

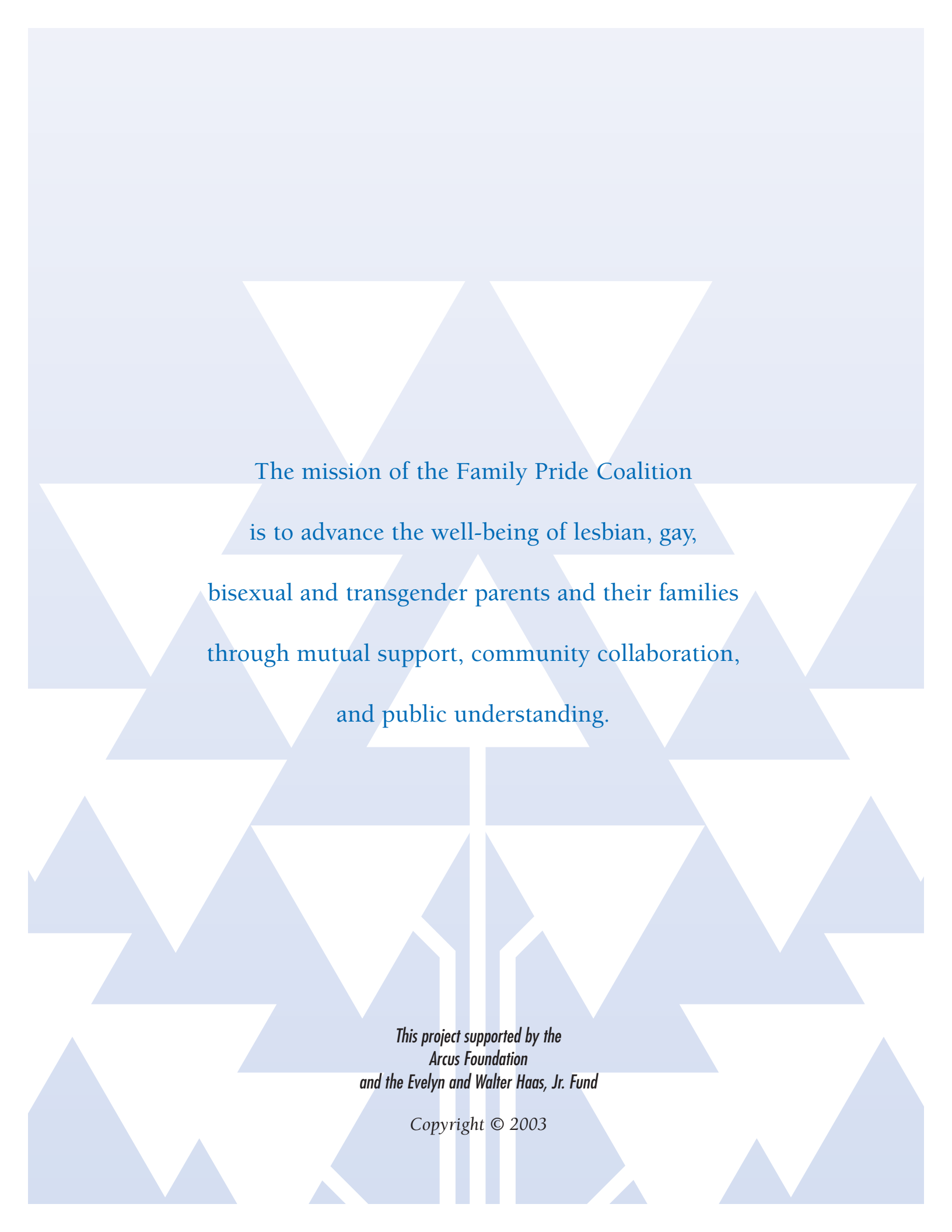
# OPENING MORE DOORS:

*Creating Policy Change to Include Our Families*



**family pride**

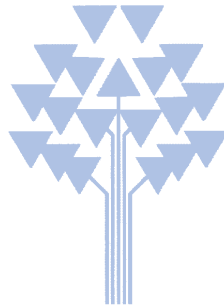
coalition



The mission of the Family Pride Coalition  
is to advance the well-being of lesbian, gay,  
bisexual and transgender parents and their families  
through mutual support, community collaboration,  
and public understanding.

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Arcus Foundation  
and the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund*

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Dr. Goldstein has over 15 years of experience as a writer and teacher with a specialty in education, public policy and public health. As the Manager of Educational Resources for GLSEN, she published *Zero Indifference: A How-To Guide to Ending Name-Calling in Schools* (<http://www.glsen.org/templates/resources/record.html?section=14&record=1053a>) and *Invisible Women*, which documents the underreporting of anti-LBT harassment against girls and young women in grades K-12 (<http://www.glsen.org/templates/resources/record.html?section=14&record=1062>).

Dr. Goldstein earned her Ph.D. from Brandeis University with the assistance of a Mellon Fellowship, and has taught at Harvard, MIT and Connecticut College. Beverly Guy-Sheftal called her anthology, *The Gender Politics of HIV/AIDS in Women* (NYU Press, 1997), "the most important book to emerge on women and AIDS." She currently serves as a Senior Grant Writer for an anti-poverty non-profit organization in New York City.

# OPENING MORE DOORS:

## *Creating Policy Change to Include Our Families*

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## Opening More Doors: Creating Policy Change to Include Our Families

### How Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Parents Can Help Their Children's Education By Creating Change At The Administrative and District Level

*Opening More Doors: Creating Policy Change to Include Our Families* marks the second phase of the two-part Opening Doors project initiated by the Family Pride Coalition in 1999. The first phase of this project produced *Opening Doors: Lesbian and Gay Parents and Schools*, a resource that supported parents, educators and children as they built relationships to create welcoming environments for children with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) parents. Phase 2, the resource you now hold in your hands, provides guidelines to families and communities to advocate at the administrative and district level to institute policies that support diverse families—specifically LGBT-headed families—by including and integrating their needs and culture into the life of the school.

### The Challenge

All parents want their child's school to be a welcoming and safe place that respects and includes their family. LGBT parents eager to ensure these same goals for themselves and their children may find themselves facing particular challenges on the administrative and district level. Those of you fortunate enough to live in a school district where other LGBT-headed families have paved the way may find some progress has already been made on visibility, safety and inclusion-related issues by the time your family arrives. But if you are one of the pioneers coming into a school or a child care program that has never encountered a family like yours, they may not know that you exist, what to call you or how to treat you or your children. If the policies of your school district reflect those of your state, it's likely that little thought will have been given to recognizing LGBT people and/or their families as fully acknowledged members of the community or protected legal entities.<sup>1</sup>

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[1] There is only sporadic legal recognition of the rights of LGBT people or families in the laws of the United States. See <http://www.lambdalegal.org/cgi-bin/iowa/documents/record?record=399> for Lambda Legal's overview of State Adoption Laws, <http://www.lambdalegal.org/cgi-bin/iowa/documents/record?record=217> for their chart of states, cities and counties which prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and <http://www.lambdalegal.org/cgi-bin/iowa/states/domesticpart-map> for their map of government employers offering domestic partnership benefits. All three sites accessed on May 26th, 2003.

Those few protections that do exist tend to be enacted on a state or county level, and can be wildly idiosyncratic in content and scope even within a given county or state. We need only to look to Florida for a recent example. On December 3rd, 2002, the Orlando *City Council* passed legislation that protects gay people from discrimination in the workplace, housing market or public accommodations—but does not authorize gay adoptions or same-sex marriages. The very next day, in the very same state, Palm Beach County *commissioners* quietly enacted sweeping new protections against job discrimination sought by the county's gay community—and in doing so joined the then 239 municipalities and 12 states (plus the District of Columbia) that have anti-discrimination ordinances protecting gays and lesbians in the realms of public and private employment. By contrast, that very same week the Palm Beach County *School Board* postponed a decision on whether to include sexual orientation in its anti-discrimination policy for students after opponents asked for more time to consider the change.



