



WHAT TO ASK SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATES **AND WHAT THEY OUGHT TO TELL YOU IN RESPONSE**

CAVEAT: *Some voters prefer idealism and passion in a candidate. Others prefer pragmatism. Know that, in some more conservative school districts, giving a "best" answer (below) might be political suicide. A candidate who gives you a "good" or "better" answer may be more electable than one who gives you a "best" answer. And he or she may, in the long run, be a more effective agent of change depending upon his or her people skills. A school board member needs not only the right values, but also the ability to influence colleagues on the board to make real policy changes and to cajole a district's superintendent into meaningful implementation.*

STUDENT RIGHTS AND SAFETY

- 1. Please explain what your district has done or will do to comply with the new Safe Schools/Bullying bill? (Outside Washington State, ask "What has your district done – or what will you do if you're elected – to address harassment, bullying and intimidation?")**

Good: We adopted the model bullying/harassment policy and procedure from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA). We will be incorporating new bullying training materials into our annual staff development events in order to ensure that all staff members are aware of their responsibilities to uphold the policies.

Better: THAT AND ... We modified the OSPI/WSSDA model policy and procedure before adopting it, in order to strengthen it in a few key ways. We required that every school develop an anonymous reporting procedure. We shortened the time allowed for investigating an incident prior to its resolution. We have set up an accountability plan within the district so that incidents serious enough to lead to written reports will be archived, studied and reported regularly to the Board.

Best: THAT AND ... We formed a committee that includes teachers, family members and students from diverse backgrounds to oversee our compliance with SSB and to ensure that our district goes beyond the letter of the law to become truly safe. On the committee's recommendation, student handbooks and teacher orientation materials have been modified to give clear age-appropriate examples of harassment including incidents targeting someone's race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and physical attributes. We are in the process of developing new curriculum segments for all grade levels so that we may educate students on the importance of respecting differences and to teach skills (expected behaviors) for students who witness harassment or bullying. All members of our school community will be actively engaged this year in the process of understanding the harm caused by harassment and bullying, and the value of honoring differences.

- 2. If a student identifies as other-gendered from his or her biological sex, what should the school do regarding the student's identity?**

Good: The school should already have gender education curriculum modules in place that discuss the variety of gender expression, dispel myths about gender differences, and address bullying and harassment specifically. But this student's peers should, especially, be offered such curriculum.

Better: THAT AND ... As with other special needs students, the school should work in concert with the student, his or her family and other adult allies to see that the student's unique needs are being addressed and all options considered. Special arrangements such as access to a private lavatory or changing area should be considered if this would be safer for the student and is something the student wants.

BEST: THAT AND ... If the student wishes to be called by a new name and/or prefers different gender pronouns, with the advice of a psychologist and/or with the consent of the family, the school should respect those wishes.



3. A 2nd grader calls another student a faggot. What should the teacher say and why?

Good: The teacher should tell the student that name-calling is not allowed (e.g., “Faggot’ is a mean word for a gay person and we don’t use mean words or put-downs here.”). And the teacher should state the consequences if it continues (e.g., “If you use that kind of mean language again, you’ll miss a recess.”). The teacher should also assess the impact on the student who was targeted, and if it appears to be an ongoing problem, contact the child’s family as well as the family of the bully.

Better: THAT AND ... It’s not too young at second grade to say, “I have friends who are gay and it hurts me to hear you say that kind of thing.” The teacher should also include discussions of the various forms of name-calling in lessons on classroom citizenship, helping students develop compassion for any targeted peer and skills for standing up to bullies.

Best: THAT AND ... The teacher should also report ongoing bullying or harassment to his or her supervisor and to the staff in general, so that others can be alert for ongoing problems.

4. Suppose a group of students wants to form a “Gay-Straight Alliance” and their principal denies the application, fearing it will be too controversial. The students contact you. What will you do? What should the district administration do?

Good: I recognize that under the Federal Equal Access Act, the students have just as much of a right to meet as any other non-curricular student club on the campus. I would make sure that our attorney conveyed this fact to the Superintendent and the Principal.

