

# FALL 2015 ■ FOURTH ANNUAL STATE OF THE SAFE SCHOOLS ACT

## Next Steps in Reporting

For the past three years, Oregon Safe Schools and Communities Coalition has partnered with several organizations--OGALLA: The LGBT Bar Association of Oregon, Oregon Public Health Division, Oregon Department of Education, Q Center, and our entire coalition—to help monitor school district anti-bullying policy adoption and full implementation of the law. We have also continued to organize the Safe School Awards to recognize those who are leading the way in providing safe schools for all students.

Over the course of this time, we have seen that one by one school districts across the state have adopted more inclusive anti-bullying policies. The momentum by which districts are moving forward on complying with the 2009 Oregon Safe Schools Act is impressive. 2015's Safe Schools Report found that the number of Gold Star Districts rose 64%, with the majority of districts now in substantial compliance with the law. One key factor for this improvement was the Oregon

**2015** saw OSSCC laying the framework for a Safe Schools Certification Project to look beyond whether entire districts are formally in compliance with the law and instead dig deeper into the spirit of the Safe Schools Act and the circumstances that lead to its passage.

School Board's Association's rural school initiative, which helped small, rural districts make policy changes.

In mid-2015, OSSCC and the Report's working group found themselves in a unique position. The bulk of Oregon's school districts were now adhering to current legislation, and yet we know that districts adopt policies that don't always trickle down into individual schools. To truly have safer schools, these policies must be thoughtfully implemented within each school in districts.

School-based supports such as comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policies, school personnel who are supportive of LGBT students, Gay-Straight Alliances, and LGBT-inclusive curricular resources can positively affect school climate for all students. Findings continue to demonstrate that students attending schools with these resources and supports report more positive school experiences, including lower victimization, absenteeism and higher academic achievement.

## So what's next?

It was agreed at the publishing of last year's Safe Schools Report, that it was an ideal time to reevaluate the scope and focus of future assessment endeavors. It is expected that 2016 will see the publication of several highly relevant assessments of school performance in Oregon, including GLSEN's next National School Climate Survey report, as well as the next Oregon Healthy Teens Survey. OSSCC is currently working alongside our coalition members to determine the most beneficial next-steps for the 2016 Safe Schools Report and the potential for new and relevant data-collection is thrilling. The upcoming months are dedicated to convening like-minded organiza-

tions around the state to identify the most pressing assessment needs, both at the school and district level. The Multnomah County Communities of Color and LGBT Data Equity Taskforce continues to be a valuable resource.

The document you see printed here, the 4th Annual Safe Schools Report, is a snapshot into the lives of our state's youngest LGBTQ citizens and some of the organizations and people working on behalf of their well-being. Together they highlight both the many dynamic ways that state-wide and local policies are changing to become more inclusive, yet also indicate that there is still much work to be done.

We at OSSCC are already moving forward, alongside our coalition members, to outline the next-steps in state-wide data collection for the 2016 Safe Schools Report—Keeping students safe and healthy means engaging families, school administrators, teachers, the students themselves, and communities to help create a learning environment that promotes students' physical, social, and emotional well-being.

The power of the Safe Schools Report has always been steeped in the fact that assessing the current status of these endeavors is a critical component to foster accountability and facilitate positive change.

Oregon Safe Schools & Communities Coalition welcomes your contributions. Please consider joining this project and lending your voice to the project. Together, we are confident that the next Safe Schools Report will again act as a tool to help establish lasting safety in our state's learning communities.

**Glenn Goodfellow**  
OSSCC Board co-chair

# Upcoming Guidance Document to School Districts

## Creating a Safe and Supportive School Environment for Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students

**BY /** Karin Moscon

**O**DE fosters excellence for every learner, and recognizes that academic success depends on a safe school environment. As an organization we value equity for every student; this includes an educational environment safe and free from discrimination and harassment, ensuring that every student has equal access to educational programs and activities.