Perhaps you arrive at your child's school to find that all official paperwork from the school refers to parents as "mother" and "father"—and provides only one slot for each category. There are no books depicting LGBT people, let alone families, in the school library. When you call to volunteer time as a teacher's assistant in your second grader's classroom, her teacher insists on knowing whether you're her "real" mother/father. Though it's June, the bulletin boards that are usually devoted to commemorating national and ethnic holidays are still full of May Day projects—nothing about LGBT Pride Month. Your 7th grader makes it through an entire section on the American Civil Rights movement without ever learning Bayard Rustin's name. The list goes on and on, from incidents that are "merely" hurtful (on Mother's/Father's Day, your child's teacher tells him or her that no one has two moms/dads and only allows your child to make one gift/card/project) to those that endanger your child's health (the school nurse insists that only the child's legally recognized biological or adoptive parent can approve medical procedures in case of an emergency). In school districts, as in many other public venues, invisibility is the most common first obstacle of LGBT people.

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*Name-calling has reached epidemic proportions in schools across the country, and can be accompanied with, or lead to, physical violence.*

There may be resistance when you take steps towards visibility. Some of that resistance may arise along so-called moral grounds; people who wish to support you, might not feel safe doing so without some kind of legal protection in place. For example, some parents, teachers, administrators and students may confuse your requests for inclusiveness and tolerance with "promoting a homosexual agenda," accuse you of seeking "special rights," or argue that it's improper to "teach sex education." Well-meaning teachers may

tell you during parent-teacher conferences that they'd like to create a more inclusive atmosphere but hesitate to bring up so-called "gay issues" in the classroom for fear of losing their jobs.

The other major challenge to the safety and dignity of LGBT people in K-12 environments is anti-LGBT harassment. Name-calling has reached epidemic proportions in schools across the country, and can be accompanied with, or lead to, physical violence.<sup>2</sup> Your child is very likely to hear slurs everywhere he or she goes—on the school bus, in the hallways and even in the classroom. What happens when your first grader comes home saying, "That's so gay, and responds to your objections by protesting "all the kids say it"—within earshot of their (unresponsive) teacher?

The previous scenario is all too real, as nearly anyone who has recently passed an outdoor schoolyard during recess knows<sup>3</sup>: 88% of the 1,000 students interviewed in a 2001 national phone survey conducted by Hamilton College reported having heard classmates use "gay" as a derogatory term.<sup>4</sup> And of the 900 middle and high-school aged LGBT students who responded to the GLSEN 2001 National School Climate Survey<sup>5</sup>,

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[2] For more information on ending name-calling see GLSEN's "Zero Indifference: A How-To Guide to Ending Name-Calling in Schools." While the whole guide should prove useful, section C documents the legal obligation of school faculty and administrators to end harassment: <http://www.glsen.org/templates/resources/record.html?section=14&record=1053>. Accessed May 26th, 2003. The National Mental Health Association offers *What Does Gay Mean? How to Talk with Kids about Sexual Orientation and Prejudice*. This anti-bullying program is designed to improve understanding and respect for GLBT youth. Centered on an educational booklet (available in print and on their website as a PDF file) this program encourages parents and others to communicate and share values of respect with their children. <http://www.nmha.org/whatdoesgaymean>. Accessed May 26th, 2003.

[3] This scenario is actually based on the account of a lesbian mom from a "progressive" Northeastern suburb.

[4] Hamilton College (2001). Hamilton College Gay Issues Poll. Available at: <http://www.hamilton.edu/news/gayissuespoll/>. Accessed May 26th, 2003.

[5] GLSEN (2001). National School Climate Survey. Available at: <http://www.glsen.org/templates/news/record.html?section=20&record=1029>. Accessed May 26th, 2003.



23% sometimes heard homophobic remarks from faculty or staff, and 81% reported that faculty or staff rarely intervened when hearing such remarks.

Anti-LGBT harassment touches the lives of all students, regardless of sexual orientation. Four out of five students in the 1999 Safe Schools Coalition survey who said that they had experienced anti-LGBT harassment (80%) identified as heterosexual.<sup>6</sup> And in a 2001 poll of 712 suburban high school girls ages 14-19, 62% of heterosexually identified girls said that they had been “called sexually offensive names;” among girls who identified as bisexual or lesbian, the figure rose to 72%.<sup>7</sup> The problem intensifies in the lives of people who actually identify as LGBT, where unchecked verbal abuse often leads to physical violence. According to the GLSEN survey:

**84% reported hearing homophobic remarks such as “faggot” or “dyke” frequently or often.**

- 83% of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed (name calling, threats, etc.) because of their sexual orientation.
- 84% reported hearing homophobic remarks such as “faggot” or “dyke” frequently or often.
- 90% reported hearing the expression “That’s so gay,” or “You’re so gay” frequently or often.
- 21% reported being physically assaulted.<sup>8</sup>

### What a Better World for Our Kids Looks Like

In an ideal world, your child’s school already has—and enforces—non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, teaches tolerance and respect, opens its proms to all, and includes representations of LGBT people throughout the K-12 curriculum; it has modified the internet filtering software in its computers that previously blocked out all web sites with LGBT-related material and provides specialized training for its staff, faculty and administrators on LGBT issues. You enjoy the company and support of allies in all quarters of the parenting and academic communities, and your school administrators and superintendent actively solicit your suggestions for additional improvements.

Whether your situation looks like the one described above, you’re the first LGBT family in your school, or somewhere in between, *Opening More Doors: Creating Policy Change to Include Our Families* is for you. It’s about what one family can do to bring its school closer to the ideal of safety and visibility for all.

[6] Safe Schools Coalition (1999). They Don’t Even Know Me: Understanding Anti-Gay Harassment and Violence in Schools. Available at: <http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/safe.html> under the “publications” heading in the toolbar at the top of the screen. Accessed May 26th, 2003.

[7] Fineran, S. (2001). Sexual minority students and peer sexual harassment in high school. *Journal of School Social Work*, 11, (2), 50-69.

[8] GLSEN (2001). National School Climate Survey.



## What LGBT Parents Can Do: General Introduction to School Activism

All children and families should have an equal right to a safe and effective education in their school community. It is possible to have an impact on the school environment through active participation in the school community. Parents are natural advocates. Many LGBT people engage in their first activist experiences as a result of their commitment to making the world a better place for their children. Others describe their entry into school

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*Many LGBT people engage in their first activist experiences as a result of their commitment to making the world a better place for their children.*

activism as the most courageous of their sometimes long activist careers. The decision to advocate for your children is a personal one, fueled by abiding passion for the well-being of your children and family. It is important to use this passion to your advantage, while communicating it as an issue of civil rights for all children and families.

In *Opening Doors: Lesbian and Gay Parents and Schools* (1999), the Family Pride Coalition began the discussion of how gay and lesbian parents, teachers and administrators can best build relationships that promote the well-being of our children in schools.<sup>9</sup> But educators need policies to promote “doing the right thing” and to protect them for opening the door to what, for some, might be sensitive conversations. This project addresses this need. The activities described below build on that publication by providing a blueprint for the steps that LGBT parents can take with four important people or entities within the school community—the board of education, Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), superintendent and principal.

### Board of Education

#### Background Information on the Board of Education

The local Board of Education, often referred to as the school board, is comprised of individuals from the community interested in having some oversight and input on what is being taught in the school and the school environment. These board members are mandated to gather information from all members of the community to accurately represent their views.

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*The local school board will usually have direct authority over the policies implemented in the district, and the level at which they are enforced.*

The local school board will usually have direct authority over the policies implemented in the district, and the level at which they are enforced. School board members may have varying degrees of familiarity or comfort with issues related to gay and lesbian families, and may view debate over this topic as a contest between special interest groups unless the issues are brought to their attention by those most impacted and as an identifiable part of their constituency.

This type of communication helps to make the issue both personal and tangible, rather than viewed as part of a larger political agenda. In some cases, it may be useful to address these concerns with straight allies from the community who may appear to school board members to be less threatening, less biased and more credible carrying a message that all children and families need to feel accepted, included and equally represented in the school community.

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[9] “Opening Doors: Lesbian and Gay Parents and Schools,” The Family Pride Coalition, 1999.





