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Speak Out -- LGBT Youth Empowerment in USA Today

Sep. 2, 2011

USA Today spoke to GSA Network's Executive Director Carolyn Laub and featured five ways to Make It Better in a supplement by MediaPlanet! Click below to see a larger version of the page on bullying:



Question: How can teachers and other school leaders help provide a safe environment for youth?
Answer: They can educate themselves about LGBT issues and promote equality in the classroom.

Combating bullying

The schoolyard bully is a cliché of books and television. In reality, however, bullying can have serious, lasting consequences. And young people who are bullied because of their sexual orientation or gender identity often have fewer resources to help them.



Nearly 9 out of 10 LGBT students experienced verbal or physical harassment at school in the previous year, according to a 2009 study by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). This was linked to increased depression and anxiety and decreased self-esteem. One in five LGBT students had been bullied because of sex or perceived sexual orientation, or gender identity experience. "Disproportionately high rates of negative consequences," including lower grades, dropping out of school, depression, and substance abuse. (Source: GLSEN 2010, www.glsen.org)

Teachers and school administrators must educate themselves about bullying issues and connect to students' safety, "regardless of their own personal feelings," Kimmel asserts. "Safe space is a school isn't a privilege, it's a young person's right."

Anti-bullying policies must not focus on punishing bullies as a good first step toward awareness and accountability, he says, but must have adequate funding for monitoring and evaluating, monitoring, and staff training. Although adults must take action, Kimmel says, "students are leading this movement." One step is by forming gay-straight alliances (GSAs) to support each other and create positive change. There are some over 4,000 GSAs around the country, many with a large percentage of straight allies. Students feel safer if their school simply has a GSA, the



Safe Schools
 The presence of anti-LGBT language and discrimination are proven to have a negative effect on LGBT students' achievement. The safety of intervention can help boost the positive effects of a hostile school climate and promote a positive educational experience.

The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
 The leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students. www.glsen.org

GSA Network
 A youth leadership organization that connects school-based gay straight alliances (GSAs) to each other and community resources through peer support, leadership development, and training. www.gsanetwork.org

It Gets Better Project
 Offers personal videos that respond to LGBT teenagers that they are not alone—and it will get better. www.itgetsbetter.org

PFLAG Safe Schools for All
 Collaborating Respect, a program to train and certify members to go directly into schools with community resources, staff training, model policies, and resource programs that address bullying and harassment. www.pflag.org

American Civil Liberties Union LGBT Project
 Schools and youth working to make public schools safe and free for LGBT students, defending their free speech in school, and making sure they know their rights. www.aclu.org

The Matthew Shepard Foundation
 Supports diversity groups in education and helps youth organizations establish environments where young people can feel safe and be themselves. www.mshepard.org

Safe Schools Coalition
 An international public policy organization that supports gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth. www.safe-schools.org

Stonewall Youth
 Provides information, resources, and support for young people who are LGBT. www.stonewall-youth.org

Welcoming Schools
 An LGBT inclusive approach to addressing family diversity, gender stereotyping and bullying, and same-gender attraction. www.welcomingschools.org

Make it better now for LGBT youth

- 1 Support a Gay-Straight Alliance in your school or community.** GSAs can be a life-saving source of support for students dealing with bullying. Share this support through a letter to the local paper, helping raise money for the club, or creating an online site like www.gsanetwork.org that addresses lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth issues in your school.
- 2 Informers when you see bullying, and spread the word that homophobic and transphobic slurs are unacceptable.**
- 3 Advocate for a non-discrimination or anti-bullying policy in your school.** Policies that specifically include protections for students based on sexual orientation and gender identity are most effective. Make sure the school district has policies that protect, and that students experiencing harassment know how to get help.
- 4 Call up your Congressional representatives and tell them to support the Safe Schools Improvement Act.**
- 5 Write a letter!** Reach out to your school's administration, be firm or be funny—what is new for LGBT youth when you voice their, and ask the administration to make it better for today's students. Use the www.gsanetwork.org for suggestions and to publish your story on its open letter.

GSAs can be a life-saving source of support for students dealing with bullying.

[1]

<http://www.mediaplanet.com/> [2]
 News Article
 USA Today

Source URL: <https://gsanetwork.org/news/speak-out-lgbt-youth-empowerment-usa-today/090211#comment-0>

Links

- [1] <http://www.makeitbetterproject.org/sites/makeitbetter/files/SpeakOut-USA Today-GSAN.pdf>
- [2] <http://www.mediaplanet.com/>