

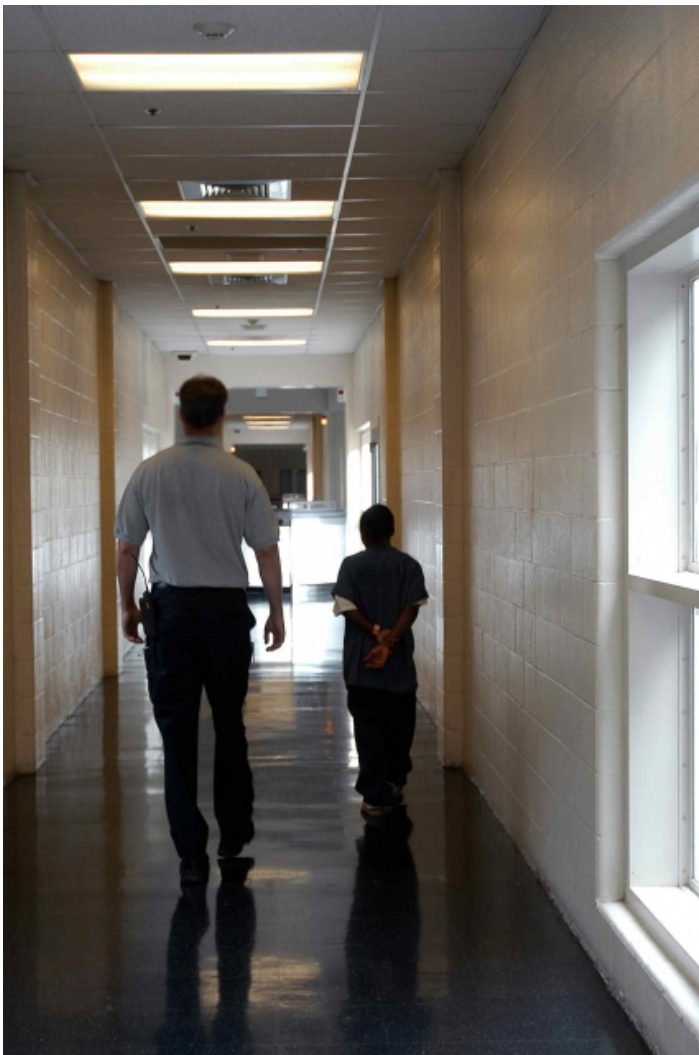


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Happy National School Counselor Week: Counselors, Not Cops

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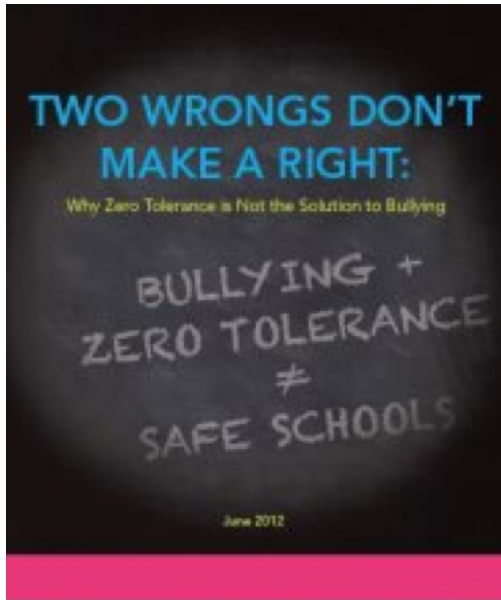
After the tragedy in Newtown, many public figures, including Senator Barbara Boxer, responded by proposing a violent solution to a violent

problem: more police officers in schools. Instead of making schools safer by creating nurturing, supportive learning environments, they wanted to make schools safer by turning them into prisons.

Californians have shown that they emphatically disagree. According to a [new survey by the California Endowment](#) ^[1], Californians believe 2-1 that we should place mental health counselors in schools, not police.

We at GSA Network couldn't agree more. We know that access to counselors is especially important for LGBTQ youth, as they are at a higher risk for mental health issues including depression and suicide. In fact, statistics show us that youth who are harassed based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation are more than twice as likely to experience depression than those who are not. What's more is that these youth are [more than twice as likely](#) ^[2] to seriously consider suicide and to make a plan for suicide. Adding more cops to schools could never fundamentally address the issues that create homophobic and transphobic environments for queer youth and lead them to such fatal conclusions. Queer youth and Californians demand counselors, not cops.

Not only do school counselors alleviate the mental health issues of LGBTQ students, but they also help address students' academic and behavioral issues such as anti-LGBTQ bullying or harassment. GSA Network's report "[Two Wrongs Don't Make a Right: Why Zero-Tolerance is Not the Solution to Bullying](#)" ^[3] highlights the discipline disparities faced by LGBTQ, low-income, youth of color. That's why we call for an end to reliance on punitive discipline, such as suspension or expulsion, especially in cases of bias-based incidents of harassment or bullying. Instead, alternative discipline measures must be taken. Counseling, teaching coping skills, and conflict management are alternatives to anti-LGBTQ bullying that actually address students' behaviors at the source. School counselors play a vital role in helping create safe, positive, healthy, supportive and equitable school environments, and we need more of them.



Increasing the policing of youth does not solve the issue of violence in schools. Rather, we must look at the roots of violence and find ways to give youth the tools they need to make healthy decisions for their long-term success, which include access to supportive counselors. The late social-justice minded theologian Deitrich Bonhoeffer said, "We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself." We know school counselors are the spokes in those wheels, stopping violence at the root and helping prevent violent incidents on their campuses.

We'd like to give a warm and appreciative shout-out to all school counselors:

Happy National School Counselors Week & thank you! Thank you for your dedication to school safety, to teaching youth the skills they need to succeed, to listening when no one else will or when no one really understands. We give you our deepest gratitude on behalf of LGBTQ youth and those who are harassed and discriminated against in their school communities.

If you are currently a school counselor and would like to know more about what you can do to support LGBTQ youth and GSAs in your school, have a look at our quick tip list:

- If your school does not have a GSA, help [start one](#) ^[4]
- Help disseminate [school climate surveys](#) ^[5] to find out what students' experiences of harassment are at your school
- Help GSA youth start and implement [anti-bullying campaigns](#) ^[6] that address the use of slurs and physical harassment at school
- Be a mental health expert when GSA youth need you to back them up to other teachers and administrators on their efforts
- Listen
- Practice [restorative justice principles](#) ^[7] as alternatives to punishment and discipline

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Links

- [1] <http://tcenews.calendow.org/releases/survey:-californians-say-mental-health-care-and-emergency-preparedness-are-best-ways-to-prevent-school-violence>
- [2] <http://www.healthiersf.org/LGBTQ/GetTheFacts/health.html>
- [3] <http://gsanetwork.org/news/blog/two-wrongs-dont-make-right/06/26/12>
- [4] <http://gsanetwork.org/resources/building-your-gsa/10-steps-starting-gsa>
- [5] <http://gsanetwork.org/resources/gsa-actions-events/conducting-school-survey>
- [6] <http://gsanetwork.org/get-involved/change-your-school>
- [7] <http://www.rjoyoakland.org/resources.php>