## Activities to Influence and Educate the Board of Education

### ► Meet with Local School Board Members

Meet with at least one school board member and encourage other LGBT parents to do the same. Use these meetings to gain an understanding of board members' views on education. What are their concerns for the school? As an LGBT parent with children in the district, be sure to let school board members know about your family, your issues and your concerns. The only way they will begin to address the needs of LGBT families is if they know that they exist.

### ► Provide Information to School Board Members

School board members may not have an understanding of the importance of including information about LGBT-headed families in the school environment. This includes recognition of same-sex parents and enforcing policies protecting LGBT youth and children of LGBT parents from harassment.

Of particular importance to most board members are test scores and budgets, as these reflect the community's sensitivity to academic achievement in a climate of shrinking budgets. You can answer these concerns by reminding the board members that students perform better when they study in a nurturing and supportive environment. Studies have repeatedly shown a direct correlation between the amount of parental involvement and the academic success of their child. Alerting board members that there is a high cost to the district when families sue the school district for not providing equal access to education has proven successful, though it is not our recommended starting point in the dialogue.<sup>10</sup>

Emphasize that providing an environment supportive of LGBT parents and their children is not hard or expensive. Teacher training is already required, and there are community-based groups that can help educate teachers and staff about LGBT families and how to create safe and inclusive schools.<sup>11</sup>

(See list of Organizations and Websites, pg. 26)

#### What can you ask for?

##### **An anti-harassment policy**

If your school district does not have an anti-harassment or non-discrimination policy, suggest that one be adopted. In discussions with teachers about best practices to create inclusive environments, they have repeatedly communicated concern for finding support or feeling sure of job safety if they discuss issues related to "homosexuality." A district policy should free teachers to do what they often know is the right thing, without fear of reprisal. Schools should develop and implement written policies that prohibit discrimination, harassment and abuse of students, teachers, and staff because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender or because they are perceived to be in one of those categories, or associated with someone who is in one of these categories. (See Appendix A)

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[10] See *Nabozny v. Podlesny*, 92 F3d 446 (7th Cir. 1996) holding student could maintain claims alleging discrimination on the basis of gender and sexual orientation under the Equal Protection Clause where school district failed to protect the student to the same extent that other students were protected from harassment and harm by other students due to the student's gender and sexual orientation. The school administrators failed to protect Nabozny against anti-gay harassment, despite the school's policy of investigating and punishing student-on-student battery and sexual harassment. Just before the case went to jury, the school district agreed to settle the case for just under \$1 million.

[11] The "Making Schools Safe" program from the Lesbian & Gay Rights Project of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), is a model training workshop focused on educating school faculty and administrators about how to create a safe and open environment for lesbian and gay students. It includes information on their legal obligations to LGBT students, staff, and families, and could serve as a fine preventative tool long before situations come to the point of litigation. [http://www.aclu.org/safeschools/safe\\_schools.html](http://www.aclu.org/safeschools/safe_schools.html). Accessed May 26th, 2003.



### Evaluation of existing policies

If your school district does have inclusive policies in place, evaluate the implementation of those policies to ensure that the burden of ending harassment is not placed on the student who has been harassed. Policies should be in place to protect teachers, administrators and other employees from discrimination in employment on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

### Inclusive Curriculum

To benefit students in all grade levels, encourage a curriculum that includes trainings, texts and materials—in all areas including, but not limited to, history, literature, family life, sexuality and health education—that are relevant, comprehensive, age-appropriate, medically-accurate and inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

### Repeal Anti-LGBT Policies

If your district has anti-LGBT policies in place, you can work to remove prohibitive policies that forbid or discourage appropriate in-school discussions of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. All students should be able to feel comfortable and safe talking about their families.

### Internet Filtering

If your school provides internet access, ask the district purchasing officials to buy internet filtering software that (1) has transparent filtering tools; (2) allows disabling keyword blocking; and (3) is modifiable to ensure that educational and appropriate LGBT sites are not automatically blocked.<sup>12</sup>

#### ► **Build Coalitions with Heterosexual Allies**

One of the most important factors to consider when trying to educate school board members is that the individuals who serve are elected and require the support of the community to continue their work. If you are able to build a coalition with diverse constituents in the community, you are much more likely to ensure that an inclusive environment is established and maintained.

Some of the groups that you will want to include in a coalition are the PTA, faith-based organizations, racial or ethnic minority organizations, students/student groups, local business associations and prominent community leaders, among others.

#### ► **Encourage Other Community Members to Contact the School Board**

Even a few calls or letters can make a big difference in the outcome of debates. There is great strength in numbers and diverse voices advocating for fairness. Using your relationships in the community to increase the contacts to the board is a useful tool. The individuals with whom you interact at your place of worship, child care center, play groups or other types of groups should be encouraged to contact board members as well.

#### ► **Attend School Board Meetings and Testify**

These meetings are too often sparsely attended. By establishing an ongoing presence before a controversy occurs, you will establish history and build more credibility with the board. You can also support safe and inclusive schools by speaking about this issue before your school board. Coordinate testimony with other like-minded people to ensure that the most effective messages are being provided to the board throughout the meeting.

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[12]“What to Ask for and From Whom,” The Gay Lesbian and Straight Educational Network (GLSEN), 2001.



Be respectful toward the board and toward community members who oppose LGBT-related policies and programs. Remember that you are asking them to stretch their boundaries of understanding and acceptance. You will gain more ground by making it possible for them to do so. Trust and respect expand the opportunities for mutual respect. The strongest arguments are reasonable, but include a personal approach, especially as LGBT parents who share common goals with other parents.

### ► **Vote for Fair-Minded School Board Members**

School board elections typically generate low voter turnout. You can make a big difference in the school environment for your children, your family and your community by voting, and reminding friends and colleagues to vote for fair-minded members.<sup>13</sup>

## **Parent-Teacher Associations**

### **Background Information on Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs)**

The Parent-Teacher Association in your child's school presents another opportunity for creating a positive influence in the schools. The Parent Teacher Association, or PTA, is comprised of both parents and teachers who have an interest and investment in the schools. They are usually eager for volunteers, providing LGBT parents a chance to interact with other parents in an informal setting on common goals.

In fact, the National PTA is the largest volunteer child advocacy organization in the United States. It is a not-for-profit association of parents, educators, students and other citizens active in their schools and communities. As the structure of families have changed in the United States, the National PTA has sought to continue to be a voice for all children by providing support and resources that are both relevant and inclusive. With over 6 million members nationwide in 26,000 local communities, the PTA can be a powerful tool for LGBT parents to make change in their local schools.

#### **The Mission of the PTA**

- To support and speak on behalf of children and youth in the schools, in the community and before governmental bodies and other organizations that make decisions affecting children.
- To assist parents in developing the skills they need to raise and protect their children.
- To encourage parent and public involvement in the public schools.

#### **The Purpose of the PTA**

- To promote the welfare of children and youth in their home, school, community and place of worship.
- To secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth.
- To bring into closer relation the home and the school, that parents and teachers may cooperate intelligently in the education of children and youth.
- To develop between educators and the general public such united efforts as will secure for all children and youth the highest advantages in physical, mental, social and spiritual education.<sup>14</sup>

[13] "Working with School Boards to Ensure Comprehensive Sexuality Education," Sexuality and Information Council of the United States (SIECUS), available at: <http://www.siecus.org/advocacy/kits0003.html>. Accessed May 26th, 2003.

[14] National PTA, "Mission and Purpose Statements," available at: [http://www.pta.org/aboutpta/mission\\_en.asp](http://www.pta.org/aboutpta/mission_en.asp). Accessed May 26th, 2003.



When thinking about working with the local PTA, an important resource is the National PTA policy statement regarding diversity. An excerpt is included below.<sup>15</sup>

### National PTA Respect for Differences Position Statement (excerpt)

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National PTA believes that the first and most important steps to combat hatred and violence must be made by families and supported by schools who teach tolerance, respect and sensitivity towards others. National PTA believes that the lessons of respect are best learned when parents, teachers and other adults model a commitment to tolerance and fairness.

