive learning environment, and ensure that all students feel safe, supported, and respected.

Conclusion

The future of LGBT inclusion in education is bright, as we continue to see progress towards creating a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all students. This progress has been driven by the growing recognition that LGBT students face unique challenges in school, including bullying, harassment, and discrimination. In response, educators and policymakers have been working to develop strategies and policies that promote inclusivity and support the well-being of

LGBT students. This includes initiatives such as anti-bullying campaigns, diversity and inclusion training for teachers and staff, and the implementation of policies that protect LGBT students from discrimination.

The discrimination faced by LGBT students can have severe impacts on their mental health. According to a report by the National Institute of Mental Health, LGBT youth are two to three times more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation than their heterosexual peers. Discrimination and stigmatization can also lead to a sense of isolation, low self-esteem, and self-hatred, making it difficult for LGBT students to build healthy relationships and participate in social activities.

One key area of focus for LGBT inclusion in education is the development of inclusive curriculum that reflects the experiences and contributions of LGBT individuals. This can help to promote greater understanding and acceptance of LGBT students, while also providing them with positive role models and a sense of belonging. Inclusive curriculum can take many forms, from incorporating LGBT themes into existing lesson plans to developing entirely new units or courses focused specifically on LGBT history, culture, and social issues.

Another important aspect of LGBT inclusion in education is the creation of safe spaces and support networks for LGBT students. This can include the establishment of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) or other student-led organizations that provide a sense of community and support for LGBT students. Additionally, schools can work to provide resources and counseling services for LGBT students, as well as training for teachers and staff on how to best support their needs.

As we look to the future, it is clear that LGBT inclusion in education will continue to be a key priority for educators and policymakers alike. This includes ongoing efforts to promote diversity and inclusivity at all levels of education, from early childhood through higher education. By working together to create a more welcoming and supportive environment for LGBT students, we can help to ensure that all students are able to achieve their full potential and thrive in school and beyond.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that there is still much work to be done to fully achieve LGBT inclusion in education. Despite the progress that has been made, many LGBT students continue to face significant challenges in school, including harassment, discrimination, and exclusion. As such, it is essential that we remain vigilant in our efforts to promote inclusivity and address these issues wherever they arise.

Ultimately, the future of LGBT inclusion in education will depend on the ongoing commitment and dedication of educators, policymakers, and advocates alike. By continuing to work towards a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all students, we can help to ensure that every student has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive in school and beyond.

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