Research has identified that transgender and gender nonconforming students are often targeted with physical violence and experience a hostile school environment at a higher rate than their peers. As a result, transgender and gender nonconforming students are also more likely to demonstrate frequent absenteeism, higher dropout rates, and higher rates of suicide.

Oregon law prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation which includes gender identity. Per Oregon State Law: ORS 659.850(1) discrimination means any act that unreasonably differentiates treatment, intended or unintended, or any act that is fair in form but discriminatory in operation, either of which is based on race, color, religion,

sex, sexual orientation, national origin, marital status, age or disability.

Additionally, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX) specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in federally funded programs and activities. The United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights has issued guidance recognizing that Title IX protects transgender and gender nonconforming students. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education and Justice have stated that under Title IX, "discrimination based on a person's gender identity, a person's transgender status, or a person's nonconformity to sex stereotypes constitutes discrimination based on sex".

As a response to student, parent, and school district requests, the Oregon Department of Education is working with stakeholders to develop guidelines providing assistance for districts to foster an educational environment for all students that is safe and free from discrimination, and is aligned with state and federal laws. These guidelines will be used by school boards, administrators and other members of the educational community to develop school procedures and district policies related to transgender and gender nonconforming students. Additionally, the guidelines will provide a foun-

ation for the educational community to build safe and supportive school cultures.

ODE guidance will include topics such as:

- Terminology and communication
- The use of pronouns,
- Handling issues such as restroom and locker room usage,
- Participation in clubs, sports, extra-curricular activities, and field trips,
- Dress code,
- Privacy rights,
- Threat assessment and safety plans,
- Management of student identity in school documents and records.

Scenarios presented in the guidance will be based on real life experiences of Oregon students and demonstrate opportunities to leverage existing school and community supports. In addition to supports for schools, the guidelines will also include resources for allies, parents and communities.

The guidance documents are currently being reviewed by an advisory panel of stakeholders, and are scheduled to be released in early October.

Questions or comments can be addressed to Karin Moscon, Civil Rights Education Specialist, Oregon Department of Education. [karin.moscon@state.or.us](mailto:karin.moscon@state.or.us)

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Ashland High School 2014-15

**BY /** Erika Bare

**A**t Ashland High School, we believe that diverse ideas and cultures reflect the diversity of the nation, enrich our lives, and serve our educational mission. AHS is committed to diversity in all areas of our work including the strategic recruitment of faculty, staff, and adminis-

trators, selection of curriculum materials, and the education of our student body.

As a result of a recent initiative, this diversity statement was adopted and added to all postings for new positions at Ashland High School (AHS). Working with lead facilitator, Carmen Morgan from LIDR in Los Angeles, The AHS staff participated in three days of diversity and inclusion training. In order to build local capacity, we engaged Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) leaders, Southern Oregon University (SOU) facilitators and partners at the Southern Oregon Education Services Division (SOESD). Due to the strong local partnerships, even after

our contract ended with Ms. Morgan, we could continue the work.

In fact, staff from OSF and SOU joined our Site Council and met monthly with staff, students, and families to lead our efforts to develop a safe and welcoming learning environment and greater cultural agility among the staff at our school.

We made significant changes during the 2014-2015 school year. Student Leadership worked to create Court events that included all students and sloughed off some of the heteronormative paradigms that have made many students feel like participating wasn't really an option for

# Welcoming Schools for All

HRC's Comprehensive Approach to Improving School Climate

BY / Tracy Flynn, HRC

Founded in 2008, Welcoming Schools' gender- and LGBTQ-inclusive approach helps elementary schools, early childhood educators and new teachers embrace family diversity, create gender- and LGBTQ-inclusive environments, and prevent bias-based bullying and name-calling.