All children have the right to a quality education that allows each child to reach his or her full potential. Schools must eliminate discrimination and stereotyping in materials and activities. **They must establish an environment in which staff and students are expected to demonstrate cooperation, acceptance and respect for differences. They must provide every student the support needed to succeed, and be free from bullying, discrimination or other forms of harassment.**

National PTA opposes discrimination on the basis of race, gender, national origin, language, religion, age, physical and academic ability and sexual orientation. We oppose discrimination in housing, education, health care, employment, and the justice system. **We will work to ensure that tolerance and respect for differences are provided to all children and all families in schools, communities and public policies.**

—ADOPTED BY 2001 NATIONAL PTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

(Included in the *National PTA Resolutions, Position Statements, and Legislative Directives*, pg. III. 3C) (Emphasis added)

### Activities: Participating with and Educating the Parent Teacher Association

#### ► Build Relationships

The best way to advocate is proactively, so it is most advantageous to build relationships over time. It is much easier to negotiate for your family's needs and to have your issues and concerns heard when trust is already established. Be involved and get to know other parents at your child's school. Children create a natural connection for parents, allowing the development of shared commitment to their well-being. Other LGBT parents and allies committed to social justice and/or fueled by their passion for their own children's well-being might want to share the work of researching existing policies, connecting with school staff and working toward improving school climate and safety. Determine the best place for you to be involved based on your skills and interests, and approach this work in a manner that is comfortable for you and your family.

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[15] National PTA. "Respecting Differences Resource Guide," available at: <http://www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/helpchild/respectdiff/intro.asp>. Accessed May 26th, 2003.



### ► **Be a Presence in the School**

Some of the ways that you can create and maintain a strong presence in your child's school are by volunteering in the classroom, on the playground or in the lunchroom; by attending school events; or chaperoning field trips. Be sure to attend parent-teacher conferences when they are scheduled. Through your presence, you demonstrate that you want the best educational experience for your child and all of the children of the school community. Simple acts, such as working at a bake sale or attending school meetings, educate the whole school community about LGBT families and diversity.

### ► **Work with Like-Minded School/Community Members**

There is great strength in numbers, so use your contacts in the school and the community to amplify your voice and increase your power. Show your commitment to the school and its goal of educating and addressing all children, not just your student or your particular concerns. One great place to look for allies is on the school's diversity or anti-bias committee. If one exists, try to take an active role in it. Do not overlook including individuals you interact with through your place of worship, child care center or playgroups as natural allies.

### ► **Attend Meetings and Raise Issues for PTA to Support**

If it feels comfortable to you, think about joining the parent-teacher association. By becoming an active member, you can build the credibility necessary to raise issues of concern for your family in a setting designed to address those issues. You may be surprised at the support you receive.<sup>16</sup>

## **The Superintendent and the Principal**

The superintendent is the chief executive officer of the school district, and works closely (though not always well) with the school board.<sup>17</sup> The superintendent is responsible for implementing the strategic plan approved by the school board, administering board-adopted policies, managing the district budget and hiring and supervising district staff. The superintendent cannot approve district policy, but has a great deal of influence on the board's decisions, and is fully responsible for carrying out board policy. In addition to insuring the smooth functioning of the operations listed above, the superintendent also provides professional leadership and vision for the community as a whole.

The principal, who is often hired by the superintendent, or a committee appointed by the superintendent, is a school's chief administrator. The principal manages the day-to-day operations of the school in accordance with the policies and guidelines established by the school board and superintendent. He or she may hire and fire school staff and set goals and objectives for that school. In short, the principal is the single most powerful individual in a given school—and therefore the person most responsible for setting its mood and

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[16] Appelbaum, Lauri (2001). "Creating a safe and welcoming school for your children," Rainbow Families School Resources, available at: <http://www.rainbowfamilies.org/school.htm>. Accessed May 26th, 2003.

[17] This description of the superintendent's role and the one on the principal's role that follows come from "What to Ask for and From Whom," The Gay Lesbian and Straight Educational Network (GLSEN), 2001.



tone (and that of its faculty and staff). Opportunities to meet and/or work with him or her prior to your request for anything LGBT-related. It may be useful to learn about his/her track record on issues in the past.

Both legally and ethically, the visibility, safety and inclusion of your student and your family is a fundamental part of both the principal's and the superintendent's responsibilities.<sup>18</sup> As described in the opening lines of the Statement of Ethics put forth by each of their respective professional associations.<sup>19</sup>

*“The administrator acknowledges that the schools  
belong to the public they serve for the purpose of providing  
educational opportunities to all.”<sup>20</sup>*

The Statement of Ethics goes on to outline precisely what this means for high-ranking educational administrators in terms of values and conduct.<sup>21</sup> The principal/superintendent:

- Makes the well-being of students the fundamental value of all decision-making and actions.
- Fulfills professional responsibilities with honesty and integrity.
- Supports the principle of due process and protects the civil and human rights of all individuals.
- Obeys local, state and national laws<sup>22</sup> and does not knowingly join or support organizations that advocate, directly or indirectly, the overthrow of the government.
- Implements the governing board of education's policies and administrative rules and regulations.
- Pursues appropriate measures to correct those laws, policies and regulations that are not consistent with sound educational goals.
- Avoids using positions for personal gain through political, social, religious, economic or other influences.
- Accepts academic degrees or professional certification only from duly accredited institutions.
- Maintains the standards and seeks to improve the effectiveness of the profession through research and continuing professional development.
- Honors all contracts until fulfillment, release or dissolution mutually agreed upon by all parties to contract.

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[18] If fact, legally, the principal is considered a liable school official (this is not the case with teachers and counselors), and can therefore be held accountable for any failure to fulfill the requirements of law by protecting your child and ensuring their right to an equal education. The infamous landmark case for this decision is *Nabozny v. Podlesny* (1996). In this case the U.S. Court of Appeals, 7th Circuit, concluded that the Ashland Public School System, the principals of the middle and high schools, and the high school's assistant principal violated Nabozny's 14th amendment equal protection rights by discriminating against him based on his gender or sexual orientation; they failed to protect him against anti-gay harassment, despite the school's policy of investigating and punishing student-on-student battery and sexual harassment. Just before the case went to jury, the school district agreed to settle the case for just under \$1 million. The full text of the court's decision in *Nabozny v. Podlesny* available at: <http://www.ca7.uscourts.gov/op3.fwx?yr=95&num=3634&Submit1=Request+Opinion>. Accessed May 26th, 2003.

[19] For Superintendents, this is the American Association of School Administrators; for Principals, it's The National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

[20] For the full text of this document, or to print your own copy, go to: <http://www.aasa.org/about/ethics.htm>. Accessed May 26th, 2003.

[21] It's worth noting that the three-year goals approved at the July 2000 NAESP Board of Directors' meeting include the following: "NAESP will ensure legislation and policy at the federal and state levels that result in the adequate funding and equitable distribution of resources and educational programs that provide for the success of all children": <http://www.naesp.org/aboutus2.html#goals>

[22] In your case, this may mean anti-discrimination laws.

See <http://www.lambdalegal.org/cgi-bin/iowa/documents/record?record=217> for Lambda Legal's chart of states, cities and counties which prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. Accessed May 26th, 2003.



## What to Ask Your Superintendent For

### Policy & Procedures

- Adopt clear administrative procedures for district-wide compliance of anti-harassment and non-discrimination policies.
- Establish and implement policies providing confidentiality in discussions between counselors and students. School counselors should advise students of the existence and limits, if any, on counselor-student confidentiality and discuss the child's feelings about shared knowledge about their family in school. Policies should include a prohibition on disclosing information regarding the families of students to their classmates or peers without the consent of the student. In all cases, discussion of a child's family should use the language of the family to describe names and relationships ("two moms," "dad and step-dad," "mom and her partner"). School counselors should be guided by the ethical standards of the American School Counselor Association, the American Counseling Association, the National Board for Certified Counselors and the National Association of Social Workers.

