The Safe Schools Coalition

Understanding & Addressing Anti-Gay Harassment and Violence in Schools
What is the Mission of the Safe Schools Coalition?

We work to help schools - at home and all over the world - become safe places where every family can belong, where every educator can teach, and where every child can learn, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.
Who Belongs to the Coalition?
Diverse organizations, for example:

- American Friends Service Committee
- Bainbridge Island School District’s Multicultural Advisory Council
- Benton/Franklin Council for Children
- Committee for Children
- Gay Lesbian PTSA of Greater Puget Sound
- League of Women Voters of Washington
- Mountain View High School GSA
- Multi-Faith Alliance of Reconciling Communities
- NW Coalition for Human Dignity
- Open Door Ministries/LC - Evangelical Lutheran Churches of America
- Parents, Family & Friends of Lesbians & Gays
- School Nurse Organization of Washington
- Seattle-King Co. Dept. of Public Health
- Seattle Office for Civil Rights
- Snohomish County Human Services Dept.
- Stonewall Youth
- Washington Education Association
- WA State Superintendent of Public Instruction
What was the Safe Schools Project?

✓ one activity of the Coalition.
✓ an examination of anti-gay harassment & violence in schools, Kindergarten through 12th grade.
✓ an exploration of the perspectives of children, teens, parents/guardians, and educators.
How were the Data Collected?

Initially, 12 face-to-face reports at one focus group and several support groups, while the instrument was being developed and tested.

Then, 105 telephone interviews (1-800-5B-PROUD ... now 1-888-307-9275) conducted by trained counselors ... solicited via mass media, posters, and workshops.
We studied the perspectives of:

**Students**
58 targeted children and teens
9 youth witnesses
5 friends of targeted youth

**Professionals**
7 targeted educators
9 educator witnesses
16 professionals who learned about an incident after the fact

**Parents**
3 parent witnesses
10 parents who learned about an incident after the fact
We studied incidents from:

✔ 73 schools
✔ 37 public school districts
✔ 13 counties
All the incidents we studied:

- ✔ were based on bias against gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender people
- ✔ happened since 1990
- ✔ involved Washington State elementary, middle or high schools (public or private)
- ✔ occurred, at least in part ...
  - on school property
  - on the way to or from school
  - at a school-sponsored event
How was the Project funded?

Our primary grant and in-kind funding (in excess of $1,000:) came from:

Seattle Counseling Service for Sexual Minorities

Seattle-King Co. Dept. of Public Health

Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment (now called the NW Coalition for Human Dignity)

Pride Foundation

National Education Association

The City of Seattle and Providence Medical Center

The King County Commission for Children, Youth and Families

Snohomish County Human Services Dept.

NW Center for Equity and Diversity at Edmonds Community College

DSHS and the U.S. Department of Justice

Washington Education Association
We studied one hundred eleven incidents:

- ✔ 26 one-time, climate-setting incidents
- ✔ 38 cases of on-going verbal and other harassment
- ✔ 17 cases of physical harassment and/or sexual assault, short of rape
- ✔ 22 physical assaults
- ✔ 8 gang rapes
what we learned re: WHEN & WHERE it happens ...

✔ Every month of the school year with peaks in Oct. & Jan.

✔ All over school, but especially in class-rooms, halls and the locker room or in or near the gym

✔ Throughout the school day, with most rapes between 3 & 3:30 p.m.
what we learned re: WHO is targeted ... 

Everyone is vulnerable, regardless of:

✔ age
✔ gender
✔ race
✔ where they live
✔ and even their orientation
What seemed to make the offenders think these 148 people were gay?

- Had come out privately (15)
- Unknown (23)
- Were "found out" (5)
- Had HIV (2)
- Had GLB friends (38)
- Had come out publicly (34)
- Rumors, gender role (31)
what we learned re: WHO offends ...

✔ They were of all ages.
✔ They were of various races.
✔ More were male than female:

![Bar chart showing the number of cases by gender and race]

- Male(s): 72
- Females: 10
- Both: 17
- Not reported: 12
Offenders outnumbered the people they targeted by about $2\frac{1}{2}$ against 1.
what we learned re: the EFFECTS on targeted youth ...

Many take flight:

- 64% said it was harder to concentrate in class
- 36% cut one or more classes
- 27% skipped whole days of school
- 16% dropped a class
- 14% changed schools, some multiple times
- 16% dropped out of school
- 14% began or increased their substance abuse
- 13% attempted suicide

2 young people committed suicide
what we learned re: ADULTS roles …

✓ Some were offenders
✓ Some weren’t offenders, but added to the target’s distress
✓ Some did or said nothing
✓ Some intervened
✓ Some intervened and educated
✓ Some intervened, educated, and supported the target
✓ Some removed the offender(s)
✓ Some disciplined offender(s)
What we learned about the times NOBODY WENT to school authorities FOR HELP

1/3 of incidents were neither witnessed by, nor reported to school authorities, due to targets’
• shame,
• confusion,
• hopelessness or
• fear
What we learned about FAMILIES’ roles ... 

✔ Almost half of children and teens confided in a parent or guardian.