Welcoming Schools has been working with the Oregon Safe Schools and Communities Coalition (OSSCC), the Portland area Human Rights Campaign Board of Governors, and the University of Oregon since 2012. To date, we have trained over 700 educators and school professionals in Oregon. We have provided one-day training opportunities to schools, school districts, and individuals committed to creating more welcoming schools for everyone. In addition to our school based trainings, Joy Wallace, co-chair for OSSCC, along with Ellie Justice and Alison Schnur and Julie Heffernan presented at the HRC Time to THRIVE conference on their experiences with Welcoming

Schools, last February in Portland. Over the next several years, Welcoming Schools will be working to train certified facilitators across Oregon. We will work with the OSSCC on outreach and sharing information about up-coming



school-based training and "Train the Facilitator" options. Welcoming Schools can also provide in-person professional development and technical assistance. Welcoming Schools training is most effective when conducted as part of a school-wide effort that includes, staff, administrators, and families. Sessions help schools work

together on strategies to make sure that all students feel welcome and included. All lesson plans included in Welcoming Schools are aligned with common core and national standards.

To learn more about Welcoming Schools, visit [www.welcomingschools.org](http://www.welcomingschools.org) and check out how to contact an expert in your area. Also look for previews for two short films available to purchase online. The first, the award-winning **What Do You Know? Six- to Twelve-Year-Olds Talk About Gays and Lesbians**, features students talking about what they know, plus what they wish teachers would talk about at school. The second, a professional development film **What Can We Do? Bias, Bullying, and Bystanders**, features educators using Welcoming Schools' lesson plans. Filmed in the classroom, **What Can We Do?** shows teachers engaging students in conversations about bullying and bystander intervention, with touching moments from the students themselves.

them. Students often didn't see themselves reflected in those ceremonies, and a Safe School is first and foremost one that reflects the positive strengths of all of our students. Student Leadership led the conversation about the attributes that Court is meant to reflect - values that are important to a school community such as Honesty, Commitment, Compassion, Kindness, and Character - and how pairings of boys/girls/kings/queens wasn't essential to promoting those healthy values.

AHS Queer Straight Alliance also began a new tradition of fully recognizing and participating in the National Day of Silence -

a commemorative protest movement to draw awareness to the ways that LGBTQI students and people are often silenced either through bullying, violence, death, suicide, or a combination of all. It is QSA's goal that students have a place to speak without fear, and that students have the tools and desire to support all students as they explore their own humanity.

In addition, the staff in partnership with the Queer Straight Alliance (QSA), AHS identified gender-neutral bathrooms across the campus.

Economically disadvantaged students have access to free Advanced Place-

ment textbooks and now receive tickets to school events in the mail. Our Spanish speaking families requested a parent night about college admissions, conducted in Spanish and we made it an annual event.

Administrators now make a significant effort to engage diverse parent populations and invite them to serve on site-based governance boards. We believe we are on our way to identifying and removing barriers to student success. We are grateful to have powerful community support and local accountability to improve our school policies, procedures, curriculum, and welcoming atmosphere.

# We Can Do Better for Transgender Youth

TransActive Continues to Pave the Way

BY / Jenn Burleton, TransActive Gender Center

The illumination and itemization of responsibilities and protections included in the Oregon Safe Schools Act, clarification of Federal Title IX and Title VI civil rights protections and adoption of more inclusive policies for participation in athletics has resulted in improved educational experiences for many gender nonconforming, gender diverse and transgender students attending public and charter schools in the state of Oregon.

These improvements have been most apparent in schools located in larger cities, with pockets of success also happening in rural areas throughout the state thanks to the effort of outstanding individual educators, school counselors, allies and of course, families and the students themselves.