### Staff Development

- Provide introductory and on-going training to all staff—teachers, administrators, coaches, support staff, cafeteria personnel, and maintenance workers—on addressing the needs of LGBT youth.
- Provide training to all staff on how to recognize and intervene to stop harassment that occurs in their presence. Other students may take the failure of staff to respond immediately to harassment as approval of the harassment—or worse, that the student deserves to be harassed.
- Provide specialized training for school counselors on LGBT issues. Address the implicit assumption that children of LGBT parents may have challenges because their parents are LGBT vs. the reality that they may face challenges due to a world that allows for anti-gay discrimination.
- Ensure that guidance counselors, school nurses, school social workers and school psychologists receive special training on providing support and information for children with LGBT parents, and for LGBT youth as well.
- Provide appropriate training for non-instructional staff. For example, bus drivers and crossing guards should receive training on addressing harassment that occurs in transit to and from school or other locations. School security officers should receive training that includes information on the settings in which harassment is most likely to occur.

### Curriculum

- Provide an inclusive health curriculum by including information that is specific to the needs of LGBT people in health and family life education on sexuality, sexual orientation and sexually transmitted diseases. Such information should be presented on par with the presentation of all other sexual identity and health information and without an implicit message that being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender is itself a health problem.
- Integrate discussion about LGBT issues into curricula, trainings, texts and materials—in all areas including, but not limited to, history, literature, family life, sexuality and health education—that are relevant, comprehensive, age-appropriate, medically-accurate and inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.



- The district's staff development department should offer free curriculum resources and lesson plans to interested teachers.

## Students

- Ensure that all students are aware of their rights and have the means to implement them without retribution. Advocate teaching by example. Children most readily learn behavior that is modeled for them.
- Introduce students to the principles of respect and tolerance, starting during elementary school. General programs on tolerance and respect should include appropriate education about LGBT people.
- Support student clubs by placing value on the extraordinary leadership of young people and affirm the right of students to organize and lead school-supported gay-straight alliances and other appropriate groups that address LGBT issues in schools by: (1) Encouraging students to form gay-straight alliances or other in-school support groups for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, heterosexual and questioning students who want to talk to each other about issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity; (2) Facilitating the operation of these groups on equal terms with other student groups. For instance, schools should appoint faculty advisors, permit groups to meet on school grounds, allow groups to bring in outside speakers if they wish and allow groups to participate in school-wide activities. Schools should accord gay-straight alliances the same privileges that are routinely granted to other student groups; and (3) Publicizing the existence of these groups on equal terms with other student groups. For example, schools should permit gay-straight alliances to have the use of school bulletin boards and access to the public address system if other groups are permitted such use or access.

## Resources & Library

- Make age-appropriate, accurate and up-to-date literature and information about families with LGBT parents and general LGBT issues available in school libraries. This media should include videos, pamphlets and books, (including those written by youth) for the use of students, teachers and parents. Children's books depicting LGBT people in a variety of everyday roles—including as parents—should be readily available in classroom reading areas whether children of LGBT parents are in the classroom or not. **Visit the Family Pride website for an annotated age-defined list of children's books:**  
[http://www.familypride.org/store/commerce.cgi?page=children.html&cart\\_id=3282205.20217](http://www.familypride.org/store/commerce.cgi?page=children.html&cart_id=3282205.20217)
- Ensure that library holdings are catalogued and shelved so that students can access the materials easily. For example, cataloguing systems should use contemporary subject headings such as “lesbian” and “gay” rather than outdated and potentially derogatory terminology such as “homosexual” or “homophile.” Books on LGBT issues should be kept in the same manner as other holdings, preferably on open shelves, rather than being kept in the librarian's office and made available only on request.
- Integrate LGBT issues and literature into reading lists to ensure comfortable and universal access. In addition, develop specific reading lists of books on LGBT issues, periodically displaying these materials in a visible way.
- Remove the Internet filtering software or install software that allows for educational and appropriate access to information about LGBT issues and other issues commonly censored by filters.
- Develop local guides to organizations for LGBT parents and LGBTQ youth.
- Evaluate materials currently in use to ensure that they do not present outdated information or stereotypical messages.





- Develop an awareness of heterosexism (the assumption that everyone is heterosexual) and the ways in which it infiltrates literature, curriculum and general media. Question and comment on this assumption whenever possible.
- Make sure your district does outreach to all minorities including LGBT people when it comes time to fill teaching, coaching, administrative, clerical, custodial and all other positions within the school system.

## What to Ask Your Principal For <sup>23</sup>

- Adopt a school core values statement that makes clear both the values being promoted and those things that will not be tolerated. Insure that it explicitly protect the rights of all students, teachers and families regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender or sexual orientation (real or perceived). Post this core values statement and anti-harassment policy in a prominent place in the school's student handbook, parent's handbook, disciplinary guidelines, cafeteria and hallways.
- Espouse these values in public and explicit ways at back-to-school nights and other gatherings by welcoming all families and declaring your school a safe and inclusive environment for all children and families.
- Adopt an anti-harassment policy that specifically names and defines those behaviors that are considered harassment; insure that it covers the spectrum from verbal to physical, and spells out the right of all students, families and teachers, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender or sexual orientation (real or perceived) to be safe from harmful remarks as well as from bullets or fists.
- Establish and enforce clear disciplinary guidelines in a handbook that spells out infractions and disciplinary actions, thereby insuring consistent discipline from teacher to teacher, student to student, and infraction to infraction. Make sure that it clearly spells out for parents how the school will handle infractions so that all involved, whether they are the one who perpetrates verbal or physical harm against someone else, or is the victim of these actions, have clear expectations of the outcomes of behavior.
- Offer professional development opportunities for staff, including para-professional staff (bus drivers, cafeteria monitors, after school program staff). Insure that these opportunities include anti-homophobia training—including, but not limited to, how to spot, and stop, anti-LGBT name calling in classrooms, hallways, locker rooms, playgrounds and any other school areas.
- Host an evening community awareness program for parents that addresses bullying, discrimination and harassment, including LGBT issues.
- Openly talk to staff, parents and students about protecting LGBT (and all) people from bullying, discrimination and harassment.
- Make sure that official school forms/paperwork do not assume heterosexuality, and create spaces for all family members to be included without altering the forms.

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[23] The suggestions in this section borrow from a number of resources, including *Hatred in the Hallways*, the excellent report on violence and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students in U.S. schools by Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2001; a full citation for this appears in the resource list on pg. 24), "What to Ask for and From Whom" by The Gay Lesbian and Straight Educational Network (GLSEN, 2001), and an invaluable discussion with Phil Robinson, an "out" teacher/Student Support Coordinator at Grover Cleveland Middle School in the Boston public school system.



## Working with Others

As a parent, you have a lot of clout. Still, it helps to be present in your student's education and school community before the time comes to express a complaint and/or advocate for changes in policy. Parents who have the time and leisure to be involved with their students and their schools on a day-to-day basis enjoy the advantage of already knowing something about their school's structure, administrators, faculty, board, students, parents—and possibly even town selectmen. More importantly, they have already demonstrated their interest in and dedication to the life of the school as a whole.

So if your circumstances allow you to make an on-going commitment—as a room parent, a committee member, or a member of the PTA—definitely consider doing so. Becoming a member of your school's anti-bias or diversity committee (or starting one if none exists) can offer a particularly invaluable opportunity to make allies across the spectrum of difference; it's also a chance to develop curriculum and policies that demonstrate your commitment to respect and equality for all.

Of course, you have the right to advocate for your student and/or family regardless of whether you have a history of involvement with the school. Even then, bear in mind that one of the best ways to insure that your request will be taken seriously is to take an instrumental practical role in helping to make it happen. For example, a great way to show your commitment to the LGBT sensitivity trainings you want your school to hold is to help write a grant to fund them. If you want your principal or superintendent to stand up to parents who flood the school board meeting to complain about the inclusion of LGBT-family friendly books in the library, help them out by making sure that parents who support the school's position also attend the meeting—and that they agree in advance on a calm, clear message about respect for all members of the school community and their families.

