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Coming Out Against Push Out: Action Camps

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From the west coast to the south to the midwest, GSA Network youth and staff are coming together to change punitive discipline in schools through groundbreaking Action Camps. These camps focus on dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline, a set of policies and practices used by school districts that indirectly push out or exclude youth of color, queer youth, and low-income youth. At each action camp, roughly 100 youth and staff from local organizations and schools came together to learn how to build a local and national campaign to replace a harsh punitive discipline approach with restorative justice and other alternative discipline practices.

Trio Harris, a GSA Network youth leader and Board Member, attended an action camp and was personally transformed: "I felt as if Action Camp drastically changed who I am as a person. It challenged the way I identify my racial and sexual identity, and helped me learn how these two identities can co-exist. **Action camp brought out a part of me that I did not know was there, and I felt liberated by the work I was able to accomplish.**" Claudia Chen, a GSA Network youth council member and leader, added, "These camps have helped strengthen my understanding of how my GSA and its members interact with the school-to-prison pipeline, and how we can help stop it."



Policies like zero tolerance leave schools with no other option than to expel youth for incidents like getting in a fight -- even if, for example, that student was defending themselves against an attacker. As shown by [Two Wrongs Don't Make a Right](#) [1], GSA Network's new report with Advancement Project and Alliance for Educational Justice (AEJ), zero tolerance policies, suspensions, and expulsions are not fixing the problems that cause students to feel unsafe in their schools.

GSA Network along with Advancement Project, AEJ, and Dignity in Schools Campaign has been traveling around the United States since February to bring local organizations together through these regional action camps. Members of the National Association of GSA Networks have been key in this effort, and Em Elliot of Georgia Safe Schools Coalition credits Action Camp with raising her awareness around the school-to-prison pipeline. "Having the sensitivity to see past



zero tolerance policies and see the real human suffering it causes has changed my approach to anti-bullying and there have already been changes within my advocacy," Em said.

Anna Davis from Mississippi Safe Schools Coalition agreed. "**Action camp taught me that social justice issues come in all different shapes, sizes and hues.** It is important to not only acknowledge the differences in our work but to strive to understand them, Folks from my state don't always get a whole lot of opportunities to talk openly about social justice issues, so having the opportunity to connect with other groups not only from our region but also from my state was truly an inspiring and rejuvenating experience. I hope to see our discussions turn into actions that help us create a better Mississippi."

Source URL: <http://gsanetwork.org/news/blog/coming-out-against-push-out-gsa-action-camps/07/17/12>

Links

[1] <http://gsanetwork.org/news/anti-bullying-advocates-call-policymakers-end-overly-harsh-punishment-bullies/062612>