Better: THAT AND ... In fact, I would make sure that every responsible staff person is informed of the legal issues and their legal obligations. On a personal level, I would listen to the students’ concerns and convey them myself to the Superintendent, along with my whole-hearted support for such a club and my understanding of why it’s so important. And I would encourage the students to get back to me if the Principal’s resistance continues. And I would be a spokesperson to my constituents in the community to educate them about these issues if a public controversy were to develop.

Best: THAT AND ... I will work with our legal counsel and my colleagues on the Board to clarify or modify our non-discrimination policies and procedures in this regard.

5. Should public institutions which prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation allow Boy Scouts to recruit on school grounds or in school facilities? Please explain and discuss your rationale.

Good: I recognize the dilemma that many local troops face. They are not the ones in charge of setting the discriminatory policies that could prevent them from access to public locations for meetings such as schools. I think schools should work with troops on a case-by-case basis and allow access to those troops who state, in writing, that they do not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation.

Better: No they should not. I realize that federal law (ESEA) prohibits us from banning the Boy Scouts from meeting in public school facilities, regardless of their discriminatory policies, but we aren’t required by law to permit their *recruiting* on campus. I think schools should stop allowing the Boy Scouts to send home recruitment literature in little kids’ backpacks or to set up information tables in high schools.

Best: THAT AND ... I will work with our legal counsel and my colleagues on the Board to pass a policy to that effect.

EDUCATOR ISSUES

1. Is it appropriate for LGBT teachers, teacher’s aides, counselors, principals and coaches to be “out” to their students? If so, under what circumstances?

Good: I believe it’s appropriate whenever it’s in the best interest of the students and if such information is handled sensitively with regards to the needs of the school community. Not that an employee should ever feel obligated to come out; it’s a personal decision either way. I would respect



the right of any employee who chooses to come out and do what I could to lend them my personal support.

Better: Yes, just as it's appropriate for straight, married teachers to disclose such information with family photos in the classroom or in talking about their own family activities. Knowing about a teacher's family, hobbies and that sort of thing helps to humanize a teacher, allowing students and their families to feel more connected to him or her.

Best: THAT AND ... Besides, educators can be most effective when they can be themselves. LGBT teachers should be openly supported by the administration to show students that LGBT people are valued in the school community. That includes individuals in such sensitive roles as coach. I will work to convey to the Superintendent my support for his or her supporting, in turn, every single employee's right to be a three-dimensional human being at work.

2. Suppose a parent or guardian wants his or her child transferred out of the class of a teacher he or she thinks is LGBT. How should school administrators handle the issue?

Good: The principal should try to help the parent or guardian to articulate his or her specific concerns and then alleviate those concerns through educating the parent.

Better: THAT AND ... But it would be discriminatory to accede to this kind of request unless there's some reason beyond simple prejudice for the family's making it. The principal should look at the language of any relevant collective bargaining agreement and make sure, at the least, that it is followed.

Best: THAT AND ... The principal should explain that the district values diversity and non-discrimination and, in order to be true to that philosophy, it does not allow him or her to discriminate against the staff. Finally, if it happens to be true, the principal should explain that this is one of the building's most talented teachers and that children flourish in his or her class.

3. If (re)elected, will you support the hiring or appointment of members of our community to teaching, administrative and support positions within your school district? If so, how? If not, why not?

Good: Though we do not base hiring decisions on a qualified applicant's sexual orientation, it's my hope that the school environment will reflect the diversity of the community that surrounds it. I will strive to ensure diversity in our personnel.

Better: THAT AND ... I will see that all personnel policies include non-discrimination language explicitly protecting LGBT candidates and employees in hiring, promotion, performance reviews and other matters related to employment.

Best: THAT AND ... I will work with my colleagues on the board to communicate unanimously to the Superintendent two things: our intention that LGBT staff should be supported if they choose to be out in the workplace and our expectation that Human Resources take active steps to recruit within the LGBT community, just as it has recently begun to do in communities of color.

4. How are heterosexual students affected by openly LGBT role models in the schools?

Good: Heterosexual students should not be affected in any way by the presence of LGBT people in schools. They are no more likely to be sex offenders than heterosexual adults are – that's a myth.

Better: Heterosexual students will learn that LGBT people are more like them than different from them. They'll learn to be more accepting and respectful of differences. They'll be less likely to harass peers they perceive to be Gay.