## A Few Words about Protocol When Interacting with School Administrators, Faculty and Staff

Courtesy, kindness and all-around good manners are an important part of advocating for change. So is an understanding of the chain of command within your school system. As tempting as it may be to call your district superintendent first thing when making a complaint or seeking policy changes (especially if you are feeling angry or frustrated), it will probably serve you better to go through the levels of influence in order. That means going to your principal (or perhaps even the assistant principal) before approaching his or her boss—the superintendent. There are several reasons for this:

- School districts, like most institutions, are hierarchies with procedures in place. Most often, there are specific people to address specific problems at specific points in the process. This is not necessarily a sign that the people who administer your schools are trying to shut you out; on the contrary, this may be the best way they've found to sort through the many people trying to contact administrators on any given day and best serve them according to their concerns. In addition, it is in everyone's best interest to keep open communication with those in closest contact with the student, as those with a relationship with a child and family are often the ones most invested in their well-being.
- If you try to jump ahead, it is likely you will be asked to return to the starting place on the procedural ladder.



- By jumping ahead, you risk alienating whomever it was you passed over initially. This may strain relations if you are ever called upon to establish communication with them, whether on this issue or some other one.
- While some of these procedures and/or people to whom you are directed may not seem as responsive or effective as you would like them to be initially, it's best to try to work with them, at least the first time around. It's always to your benefit to present yourself as a good citizen—someone who is trying to work within the system. Otherwise, you run the risk of being seen as presumptuous, unpleasant or a troublemaker, which could make it harder for you to advocate effectively for your child. It is often helpful to approach these interactions with the assumption that we all want what's best for children and move from that shared commitment. If your initial efforts at following the protocol produce unsatisfactory results, at least you have tried to get things done according to existing policies and procedures. That can be very valuable later, in the event that anyone implies that you're asking for "special treatment." *It is helpful to document your attempts and interactions as you follow along procedural channels.*
- The content and quality of the relationship between a superintendent and his or her principals, or between principals and those who report to them, varies. It may be that your principal (or the assistant principal) has more immediate and direct authority to deal with your concern than does the superintendent—or more empathy towards or experience with your area of concern. It may be that your principal is so eager to avoid having you take your concern to the superintendent, that he or she addresses it directly.

All in all, the most important thing to remember is that there is a system in place for representing the voices and cultures of the school community. Discovering the means through which these voices can be heard most harmoniously can prove challenging. But in its purest sense, it is this endeavor that brings all of us together to meet the highest goals of education. You are supposed to be heard—and recognized—and represented equally among all others who deserve this same right. The more that you bring people together to achieve these goals, the greater the probability that they will come to pass.

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,  
committed people can change the world.  
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*

—Margaret Mead



***In conclusion:***

**A note from Aimee Gelnow, Executive Director, Family Pride Coalition**

The job of parenting is a daunting task no matter who you are. For LGBT parents, navigating the school system for and with your child adds obstacles and challenges seldom recognized or anticipated by other families, your child's teachers and the school administration. As a mom and school advocate, I have always operated under the assumption that often people just don't know what they don't know. I encourage families to enter relationships with their child's schools with the assumption that you all share a common goal: to create a safe, just and welcoming educational environment for ALL children—ours included—and that, working together, you can all come closer to achieving this common goal for the good of our children and all children who thrive in the safety of accepting, nurturing and just schools.

Thanks are in order to both the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund and the Arcus Foundation for the vision to support our efforts on your behalf along with all of those who continue to support the work of Family Pride.

I hope that you find this booklet useful in achieving your goals for equality and I congratulate and admire you for taking on the challenge. Children have a way of bringing out the activist in all of us. Please let us know your successes and challenges and how we can continue to help.



#### HARASSMENT OF STUDENTS

##### Policy

The [Your School District] School District is committed to providing all students and employees with a safe and supportive school environment in which all members of the school community are treated with respect. Teachers and other staff members are expected to teach and demonstrate by example that all members of the community are entitled to respect.

It is hereby the policy of the [Your School District] School District to prohibit harassment based on real or perceived race, color, religion (creed), national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or on the basis of association with others identified by these categories.

This policy is intended to comply with [Your State] state as well as federal requirements.

The School District shall act to investigate all complaints of harassment, formal or informal, verbal or written, and to discipline or take other appropriate action against any member of the school community who is found to have violated this policy.

##### Definitions

**Adverse Action:** Includes any form of intimidation, reprisal or harassment such as diminishment of grades, suspension, expulsion, change in educational conditions, loss of privileges or benefits, or other unwarranted disciplinary action in the case of students and includes any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment such as suspension, termination, change in working conditions, loss of privileges or benefits, or other disciplinary action in the case of employees.

**Employee:** For purposes of this policy, an employee includes any person employed directly or through a contract with another company by the school district, agents of the school, school board members and any student teacher, intern, or school volunteer.

**Gender Identity:** For purposes of this policy, gender identity means a person's identity, expression, or physical characteristics, whether or not traditionally associated with one's biological sex or one's sex assigned at birth.

**Harassment:** Harassment means verbal or physical conduct based on the student's real or perceived race, religion (creed), color, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or on the basis of association with others identified by these categories, that (1) substantially interferes with or will substantially interfere with a student's educational benefits, opportunities, or performance; or a student's physical or psychological well-being; or (2) creates an intimidating or hostile environment.

**School Community:** Includes but is not limited to all students, school employees, contractors, unpaid volunteers, work study students, interns, student teachers, and visitors.

**Sexual Harassment:** A form of harassment which means unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature made by a school employee to a student or by a student to another student when:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of a student's education, academic status or progress; or
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct by a student is used as a component of the basis for decisions affecting that student; or



- The conduct (1) substantially interferes with or will substantially interfere with a student's educational benefits, opportunities, or performance; or a student's physical or psychological well-being; or (2) creates an intimidating or hostile educational environment; or
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct by a student is used as the basis for evaluating the student's performance within a course of study or other school-related activity.

**Retaliation:** Any adverse action taken against a person for reporting a complaint of harassment when the complainant honestly believes harassment has occurred or is occurring, or for participating in or cooperating with an investigation.

## **PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING AND HANDLING COMPLAINTS OF HARASSMENT OF STUDENTS**

### **A. REPORTING**

1. Students. It is the policy of the [Your School District] School District to encourage student targets of harassment and students who have first-hand knowledge of such harassment to report such claims. Students should report incident(s) to any teacher, guidance counselor, or school administrator.
2. Employees. Any adult school employee who witnesses, overhears, or receives a report, formal or informal, written or oral, of harassment at school or during school-sponsored activities shall report it to the principal or the principal's designee. If the report involves the school principal, the reporter shall make the report directly to the school district equity coordinator or superintendent. Under certain circumstances, alleged harassment may constitute child abuse under state law. The statutory obligation to report suspected abuse, therefore, may be applicable.
3. Privacy: Complaints will be kept confidential to the extent possible given the need to investigate and act on investigative results.

### **B. RESPONSE**

1. Principal's Duty. The principal or the principal's designee is the person responsible for receiving oral or written reports of harassment. Upon receipt of a report, the principal must notify the school district equity coordinator immediately, without screening or investigating the report. The principal may request, but may not insist upon, a written complaint. A written statement of the facts alleged will be forwarded as soon as practicable by the principal to the school district equity coordinator. If the report was given verbally, the principal shall reduce it to written form within 24 hours and forward it to the school district equity coordinator. Failure to forward any harassment report or complaint as provided herein will result in disciplinary action against the principal.
2. School District Equity Coordinator(s). The superintendent shall designate at least one individual within the school district/supervisory union as the school district equity coordinator to receive reports of harassment. If the report involves the school district equity coordinator, the reporter shall refer the complaint directly to the superintendent. The school district shall prominently post the name, mailing address, and telephone number of its equity coordinator(s). For the [Year] school year the district equity coordinator(s) is (are):

[Name]

[Mailing Address]

[Telephone Number]



### **C. INVESTIGATION**

1. Who. The principal or school district equity coordinator shall conduct an investigation upon receipt of a report or complaint alleging student harassment.
2. How. The investigator shall interview individuals involved and any other persons who may have knowledge of the circumstances giving rise to the complaint and may use other methods and documentation. In determining whether the alleged conduct constitutes a violation of this policy, the investigator shall consider, among other things: the nature of the behavior; how often the conduct occurred; whether there were past incidents or past continuing patterns of behavior; and the relationship of the parties involved.
3. When. The investigator shall complete the investigation as soon as practicable, but in no event later than fourteen (14) calendar days following receipt of the complaint.
4. Result. Upon completion of the investigation, the investigator shall decide if a violation of this policy has occurred and report that decision, along with the evidence supporting it, to the principal or school district equity coordinator and the superintendent or, if the complaint involves the superintendent, directly to the school board, for appropriate action in accordance with school district disciplinary policy.

