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## Holding CA Schools Accountable

Aug. 28, 2012 ? yvonna



I hadn't been Policy Manager at GSA Network for a full day when already GSA leaders scored another huge win for safe schools for all students. On Wednesday, August 8, the Joint Legislative Audit Committee heard testimony from youth from SoCal and the Central Valley about their schools' failure to protect LGBTQ students. After their testimony, the Committee took action and approved a **groundbreaking audit of all California schools**, to investigate if schools are meeting or falling short of California's anti-bullying and non-discrimination laws around sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

*Asm. Lara with GSA Network youth leaders Emily Coffin and Calen Valencia. Photo from La Opinion.*

## Have you been harassed or bullied in your school just for being who you are?

Then this audit is a good thing for you! And for all students, especially since [80% of California's LGBT youth report](#)<sup>[1]</sup> experiencing harassment at school.

I remember stepping in when a girl was bullying a young boy who didn't speak English during P.E. And nothing was scarier than not being able to use the restroom in the halls because a gang

of girls wanted to "jump" me.

No question about it – an unsafe school climate is unacceptable and gets in the way of our learning. California schools have some of the toughest laws in place to protect LGBT students from discrimination, harassment, and bullying, but you wouldn't know it if you were a gender non-conforming youth in many California schools today. That's because many school districts neglect to post the anti-discrimination laws or fail to address a student's complaint that they have been harassed in a timely manner. In light of more cuts to education, other school districts lack the capacity to uphold non-discrimination policies. Still other school districts are models of providing safe places for all students to learn.

The audit of all school districts will help everyone understand who is falling short of compliance with the law and provide a path for them to become compliant. In other words?



**This audit will make it better!**

The audit of all school districts, which is like a giant, in-depth report card of how safe your school is, will help document what many of us already know: that not every school is enforcing the right of LGBT students to learn in a safe environment.

## **Pride in our Achievements**

The audit will give teeth to many of the protections GSA Network youth have fought for and won over the years. Last year alone, we passed three life-saving bills:

- Seth's Law (AB 9) ensures that all schools have clear and consistent guidelines for investigating cases of bullying within set life-saving timelines.
- The Fair, Accurate, Inclusive and Respectful (FAIR) Education Act (SB 48) updates education textbooks in social studies classes so as to not exclude important historical figures like Harvey Milk and Byrd Rustin who fought tirelessly for LGBTQ rights and the rights of other communities.
- The Gender Nondiscrimination Act (AB 887) clarified California law by explicitly stating that gender identity is a protected class from discrimination.

[Click here for a full list of policies we have successfully passed into law.](#) [2]

The audit, requested by Joint Legislative Audit Committee Chair Asm. Ricardo Lara, received bipartisan support and will help pinpoint the schools and classrooms that have become a

playground for bullies.

Stay tuned for more information about how the audit will be conducted. And reach out to me, [yvonna@gsanetwork.org](mailto:yvonna@gsanetwork.org) <sup>[3]</sup>, for any questions about the audit or the policies we're working on!

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#### **Links**

[1] <http://gsanetwork.org/news/blog/announcing-new-research-lessons-matter/06/05/12>

[2] <http://gsanetwork.org/get-involved/change-california/change-law>

[3] <mailto:yvonna@gsanetwork.org>