Best: THAT AND ... Just as boys need strong, competent, caring women as role models and vice versa ... just as white children are enriched by role models of color ... so do heterosexual students grow from exposure to terrific LGBT adults. It will make them better future employees in an increasingly diverse workplace and better citizens of the world.



FAMILIES

1. Every school district has children who have LGBT parents. What are the major problems facing these students and their families in relation to the school system?

Good: Students can be harassed and bullied by other students based on their families' structure. And they get hurt, even if they aren't personally targeted, by having to overhear casually cruel comments such as the ubiquitous "That's so gay!" We should protect them from bullying.

Better: THAT AND ... They may also feel judged by adults at schools. When schools fail to acknowledge the presence of LGBT families, students may feel like they shouldn't bother to invite their families to school events and their families may be less inclined to partner with us. We should put up posters and signs to acknowledge that all families are welcome. We should address letters home to "The family of ..." rather than to "The mother and father of ..." a child. We should ensure that every adult in a child's life feels welcome to attend all school events, including parent-teacher conferences, and to volunteer in the classroom.

Best: THAT AND ... Besides, invisibility in text books of some children's families, and subtle messages that their family is 'alternative' or 'different' can damage students' self-esteem. The library collection and the curriculum should address LGBT-parented families.

2. Studies show that parent involvement enhances academic performance but many LGBT parents and guardians feel unwelcome. What can schools do to encourage their involvement?

Good: Schools that treat all families equally will improve their rapport with LGBT-parented families. When families come to trust that their experiences in a school will be positive, they will become more comfortable in the building.

Better: We need to communicate to LGBT parents and guardians that our building is an inclusive community. We can do this by displaying LGBT posters, making sure that forms are appropriate for a variety of different kinds of families, and ensuring respectful interactions with all families. Not only do we need to treat parents and guardians with equal respect regardless of their sexual orientation, we need to overcome the transgressions of past schools with which those families may have had negative interactions.

Best: THAT AND ... Our curricula should include LGBT issues. And ALL staff (including support staff) should receive cultural competence or anti-bias training.

3. If a prominent citizen referred to LGBT students or parents by saying publicly that "we don't want their kind in schools," what would your response be?

Good: That it is our mandate as a PUBLIC school system to teach all children

Better: THAT AND ... I would invite that public figure to lunch and try to understand the context in which they made that statement. I would make the district's mandate clear to them and ask them to refrain from publicly attacking our students and their families.

Best: THAT AND ... I would make a public statement reiterating the school board's commitment to inclusive policies and to upholding the Constitution's promise of equal treatment of all by their government. I would participate if there were a community-based public action such as a rally. There, I would articulate the ways in which our district supports LGBT families (through explicitly protective bullying and anti-discrimination policies, staff training, etc.)

4. Should books depicting LGBT-parented families such as Heather Has Two Mommies or Daddy's Roommate or How Would You Feel If Your Dad Was Gay? be used in public schools? If so, how?

Good: Students should have access to literature about all kinds of families and should be able to see normalized reflections of their own families in schools. Our libraries should collect such books in a section about families and should display the books during Pride month.

Better: THAT AND ... Books depicting LGBT families should also be on the shelves in every elementary classroom.



Best: THAT AND ... In fact, they should be part of the curriculum in every elementary school and LGBT issues should be incorporated into every subject at all grades. Since the replacement of current texts is a time-consuming and expensive process, supplemental materials and training should be provided to teachers immediately. Teachers need to be adequately trained to present culturally competent curricula in non-biased ways, and it's the district's responsibility to ensure that all teachers receive that training.

HEALTH

1. Why would LGBT youth be more likely than heterosexual youth to contemplate or attempt suicide?

Good: LGBT youth might feel that there is something wrong with them, They may feel hopeless and as if they will always be lonely and isolated, especially if they've experienced or observed a lot of LGBT-bullying and ostracism.

Better: THAT AND ... They may also be reflecting the pressures and judgments put on them by their families and friends and, in some cases, religious institutions. They might feel that their identity in some way "lets down" the people who love them.

