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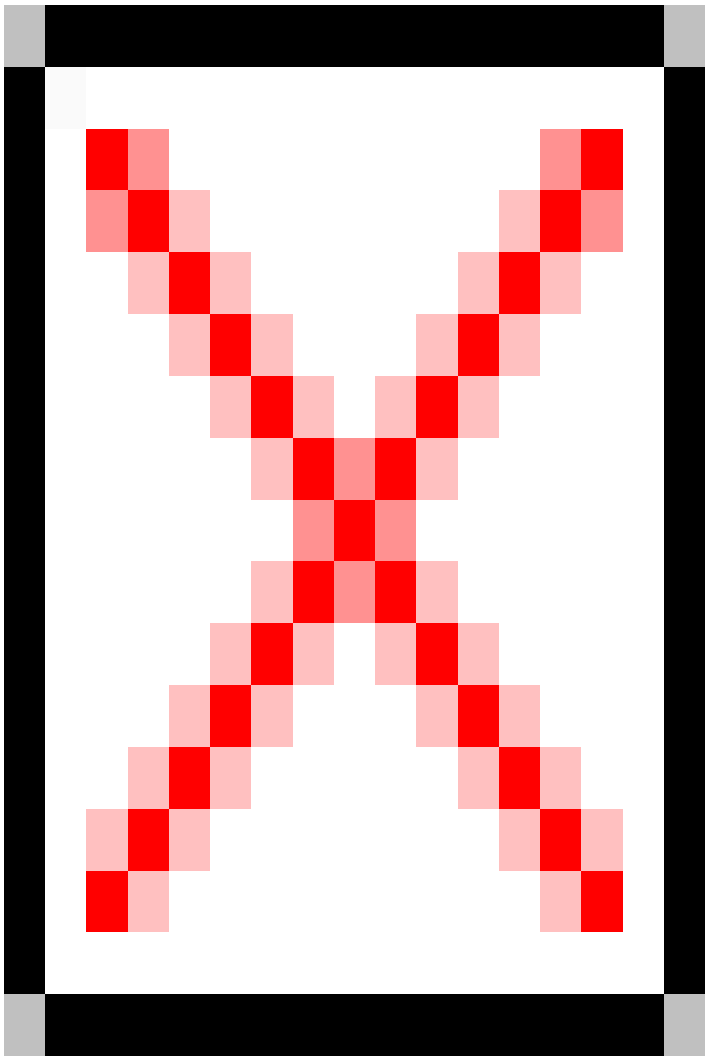
# Lawsuit: Clovis Students Need Comprehensive Sex Ed

Aug. 21, 2012 ? Carolyn



Gay-Straight Alliance activists have a message for California schools: you cannot keep ignoring the rights and the health needs of LGBT students. If you do, you will be held accountable.

GSA Network delivers that message every spring, when youth leaders travel to Sacramento [1] to speak to their legislators about bills that directly affect their access to a safe learning environment. We sent the message two weeks ago, when I watched Calen and Emily, two GSA Network youth leaders, successfully lobby the Joint Legislative Audit Committee [2] to investigate California schools? compliance with anti-bullying laws.

And GSA Network has sent that message today in Fresno, by joining two parents and the American Academy of Pediatrics California District IX (AAP) in suing Clovis Unified School District [3] for their high school?s illegal abstinence-only-until-marriage sex education.

California?s 2003 comprehensive sex education law requires that public school sexual health education be medically accurate, science-based, bias-free, and relevant for students of all sexual orientations.

But Clovis Unified?s sex ed textbook never mentions condoms, and teaches that all people, even adults, should avoid sexual activity until they are married. It lists that the ways to prevent STDs are to respect yourself, get plenty of rest, go out as a group and practice abstinence.  Additional materials even compare a woman who is not a virgin to a dirty shoe.

Such inaccurate and biased sex ed puts all students? health at risk by teaching young people misinformation and denying them critical instruction about condoms, contraception, and STDs.  It particularly harms lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth, who neither learn essential information they need to make healthy decisions nor see any potential to have a healthy, loving relationship reflected in their sex ed.

Sex ed that is biased against LGBT students has a very real mental health impact. I?ve spoken to a gay high school student from a nearby Central Valley school district who contemplated suicide after being told in sex ed that sexual activity is only acceptable and healthy when you are married, which is not currently legal for same-sex couples in California and much of the country. In contrast, research we?ve conducted [4] found that youth who have instruction in sex education that is inclusive of sexual orientation say they feel safer in school.

Although the lawsuit is limited to Clovis, the problem is not. A UCSF report [5] commissioned by the ACLU of Northern California, which is representing us and the other plaintiffs in this lawsuit,

found that less than one-third of school districts cover sexual orientation as part of sex education ? despite California law requiring that school-based sex ed be appropriate for students of all orientations.

Young people, experts, and legislators have all agreed that comprehensive, bias-free sex ed is necessary to keep California?s students healthy. With this lawsuit, we hope that Clovis Unified ? and all other California schools ? will finally do the right thing.

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