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## **El Monte High School Gay-Straight Alliance Demonstrate Leadership and Impact On Our Community**

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El Monte High School students Allen Cabanillas and Yesenia Padilla attended the annual GSA Advocacy and Youth Leadership Academy and Queer Youth Advocacy Day (GAYLA/QYAD), a statewide conference that took place at Sacramento April 26-29 in order to get two bills passed in California. The conference is sponsored by GSA Network and other organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Equality California, National Organization for Women (NOW), Transgender Law Center, California Teachers Association and the Trevor Project. The goal of the conference is to train youth in the legislative process, how a bill becomes a law and how to fearlessly approach assembly members and senators. All the training held at the conference are led by youth trainers such as Cabanillas and Padilla.

At QYAD, Cabanillas was chosen to facilitate a meeting with the chiefs of the California Board of Education to discuss the implementation of the FAIR Education Act that was passed last year by youth at GAYLA/QYAD. Although this may seem like a very intimidating job to be given, Cabanillas was more than prepared.

He shares, "It was amazing and I'm glad that I had the opportunity to talk to the Board. It was very empowering leading other youth and preparing them for a meeting like this. I know I have made a difference representing the youth."

Both Cabanillas and Padilla hold social justice for all marginalized youth very close to heart and they hope to continue to fight for the rest of their lives.

Padilla shares, "I plan on becoming a government official, particularly a member of congress, in hopes of making direct change in our state so our students have opportunities to safely participate in school without fear of harassment or pushout."

Both Cabanillas and Padilla are also youth trainers for the Southern California region youth council for GSA Network where their job is to lead summits all over Southern California and train at major GSA events.

The EMHS GSA is the largest GSA in the El Monte Union High School District and holds various campaigns and events on campus in order to obtain their ultimate goal: make school a safe and

respectful environment for all students. Some of the events GSA has held are Ally Week, Day of Silence, Transgender Day of Remembrance, LGBT History Month and Harvey Milk Day to name a few.

The EMHS GSA holds local GSA mixers so students have a network of friends from all over our community. GSA attends various conferences such as Models of Pride at USC and Queer Youth Empowerment Day at UCLA. As a result of their hard work and leadership, they have received recognition from local school board member Juanita Gonzales. Gonzales organized a district-wide Shakey's night for all the GSA clubs after she heard about the changes EMHS GSA had made on their campus. Just recently, GSA Network reached out to EMHS GSA to have a meeting with the Liberty Hill Foundation to highlight success in advancing the rights of LGBT youth in schools.

The GSA may appear to be just a social club; however, it is obvious that it is much more than that. Its members are making change one step at a time. If it means heading to the Capitol to talk to legislators, then you can guarantee they'll do it if it means all students will feel safe in schools.

### **Read the original article:**

<http://www.midvalleynews.com/news/2013/06/07/el-monte-high-s...> [2]

News Article

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### **Links**

[1] <http://www.midvalleynews.com/news/2013/06/07/el-monte-high-school-gay-straight-alliance-demonstrate-leadership-and-impact-on-our-community/#sthash.VLFWx4Bq.dpuf>

[2] <http://www.midvalleynews.com/news/2013/06/07/el-monte-high-school-gay-straight-alliance-demonstrate-leadership-and-impact-on-our-community/>