Best: THAT AND ... Besides, they may not realize the breadth of options the future holds if they've never seen images of healthy, happy, individuals who are LGBT and who contribute to society and live productive lives. The point is: depression isn't inherent in being LGB or T. Depression is simply a reasonable reaction to homophobia and heterosexism. These students need emotional support from every adult in their lives and mental health intervention.

2. How should information about LGBT-affirming health resources, agencies and services be made available to students?

Good: Pamphlets and information should be available through the school nurse, counselor, family resource specialist, drug/alcohol specialist and social worker. Students who articulate a need for these health resources should be steered to them.

Better: All adults in the building should have access to a list of LGBT-safe community resources, in case a student talks to them about LGBT issues. Staff should be assured that they have Board-level support for making appropriate referrals to LGBT-affirming agencies in the community. Staff who may not be comfortable making those referrals themselves should know of an identified resource person in the building to whom they could send a student.

Best: THAT AND ... In fact, students shouldn't have to "come out" and request referrals to access help. Resources should also be explored during health education classes as part of the regular curriculum, just as we list resources for other community agencies. In fact, information about supportive health services should be available everywhere health information is available (through the school newspaper, in orientation packets given to every incoming freshman, and listed along with family planning and tobacco cessation resources on the back of every student's ASB [Associated Student Body] identification card). Additionally, the school should NOT offer information about services that have been identified as unsupportive or hostile to LGBT youth.

3. Studies in Seattle, Vermont, Minnesota and Massachusetts have found that LGBT students are more likely than heterosexual students to report having gotten someone pregnant or to have been pregnant. Why do you suppose that's the case?

Good: LGBT students may feel depressed and use alcohol or drugs more often, especially during the time they're hiding their sexual orientations, prior to coming out. Both depression and drugs may contribute to sexual risk-taking and an increased likelihood of pregnancy.

Better: THAT AND ... They may also feel lonely and isolated AFTER coming out if the school environment is hostile. Sex may seem like one (albeit temporary) cure for loneliness. And they may feel pressure to have heterosexual sex to "prove" their heterosexuality to peers, their families, or themselves.



Best: THAT AND ... Or they may have been taught the myth that heterosexual dating and sex might actually change their sexual orientations. They need to learn that (a) it won't and (b) their sexual orientations are fine just the way they are and don't need changing.

NOTE: For more information about these studies that found disproportionate pregnancy rates, see the Safe Schools Coalition report *Eighty-Three Thousand Youth: Selected Findings of Eight Population-Based Studies* [<http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/83000youth.pdf>] – especially page 13-14, and 16-19.

4. Should teachers be allowed to/expected to explain the correct use of condoms? Should that include showing one? If so, at what grade level? If not, why not?

Good: High school health teachers should be allowed to explain the correct use of condoms.

Better: Health teachers should be allowed to explain the correct use of condoms (using actual condoms if they feel their students are mature enough to handle that) beginning in middle school.

Best: Health teachers – and any staff who are responsible for AIDS education -- should not only be allowed but **expected** to explain and show the correct use of condoms beginning in middle school. All students should know that, after abstaining altogether, condoms are the next best protection against STDs. And they should learn how to use them. Some people are afraid that will undermine our support for those who choose to abstain. I disagree. I think it will save lives among those who choose to have sex. We have to support them all.

5. What is the difference between HIV and AIDS?

Good: HIV is the germ that causes AIDS.

Better: HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. It's the organism that causes AIDS or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

Best: HIV is the organism that causes HIV disease. The end stage of HIV disease, when your immune system is seriously compromised, is what we call AIDS. That's when you not only have HIV antibodies but your T-cell count is below 200 or you have a disease or condition that only occurs in immune-deficient individuals.

CURRICULUM

1. What should students learn at school about LGBT people and issues and at what ages? Why?

Good: It's appropriate for high school students to learn that some famous figures in history such as Walt Whitman and Eleanor Roosevelt were gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. And they should learn the history of the LGBT civil rights movement just as they learn of other struggles for social justice in the U.S. and around the world.

Better: THAT AND ... It's also appropriate for middle and high school students to meet real LGBT people, preferably other youth but at least in the form of videos, in order to debunk any myths and stereotypes they may have learned.

