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Investigation: Gay, lesbian students recount their torment from anti-gay bullying

LA MIRADA - Anthony Escobar says he's been bullied for three years at La Mirada High School.

The 17-year-old senior has been shoved in the hallway, called anti-gay slurs and told he's "going to hell" for being gay and wearing makeup.

"School is a nightmare," Escobar said. "I have to keep my guard up."

Escobar's bullying is not an isolated incident, students say.

Gay, lesbian and bisexual students interviewed by the Press-Telegram at nine of the 20 high schools in the six Long Beach area school districts said they have been targeted for harassment and bullying because of their sexual orientation.

The nine schools were Artesia in the ABC Unified School District; La Mirada in Norwalk-La Mirada Unified; Mayfair in Bellflower Unified; Warren in Downey Unified; Jordan, Lakewood, Poly and Wilson in Long Beach Unified; and Paramount in the Paramount Unified.

Cozette Clarke, a senior at Poly High School, said that a math teacher "went off on a rant" about the Long Beach Pride Parade, asking why gays should get special treatment.

Clarke said another math teacher harassed some male students, calling them gay. The teacher's behavior made her feel uncomfortable and she transferred to another class, she said.

At Mayfair High School, several students said a social studies teacher criticized the Long Beach Gay Pride Parade.

Students said they also feel that some teachers and school administrators minimize or ignore bullying.

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Much of this anti-gay torment, however, is not reported, especially from students who are not

open about their sexual orientation, or students who are afraid of retaliation, experts say.

However, students at several local high schools are confronting the anti-gay climate by forming gay-straight alliances, chartered student clubs with a faculty adviser and members that devise ways of addressing harassment and homophobia.

About 880 California high schools, more than 53 percent of the state total, have these clubs, according to the Gay-Straight Alliance Network, a San Francisco-based youth leadership group helping students organize the alliances.

These clubs exist at several local high schools, including the nine high schools the P-T visited for this article.

"Artesia High School needs to know a club like this exists," said senior Hanalei Amituanai, who isn't gay but is president of the school's gay-straight alliance. "Someone needs to stand up for gay people. I want to show people that befriending gay people or being gay is OK."

Adds Perez, a heterosexual student in Paramount High School's GSA, which is called the Unity Club: "It means a lot to me to be in the club. I don't want people to be ignorant. Gay people are normal people."

Read the full story:

Sep. 18, 2012
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