✔ Maybe those who didn’t had good reason, but 9 out of 10 of those who did, got support.

✔ 13 parents actually called Safe Schools for help: now 1-888-307-9275 (which we can still provide)
The stories speak for themselves.

Category 1 = one-time, climate setting incidents
Category 2 = on-going verbal & other harassment
Category 3 = physical harassment and/or sexual assault, short of rape
Category 4 = physical assaults
Category 5 = gang rapes
Eighty-three Thousand Youth:

Selected Findings of Eight Population-Based Studies

Regarding Anti-Gay Harassment and the Safety and Well-Being of Sexual Minority Students
Harassed because someone thought they were gay ...

**Seattle:** 8% of all students grades 9-12 (6% of heterosexual teens; 34% of GLB teens)

**Wisconsin:** 5% of sample of students grades 9-12

**Connecticut:** 6% of sample of 7th, 9th and 11th graders
“My family loves and supports me.”

- Harassed: 53%
- Non-harassed: 82%

“My teachers really care about me and encourage me.”

- Harassed: 35%
- Non-harassed: 53%
“I was threatened or injured by someone with a weapon at school in past 12 months.”

- Harassed: 23.3%
- Non-harassed: 6.0%

“I have missed at least one day of school because I felt unsafe in past 30 days.”

- Harassed: 16.7%
- Non-harassed: 2.3%
Described themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual ...

Seattle: 4.5% of all students grades 9-12
(another 4% were unsure)

Minnesota: 1.1% of sample of students grades 7-12

Massachusetts: 2.0% of sample of students grades 9-12
“I made a suicide attempt in the past 12 months and was treated by a doctor or a nurse.”
Reported same-gender sexual …

“experience”: 3.0% of a sample of students grades 9-12 (Massachusetts)

“contact”: 4.4% of a sample of students grades 8-12 (Vermont)

“intercourse”: 0.2% of a sample of students grades 9-12 (San Francisco)
In nearly every study in which researchers have analyzed the associations, sexual minority youth were more likely than their peers to report:

- having been victimized and threatened.
- fearing for their safety.
- self-endangering:
  - heavy alcohol or other drug use,
  - anorexia/bulimia,
  - having been (or having gotten someone) pregnant,
  - having made a serious suicide attempt.
The Safe Schools Coalition

Understanding & Addressing Malicious Harassment in Schools
In a 1999 Seattle study, more than 1/4 of high school students in every ethnic group reported experiencing harassment based on their race/ethnicity.
So what?

They were nearly three times as likely as their non racially-harassed peers to report having skipped at least one whole day of school in the past month out of fear for their own safety.
“I feel as if the issue of racism and sexual harassment need to be talked about more in schools because every year and every grade you go up it gets worse and worse.”

-- anonymous student comment on the open-ended part of the survey
In the same study, 48% of high school girls and 20% of boys said they had been the target of offensive sexual comments.
So what?

Like the racially harassed students, youth of both genders were *twice* as likely if they had been sexually-harassed *to report* having skipped at least one whole day of *school* in the past month out of fear.
“I have been harassed by having people say rude and disturbing things which I find uncomfortable and also some of them will even touch girls... I notice again how little the teachers do.”

-- anonymous student comment on the open-ended part of the survey
In the same study, 6% of 9-12th graders said they had been harassed because someone thought they were gay or lesbian.
Sexual Orientation of Students Reporting Orientation-Based Harassment

- Bisexual: 23%
- Homosexual: 7%
- Heterosexual: 70%

Gay/Lesbian: 7%
So what?

Even *heterosexual* youth who had been verbally or physically gay-bashed were at increased risk.

They were **three times** as likely as their non-harassed, heterosexual peers to report having skipped at least one whole day of school in the past month out of fear.
“Many people call me gay even though I am not and they keep on accusing me of watching porn, even though I don’t.”

-- anonymous student comment on the open-ended part of the survey
Harassment in Seattle High Schools, 1999

Three Types

Three Types
- 3%

Two Types
- 16%

One Type
- 31%

50% Reported No Harassment
Other forms of malicious harassment commonly reported (anecdotally) in schools:

- disability-based
- ancestry/national origin-based
- religion-based
QUIZ:

“Kids are just mean and there’s nothing we can do about it.”

True or False?
What can we do about it?
What can we do about it?

#1: Policies & contract language
#2: Hiring
#3: Training
#4: Library Collection
#5: Student Activism
#6: Curriculum
#7: Modeling Respect & Consideration
#8: Requiring Respect & Consideration
#9: Intervention
#10: Reporting Procedures
#11: Discipline
#12: Support for GLBT & harassed youth
Safe Schools Coalition:

www.safeschoolscoalition.org

crises: 1-888-307-9275
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Help us provide training and resources for educators.

Tax deductible donations may be made payable to “Safe Schools Coalition”
online: www.safeschoolscoalition.org
or by mail:
c/o Lifelong AIDS Alliance
1002 E. Seneca
Seattle, WA 98122-4203
Phone: 206-957-1621
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Fax: 206-325-2689
“We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

My personal pledge:

“To make our schools safer,
I will ...”