Best: THAT AND ... On the elementary level, LGBT issues should be addressed through lessons about diverse families, discussions of bullying in which teachers clarify the meanings of slurs in ways that model respect for LGBT people, and in answer to questions that students may ask during lessons on puberty and HIV. It's appropriate for all students to learn about LGBT people through having supported "out" teachers and other staff people at school.

2. Will you ensure that teachers get trained about incorporating LGBT issues in curricula? If so, how? If not, why not?

Good: I will ask our Curriculum/Instruction and Staff Development offices to incorporate LGBT issues into the diversity and cultural competency workshops they offer.



Better: I will work with my colleagues on the board to send a unified message to the Superintendent that we want not only LGBT-inclusive bullying-reduction training for all staff, starting with administrators, but also LGBT curriculum inclusion workshops for those who teach high school.

Best: THAT AND ... I will also propose that we direct our grant specialist to seek funding specifically so that we can afford to provide release time to every teacher to attend training on incorporating LGBT issues at all levels and in all subject areas. In the meantime, I will ask that the Superintendent send a letter to all staff encouraging them to attend the elective workshops we'll offer. I will ask Continuing Education to ensure that LGBT youth panels are a part of this training, so they can answer questions from the faculty and other staff. I will encourage the Superintendent to introduce each of these training events personally, to convey just how seriously the district takes the issue. If he/she won't, then I'll offer to represent the Board at these events, in order to convey our support for inclusive curricula.

3. A 4th grader asks the teacher what "gay" means. What should the teacher say?

Good: The teacher should say that the word has two meanings: "Gay" means happy and it also refers to a person who loves someone of the same sex, a man who loves another man or a woman who loves another woman.

Better: THAT AND ... But first, the teacher should ask the student what he or she THINKS the term means.

Best: THAT AND ... That way, the teacher can then craft his or her explanation to combat any prejudices or stereotypes the student may already have acquired.

4. How many hours per year and at what grade level is your district teaching about HIV/AIDS?

Good: HIV/AIDS is addressed in the health courses in our high schools and middle schools.

Better: THAT AND ... But we also offer at least one lesson a year beginning in fifth grade, as the AIDS Omnibus Act requires us to do.

Best: THAT AND ... And we go beyond the letter of the law, because one lesson a year isn't really adequate. In most grades, students get several lessons. They learn not to be afraid of casual contact. They learn how the disease is spread and how to protect themselves, including the skills you need to abstain and the skills you need to successfully use condoms. They learn that it's still not curable and about the rigorous drug regimens and the high cost of prescriptions. They learn at the high school level, what populations are disproportionately affected by HIV and they explore some of the social and political reasons why. And they examine global and international issues, as well.

5. How should schools address abstinence? Should students learn about contraception at school in addition to abstinence? Why or why not?

Good: Schools should teach students that abstinence is the only sure way to avoid sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV/AIDS and pregnancy. Schools should also teach students about birth control.

Better: THAT AND ... We should teach students important communication skills and strategies to increase the effectiveness of abstinence for those who choose it. And we should ALSO teach all the methods of contraception, their advantages and disadvantages and their correct use.

Best: THAT AND ... Some people believe teaching about birth control will detract from the abstinence message. I disagree. There will be times in their lives when nearly every student will need both. Even LGBT kids may have heterosexual sex at some times in their lives. Abstinence-only-until-marriage programs have been proven largely ineffective especially with students who have already initiated sex. All health teachers should be trained to teach comprehensive sexuality education.



CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. **Is it appropriate for a teacher to display affection for his wife or her husband when students are present? [await response] Is it appropriate for a LGBT teacher to display affection for his or her partner when students are present?**

Good: As a good role model, it's not appropriate for any teacher to display personal affection for a partner when students are present, regardless of the partner's gender.

Better: THAT AND ... It's appropriate and important for teachers to *refer* to their husbands, wives or partners affectionately just not to show *physical* affection in front of students.

Best: THAT AND ... An exception might be holding hands when he or she introduced the person or putting his or her arm around the spouse's or partner's shoulders. I guess I would draw the line at kissing or something like stroking the person's hair. It's a matter of boundaries, regardless of the teacher's sexual orientation.