### **D. SCHOOL DISTRICT ACTION**

The district shall take disciplinary or remedial action as appropriate in order to ensure that further harassment does not occur. Such action may include, but is not limited to: counseling, awareness training, parent-teacher conferences, warning, transfer, suspension and/or expulsion of a student, and counseling, awareness training, transfer, suspension and/or termination of an employee.

School District action taken for violation of this policy will be consistent with the requirements of applicable collective bargaining agreements, [Your state] and federal law, and School District policies.

### **E. APPEAL**

A person judged to be in violation of the policy on student harassment and subjected to action under it may appeal the determination and/or the action taken as follows:

1. Student. If the person filing the appeal is a student, the appeal shall proceed in accordance with School District policy governing discipline of students and with legal due process requirements.
2. Employee. If the person filing the appeal is an employee, the appeal shall proceed in accordance with School District policy governing employee discipline, including, if applicable, grievance procedures under any applicable collective bargaining agreement, and with legal due process requirements.

### **F. RETALIATION**

Any individual who retaliates against any employee or student who reports, testifies, assists, or participates in an investigation or hearing relating to a harassment complaint will be subject to appropriate action and/or discipline by the School District.

Retaliation for reporting harassment or cooperating in an investigation of harassment is unlawful under state law.

### **G. RECORD KEEPING AND NOTIFICATION**

1. Record keeping. The superintendent shall assure that a record of any complaint and investigation of harassment as well as the disposition of the complaint and any disciplinary or remedial action taken is maintained by the School District in a confidential file.
2. Notification. The superintendent shall assure that the complainant is notified whether allegations of harassment were found to be valid, whether a violation of the policy occurred, and whether action was taken as a result.



## H. NOTICE

The superintendent shall use all reasonable means to inform students, employees, and parents or guardians that the district will not tolerate harassment. Copies of the policy and procedures shall appear in the student and employee handbooks (or other similar publications) as well as publications distributed to parents and community members and shall be posted prominently in each school. The notice shall also provide information about the following additional methods of pursuing claims of harassment:

A person may make a complaint of harassment to the [Your State] Human Rights Commission or the federal Office of Civil Rights at the following places:

[Your State] Human Rights Commission

[Address]

[Phone Number]

Director, Compliance Division [Your Area]

Office for Civil Rights

[Address for respective region]

[Phone Number]

In addition, an individual may seek other remedies through private legal action and, in some circumstances, through criminal prosecution.

## I. TRAINING

The superintendent shall develop age-appropriate methods of discussing the meaning and substance of this policy with staff and students in order to help prevent harassment.

In addition to informing staff and students about the policy, these programs, implemented within the context of professional development and school curriculum, must also raise awareness about the different types of harassment; how the harassment manifests itself; and the devastating emotion and educational consequences of harassment.

## SEVERABILITY

The provisions of this policy shall be severable. If any provision of portion of this policy or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of the policy or the application of the provision to other persons or circumstances is not affected.

Adopted:

Revised:

Developed by:  
National Center for Lesbian Rights  
870 Market St., Suite 570  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
(415) 392-6257  
www.nclrights.org



## Appendix B:

### A Sample Parent to Parent Letter



Dear Friends,

Marciano will be the Child of the Week in Ms. Minter's class the week of January 7, 2002. As you all know, being the Child of the Week is very special to all of the kids. Marciano is no exception; he is really looking forward to sharing his life with his classmates. We expect, however, that Marciano's Child of the Week presentation could prompt some questions about Marciano's family that you may or may not feel ready for. We thought that we would try to anticipate some of the questions that your child might ask and give you the information you can use in answering those questions. Enclosed is our effort to provide you with sample answers to some of the questions you might get.

While we are sure that some children have already asked some of these questions, most probably have not. There certainly are other adopted kids at school and other kids who look different than their parents. And though we are not aware of any other lesbian or gay families, some children know other families that look just like ours. Marciano knows several. But, even if your child has not asked any of these questions, others may be very curious. And, as our kids get older, their questions and the answers will get more complex. We are more than willing to talk with you about all of these issues and how we as parents can help our children understand them in age-appropriate ways.

In many ways, this letter is not necessary. Please take it as it was intended – a heads up to parents who want to help their own children as well as a thank you to friends who are part of Marciano's life. We have been very pleased by the sensitivity and friendliness we have encountered at school, and we are grateful that Marciano will have the many wonderful relationships he has already formed there.

Please don't hesitate to call either of us if you have questions.

Warmly,

Anna and Louisa



## Handling Questions about Marciano's Family

In kindergarten, kids are beginning to question who they are, where they came from and how they fit into the world around them. Inevitably, as part of this learning process, they compare themselves with each other. Since Marciano's family looks different from other families, we thought we could help you in answering questions by sharing some facts about our family.

**Q:** *Why does Marciano have two mommies?*

**A:** Marciano has two mommies because his mommies love each other and decided to have a family together. Marciano came to live with them right after he was born.

**Q:** *Why doesn't Marciano have a daddy?*

**A:** Marciano has a birthfather, but he doesn't have a daddy who helps take care of him. Not all kids have daddies who live with them or take care of them.

**Q:** *Can Marciano and his moms be a family if they don't have a daddy?*

**A:** Yes, a family is a group of people who love each other and take care of each other. Some families have a mom and a dad, some have only a mom or a dad, and some have two moms or two dads. Sometimes moms and dads don't live together. Sometimes kids have parents and stepparents. And sometimes kids live with their grandparents or another person who takes care of them. Other families include grownups who don't have kids. But they are all families.

**Q:** *Who is Marciano's real mommy?*

**A:** Both Anna and Louisa are real mommies because they are his parents. Anna is Mama, and Louisa is Mom. They love Marciano and take care of him just like other moms and dads love and take care of their kids.

**Q:** *Whose tummy did Marciano come from?*

**A:** Marciano also has a birthmother, and he came from her tummy. Even though she loved Marciano, she was too young to take care of him, so she asked Mary and Jodi to be his parents. Anna and Louisa wanted Marciano to be their little boy, so they adopted him. Now they have adopted Kaia, Marciano's new baby sister. Kaia has a different birthmother and birthfather than Marciano. Together, Anna, Louisa, Marciano and Kaia are all a family.



**Q:** *What does “adopted” mean?*

**A:** Some parents are not ready or able to take care of the children they have, so they ask other parents to love and be the family for their children. Children can be adopted at any age. Marciano and Kaia were adopted by Anna and Louisa as soon as they were born. Kids who are adopted love their parents just like other kids do, and parents who adopt kids love their kids just like other parents do. Like all children, adopted children are very special to their parents. Anna and Louisa are very lucky to be Marciano and Kaia’s parents.

**Q:** *Why is Marciano’s skin darker than his parents?*

**A:** Marciano’s skin is the same color as his birthmother and birthfather. Marciano’s birthmother is Puerto Rican. Marciano’s birthfather is from Ethiopia, a country in Africa. His baby sister Kaia’s skin will be a mix of the colors of her birthparents’ skin: one has dark skin and one has light skin. It is not unusual for kids in a family to have different colored hair or skin than their parents.

**Q:** *Are Marciano’s moms lesbians? (Gay?)*

**A:** Yes. Usually, two grownups who fall in love with each other are a man and a woman. But sometimes a man falls in love with another man or a woman falls in love with another woman. The word “gay” is used to describe a man who loves another man or a woman who loves another woman. The word “lesbian” means a woman who loves another woman. Marciano’s moms are women who love each other so they are lesbians. Many grownups, including gay and lesbian grownups, decide to be a family when they fall in love with each other. That’s what Anna and Louisa did.

### **Opening Doors: Lesbian and Gay Parents and Schools**

*The Education Committee of Family Pride Coalition*

This booklet, now in its second edition, includes suggestions and tips on building a partnership between the LGBT family and the education community. It was written by education professionals, for both the lay parent, as well as teachers and administrators. The new edition includes issues of concern to the bisexual and transgender community.