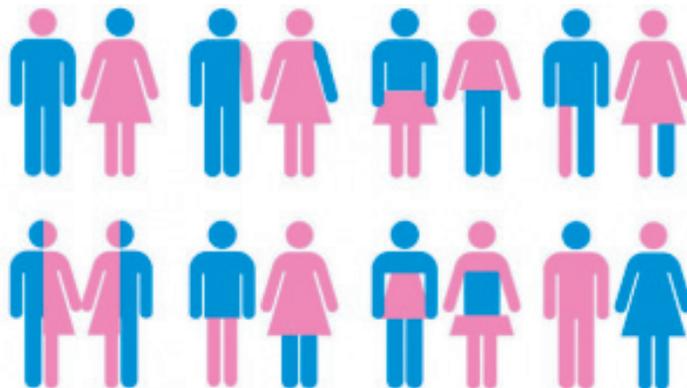
There remains however, much work to be done to achieve the higher bar of excellence that every student, staff and faculty member, parent, caregiver and educator deserves: The implementation and practice of policies and procedures that affirm gender diversity at every grade level rather than simply tolerate it.

Over the past year, TransActive Gender Center has been instrumental in securing groundbreaking Medicaid coverage for treatment including pubertal delay and cross-sex hormone therapy for transgender adolescents and teens in Oregon. We defended those victories when they came under attack from those opposed to or uninformed about the medical needs and challenges facing transgender kids.

We know, for example, that transgender adolescents and teens are significantly less likely to be successful in school if they are struggling every day, often in silence, with the psychological and physical trauma being inflicted on them as the result of bodily changes that do not reflect their innate experience of gender. This leads to exponentially higher rates of suicidal ideation and attempts than those we see in their peer groups.

We know that transgender and gender diverse students at every grade level are hampered academically or socially if their gender identity and gender expression is not validated by faculty and staff through use of respectful gender pronouns, preferred name and modified student information system data that reflects this information consistently.

We know that for most transgender students, awareness of their gender difference exists in the K-8 years, yet schools and districts remain reluctant to embrace faculty and staff training or early learning discussions about gender and the infinite spectrum of ways in which children experience and express gender. And the failure to engage in these explorations affects far more kids than those who happen to be transgender.



A 2012 longitudinal study from the Harvard School for Public Health revealed that 10% of middle and high school students who had been bullied for not conforming to gender stereotypes were twice as likely to suffer from PTSD in adulthood as their peers. The majority of that 10% self-identified as heterosexual and non-transgender.

Some of the realities we must face, while in the midst of incremental progress in creating safer school environments, are these:

- The continued conflation of sexual orientation with gender identity by school districts is delaying implementation of inclusive gender diversity policies at every grade level
- Leaving decision-making about professional development training regarding gender diversity to building administrators rather than district-level administrators is greatly hindering the establishment of safe and affirming school environments for gender diverse and transgender students
- Withholding affirmation and support for gender diverse faculty, staff and other school personnel while simultaneously encouraging students to embrace such diversity not only creates a double standard that violates state and Federal civil rights protections, it leaves gender diverse students without successful role models

School districts throughout Oregon are clearly moving in the right direction when it comes to protecting and affirming their transgender and gender diverse students...but we can all do better.

The societal struggle with embracing the diverse gender experiences of our children is, in the end, a failure of imagination. Our inability to imagine an innate life experience complete alien to our own too often leaves us lacking the empathy to affirm and authenticate such experiences.

Let's choose to imagine and celebrate that which we do not personally experience.

# Lotus Rising in Southern Oregon

## A New Program Opens Up Doors for LGBTQ Youth

BY / Kyndra Laughery

The Rogue Valley is a patchwork of rural and urban communities, each with their own distinct political climate. While there are liberal pockets, Jackson and Josephine counties are primarily conservative, especially when it comes to issues around same sex marriage.

More than half the people living in Jackson and Josephine county live in rural communities where conservative political views are most concentrated. Being gender or sexually variant in a small town can be a very isolating experience. Since most youth spend the majority of their time at school, it is important for them to feel welcome and represented, otherwise it can have negative lasting effects. According to the Center for Disease Control, LGBTQ(...) youth are more than twice as likely than heterosexual youth to attempt suicide, they are also at a higher risk for depression and substance abuse. They experience a higher rate of bullying, resulting in missed days of school, lower grades, and low graduation rates. For some LGBTQ(...) youth having a place to belong can make all the difference in the world.