2. **What is your position on military recruitment in the schools? Should parents be notified in advance? Do you think schools should provide equal access to counter-military recruiting (from organizations such as the American Friends Service Committee or Veterans for Peace, for example)?**

Good: I realize that by federal law we are now required to release names and phone numbers of students to the military, but a school board needs to be proactive in letting families know that they have the legal right to request that *their* child's name not be released to the military or any other outside group.

Better: THAT AND ... I don't believe that military recruiters belong in schools as long as the military discriminates against some of our students. It's not a career option for openly LGBT youth! Opportunities can be arranged outside of schools for students to be exposed to the military and the possibility of joining, especially if the student expresses interest in the military through a school counselor or teacher.

Best: THAT AND ... But if military recruitment does happen in schools, families should definitely be notified and students should have simultaneous and equal access to counter-military recruitment.

3. **Suppose a student is HIV+ and is transferring into your District to escape bullying elsewhere. What should the Administration do?**

Good: The Administration should be on heightened alert to ensure that any bullying or harassment that takes place in the school is immediately dealt with.

Better: The Administration should meet with each of the student's teachers – with the family's consent -- before the student enters the school to put in place a plan to deter bullying or harassment from happening. Or, if the family wants only the nurse to know, for instance, then the Administrator can still initiate special anti-bullying efforts, without identifying the student, even to teachers.

Best: THAT AND ... In fact, a care team that includes the student and family can not only draw up a plan to prevent harassment, but also can have regularly scheduled meetings to review the plan and make changes to ensure the student's safety.

4. **What is the difference between bullying or harassment and protected speech?**

Good: One involves humiliating or intimidating a particular person. The other involves expressing an opinion in an appropriate venue such as a classroom discussion or a homework assignment.

Better: THAT AND ... It's the difference, basically, between getting up in somebody's face and making your opinions known in a civil, responsible way.

Best: THAT AND ... The notion that prohibiting hate speech will infringe upon people's constitutional right to their religious expression is nonsense. It's a red herring used by the extreme right to defeat measures like Washington's bullying bill. Nobody's child has the right to call another child "fag" in the name of religion. You can write an article for your school paper saying you oppose gay marriage



without spitting in anybody's face or threatening to kill them. Any kindergartener can make that distinction!

5. Suppose a student wants to take a date of the same gender to the prom. What should the building Administration do? If the student contacts you to inform you that the principal is requiring that dates be heterosexual couples, what will you do?

Good: A principal should develop a safety plan with the student, his or her family, and the staff. But the student should be allowed to take the date of his or her choice.

Better: THAT AND ... I will work with my colleagues on the board to send a unified policy message to the Superintendent that we expect every student, including those who are LGB or T, to have equal access to all school-sponsored events.

Best: THAT AND ... But in the short run, I would call the Principal myself to express grave concern about equity and would volunteer to chaperone the event if more adults are required to ensure everybody's safe, enjoyable prom. I would also be prepared to address public concerns in the press or in other visible ways in support of every child in my care.

6. What have you personally done to support LGBT students, parents/guardians and employees? What will you do to support LGBT students, parents/guardians and employees if you are (re)elected?

Good: I voted in favor of adding sexual orientation and gender identity to the non-discrimination language in our collective bargaining agreements with employees. I voted in favor of adding sexual orientation and gender identity to our non-discrimination in employment and our non-discrimination in educational opportunity policies and to our bullying and harassment policy.

Better: I met personally with our Superintendent and Attorney to ensure that our bullying procedure, not just our policy, especially the version in student handbooks, includes an explicit prohibition against anti-LGBT harassment. I made sure that our procedure directed our Superintendent or her designee to vigorously investigate incidents and to maintain a District-wide reporting system, so that we can track our progress and ensure that children who are bullied don't just transfer from school to school to escape it.

Best: I was a founding member of our district-wide LGBT Issues Advisory Committee. We sent letters encouraging our librarians to purchase books with LGBT content. I've worked with our Staff Development/Continuing Education office to arrange training for every employee and contractor (from the school secretaries and the bus drivers to the volunteers, principals and counselors) on bias-based bullying in general and anti-LGBT bullying in particular. This year I will work with Continuing Education to plan for training teachers on how to incorporate LGBT issues into the curriculum. I will offer to represent the School Board in welcoming employees to these on-going Continuing Education workshops, to make clear that the district's leadership supports them.