1999; \$5.00, available from the Family Pride Coalition at <http://www.familypride.org/library2.htm>

### **Gay Parents/Straight Schools: Building Communication and Trust** *Virginia Casper and Steven B. Schultz*

This book addresses the specific educational realities and needs of families headed by lesbians and gays. It explores communication between lesbian and gay parents and school staff, homophobia at school and at home, gender and gender roles, different interpretations of role models, curriculum planning that invites lesbian and gay parents into the school environment, and connecting children's family experiences with school experiences. Chapters include "What Children Know," "Adults' Point of View," "Classroom Life" and "Finding Gender."

1999; \$19.95; ISBN 080773824; Teachers College Press

### **Hatred in the Hallways: Violence and Discrimination Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students in U.S. Schools** *Human Rights Watch*

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth who attend public schools in the United States are relentlessly harassed and sometimes physically attacked. Each day is an exercise in survival. But not all do survive. Their grades drop, they may become depressed, some quit school, and a few commit suicide.

These students are isolated from their peers and ignored by their teachers. A few have challenged the entrenched prejudice and demanded that school officials protect them from harassment and discrimination. But many school officials succumb to pressure from the community and reject students' demands.

In violation of the principle of equal protection before the law, local, state, and federal legislators have condoned intentional and de facto discrimination on the basis of

sexual orientation and gender identity. As a result, another generation of youth is learning that respect for human rights is selective and that discrimination and persecution are acceptable.

This report challenges these lessons.

2001; \$15.00; ISBN 1564322599; *Human Rights Watch*  
<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/uslgbt/>

### **Just the Facts about Sexual Orientation and Youth: A Primer for Principals, Educators, and School Personnel**

This booklet was developed by a coalition of organizations, including the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Association of School Administrators to help schools appropriately address sexual orientation.

It specifically looks at "reparative therapy," which refers to psychotherapy designed to eliminate people's sexual desire for members of the same gender, and "transformational ministry," which refers to the use of religion to eliminate same-gender desire. It is designed to help school personnel respond appropriately to controversies about sexual orientation.

1999; Free; Available on Web site; *Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) Web site:*  
<http://www.glsen.org/templates/resources/record.html?section+15&record=424>

Source: SIECUS Annotated Bibliographies, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Sexuality and Related Issues. Available at:

<http://www.siecus.org/pubs/biblio/bibs0005.html>.  
Accessed May 26th, 2003.

### **Out of the Ordinary: Essays on Growing Up with Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Parents** *Noelle Howey and Ellen Samuels, Editors*

This book is a collection of essays by adult children of lesbian, gay and transgender parents. These essays touch on important and complicated issues such as overcoming homophobia at school, dealing with a parent's sexuality while developing self-identity, and defining the modern family. A resource guide of organizations that offer support for lesbian, gay and transgender parents and their children is included.

2000; \$13.95; ISBN 0312244894; *V.H.P.S.*

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**Queer Families, Common Agendas: Gay People, Lesbians, and Family Values**

*T. Richard Sullivan, Ph.D., Editor*

This collection of articles examines real-life experiences of those affected by current laws and policies regarding gay and lesbian families. It gives the reader insight into the contradictions in policies and practices, and offers alternative approaches for improved services to lesbian and gay families. Articles include “Out in This World: The Social and Legal Context of Gay and Lesbian Families,” “It’s All a Matter of Attitude: Creating and Maintaining Receptive Services for Sexual Minority Families” and “Policy Alternatives for a Diverse Community: Lesbian and Family Law.”

1999; \$18.95; ISBN 1560231300; *The Haworth Press, Inc.*

**School’s Out: The Impact of Gay and Lesbian Issues on America’s Schools**

*Dan Woog*

Written by a journalist, this book examines gay and lesbian individuals and issues as they affect schools. Part One tells the stories of people—including nurses, teachers, coaches and administrators—who have worked for the inclusion of gay and lesbian issues in schools. Part Two looks at communities where battles have been fought over gay and lesbian issues in the schools. Part Three details programs designed to address the issues of gay and lesbian students, gay-straight groups, curricula and the student press.

1995; \$12.95; ISBN 1555832490; *Alyson Publications*

**When the Drama Club Is Not Enough: Lessons from the Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Students**

*Jeff Perrotti and Kim Westheimer*

Named a 2001 Notable Book in Education by the American School Board Journal Part how-to, part testimony to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students and their allies, *When the Drama Club Is Not Enough* presents the work of two educators and activists who have been at the forefront of the successful Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Students in Massachusetts. Their concrete, hard-won, and inspiring lessons show how it is possible to create a school environment in which all students feel valued and respected.

2001; \$17.00; ISBN 0807031313; *Beacon Press*

## Organizations/Websites

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### **Family Pride Coalition**

The Family Pride Coalition is the only national non-profit organization dedicated to LGBT parents and their families, as well as those considering parenthood.

The Family Pride Coalition advocates for the well being of LGBT parents and their children at the local, state and national level; provides educational resources and trainings for parents and school officials; provides opportunities for LGBT-headed families to gather through local parenting groups and specially designed regional events, including its annual Family Week events.

Address: PO Box 65327  
Washington, DC 20035-5327  
Phone: 202-331-5015  
Web site: [www.familypride.org](http://www.familypride.org)

### **ACLU – American Civil Liberties Union’s Lesbian & Gay Rights Project**

Provides a variety of resources for students, including a training program that informs school administrators and faculty about their legal and moral obligations to prevent anti-gay harassment.

Address: 125 Broad Street  
18th Floor  
New York, NY 10004  
Phone: 212-549-2673  
Web site: [www.aclu.org/safeschools](http://www.aclu.org/safeschools)

### **COLAGE – Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere**

Offers peer support, newsletters, conferences and literature for children with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender parents.

Address: 3543 18th St, #17  
San Francisco, CA 94110  
Phone: 415-861-5437  
Web site: [www.colage.org](http://www.colage.org)

### **GLSEN – Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network**

National network of local chapters working to end harassment and discrimination leveled against students and school personnel based on sexual orientation or gender identity. GLSEN’s student organizing project provides support and resources to youth.

Address: 121 W 27th St, Suite 804  
New York, NY 10001  
Phone: 212-727-0135  
Web site: [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

### **Human Rights Campaign**

National lesbian and gay political organization which lobbies for human rights and works to educate the public. Web site includes a “FamilyNet” addressing family concerns (from custody to schools to summer camps).

Address:  
1640 Rhode Island Ave. N.W.,  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
Phone: 202-628-4160  
Web site: [www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)

### **Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund**

Provides legal advice and support for people experiencing sexual orientation-based harassment and other discrimination.

Address: 120 Wall Street  
Suite 1500  
New York, NY 10005-3904  
Phone: 212-809-8585  
Web site: [www.lambdalegal.org](http://www.lambdalegal.org)

### **National Center for Lesbian Rights**

Legal center advancing the rights and safety of lesbians and their families through litigation, public policy advocacy, free legal advice and counseling, and public education.

Address: 870 Market St., Suite 570  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
Phone: 415-392-6257  
Web site: [www.nclrights.org](http://www.nclrights.org)

### **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**

National progressive organization working for the civil rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people by organizing activists, training leaders, and mobilizing voters.

Address: 1700 Kalorama Road, NW  
Washington, DC 20009-2624  
Phone: 202-332-6483  
Web site: [www.ngltof.org](http://www.ngltof.org)

### **PFLAG – Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays**

For parents, siblings and friends and for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) youth and adults, too. Share concerns; ask questions.

Address: National P-FLAG  
1726 M Street, NW, Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone: 202-638-4200  
Web site: [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

### **SIECUS – The Sex Information and Education Council of the United States**

SIECUS develops, collects, and disseminates information, promotes comprehensive education, and advocates the right of individuals to make responsible sexual choices.

Address: 130 West 42nd Street  
Suite 350  
New York, NY 10036-7802  
Phone: 212-819-9770  
Web site: [www.siecus.org](http://www.siecus.org)

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[www.familypride.org](http://www.familypride.org)

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