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# LGBT Students Take the Fight to Sacramento

The promise of ?opportunity? is embedded in the Declaration of Independence: ?We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.?  But the opportunity to enjoy life freely, to pursue happiness, to better one?s self and one?s circumstances is not self-evident to people for whom certain forms of discrimination are an unassailable tradition.

Such is the case, for instance, when a school administrator or teacher is so vested in maintaining their inherent superiority, power and control that inculcated bias against certain students is rendered invisible in the name of ?discipline.? Nor is it self-evident that such discipline sourced in conscious or unconscious racism, sexism or homophobia can further exacerbate existing socio-economic difficulty in a student gaining access to opportunity, thus unwittingly eviscerating that student?s chance ? and fundamental right - to the pursuit of happiness.

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But while Torlakson is a staunch LGBT ally, his report did not include data on sexual orientation or gender identity, nor did it mention the impact on LGBT students ? even though ?willful defiance? can also be used by a culturally incompetent or biased school official to include such behavior as a lesbian student holding hands with her girlfriend or a gender nonconforming student breaking the school's dress code, according to the Gay Straight Alliance Network.

It therefore becomes incumbent on LGBT students and their allies to fight on the frontlines of ignorance?creating their own opportunities by challenging and educating those who can cite the Declaration of Independence by heart but have no clue as to its meaning. That was the call answered by about 70 high school students on Monday, April 29 as they ventured to Sacramento for three days of leadership training?highlighted by the 8th annual Queer Youth Advocacy Day. GSA Network, the ACLU/SoCal, Equality California, the Transgender Law Center, the Trevor Project, and California NOW sponsored the educational event.

The LGBT and allied high school students also rallied in support of Assemblymember Tom Ammiano?s School Success and Opportunity Act (AB 1266). This bill ?would ensure that schools

understand their responsibility to allow transgender students to fully participate in school activities, programs, and facilities in a way that is consistent with their gender identity,? according to a GSA Network press release.

"All students should have the opportunity to succeed in school no matter who they are, but that's not the reality in California," said Carolyn Laub, Executive Director of GSA Network. "These brave youth leaders came to Sacramento to demand an end to unreasonable discipline policies and exclusionary school practices that punish LGBT students and push them out of school."

**Read the full piece:**

May. 1, 2013
News Article
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