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[Home](#) > Bullied to Death: Youth Suicides Demand Action

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BULLIED TO DEATH

GSA activists mourn youth suicides and call for action

SAN FRANCISCO, September 29, 2010 ? Students and staff from Gay-Straight Alliance Network mourn the tragic death of 13-year-old Seth Walsh, who died yesterday after relentless anti-LGBT bullying at school drove him take his own life. Officials at Jacobsen Middle School in Tehachapi, California failed to put a stop to the bullying.

Walsh is the third LGBT student whose suicide made headlines this month. Asher Brown, 13, of Cypress, Texas, and Billy Lucas, 15, of Greensburg, Indiana, also endured years of anti-LGBT bullying that went unchecked by school officials before their suicides on 9/23 and 9/9 respectively.

?As we mourn the loss of another LGBT young person, we call on students, teachers, parents, and school officials to work together to put an end to bullying and harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity,? said Carolyn Laub, founder and Executive Director of Gay-Straight Alliance Network.

?We call on Governor Schwarzenegger to sign the Mental Health Services for At-Risk Youth Act (SB 543*). This law would give youth, like Seth Walsh, access to life-saving mental health services before it?s too late.?

GSA Network empowers youth to fight homophobia and transphobia in school by training youth activists and supporting student-led Gay-Straight Alliance clubs in California and throughout the country.

While anti-LGBT bullying is an epidemic in this country, with 3 in 5 LGBT students reporting that they feel unsafe in school, research shows that students with a GSA club experience less harassment and are more likely to feel safe at school.

?Starting a Gay-Straight Alliance is one of the best ways to let LGBT students at your school know that they are not alone,? said Jeffree Merteuil-Clark, 17, a junior at Frontier High School in nearby Bakersfield. ?Youth and adults can work together in your GSA to let bullies know that harassment and discrimination will not be tolerated at your school.? Jeffree attended GSA Network?s Kern County GSA Leadership Summit last school year and is now President of his school?s GSA club.

Since GSA Network began in 1998, the number of **GSA clubs in California has skyrocketed from 40 to over 800, including 33 middle school GSAs.** There are currently 81 GSA clubs in California?s Central Valley, including 8 GSAs in Kern County.

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* **The Mental Health Services for At-Risk Youth Act (SB 543)** would expand access to essential mental health services, especially prevention and early intervention programs, for youth ages 12-17 by allowing them to obtain counseling without parental consent. The bill is currently on the governor?s desk. SB 543 was introduced by Senator Mark Leno (D-San Francisco) and is co-sponsored by Equality California, the National Association of Social Workers California Chapter, Mental Health America of Northern California, and GSA Network.

<http://www.gsanetwork.org> ^[2]

Press Release
GSA Network

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