Gay, Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs in Southern Oregon are just as diverse as the communities they live in. Considering that the town of Ashland is the liberal hub of Southern Oregon, it's not too surprising that their high school culture is supportive of a GSA. Because they are supported, their club has been able to create an inclusive and welcoming school climate. They have done many things like, presenting in Freshman health classes about LGBTQ (...) issues; having a week long observance of Day of Silence involving education about bullying prevention and ways that all students can be Allies to each other; they were able to convince their administration to create gender neutral bathrooms for their

trans and gender variant students; and they worked with student leadership to abolished the binary nature of Homecoming and Prom courts by removing the gender categories, and opening it up to all students. Overall the climate in this school is one of acceptance and inclusivity. Teens still gather in their separate groups, but everyone has a place.

For the most part, school administrators across the valley support their student's GSA clubs, the challenge is often with the political views of the larger community. In Grants Pass, a primarily conservative community, the GSA club works a bit harder to get students to attend. They don't get caught up in the numbers though, they believe that even if only one person attends, they're still giving that one person a place to belong. Against the odds, they continue to make significant changes to their school culture. Two years ago, they were able to convince their principal to recognize Day of Silence having every teacher take time during class to watch a Youtube video about bullying, have a discussion about the importance of treating everyone with respect, and what it means to be an Ally. Though they are small and faced with challenges from the

greater community, Grants Pass' GSA has made it's own mark in their school culture. LGBTQ(...) students in rural communities all over Southern Oregon are finding connection and support by creating safe spaces in their GSA's, where people can be who they are, and love who they want, without fear of retribution. Having that sort of support helps them to better handle the negative messages they may get from the larger community.

When youth feel that they belong, they are better able to grow and flourish into adulthood. Gay Straight Alliances play a crucial role in making schools safer and more inclusive for everyone. GSA's change entire school cultures, their presence has been shown to increase attendance and graduation rates for LGBTQ(...) youth, as well as lowering the risks of substance abuse, depression, and suicide. When youth feel like they belong to their school, they are more likely to show up, be involved, graduate, and leave school as confident, effective citizens. Many of the members of local GSA's in Southern Oregon have gone on to college, or entered the working world as confident, respectful people. Each of them dedicated to creating a safe, inclusive world for everyone.



# UO TEACH OUT

## Future Teachers Learn how to Respond to Homophobia and Create Affirming Spaces for LGBTQ Diversity in School

*I feel like I have my power...*

*...when I am with my friends.*

*...when I am by myself using my voice, and my writing.*

*...when I am with my GSA*

*...Right here! Right now!*

*(Voices from some of the 240 queer and allied middle and high school youth at the UOTeachOUT Youth Leadership Summit May 14, 2015)*

### FINDING THEIR POWER

In April of 2015 Tina, Carmen, and I found ourselves with a wonderful problem. We were running out of room for the third year in a row as the school registration requests kept rolling in at numbers beyond any earlier year. Four regional school districts were asking to bring youth teams from their middle and high schools to the UOTeachOUT GSA Youth Leadership Summit. As of April, 7 regional high schools and 14 regional middle schools had formed Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) youth leadership teams interested in attending the Youth Leadership Summit.

As the three-person UOTeachOUT instructional team we were busily preparing for the fifth annual forum on gender identity and sexual orientation issues in education. Tina and I were preparing our college students to run a total of five outreach projects for UOTeachOUT including the GSA Youth Leadership Summit. Our 30 University of Oregon students were meeting weekly in our teacher education course entitled Equal Opportunity: Education as Homophobia. As field assignments these students were already attending high school GSA meetings throughout the community, advocating for an inclusive high school prom, hosting a fundraiser for the GSA's, and generally getting their feet wet learning to

be advocates for equal opportunity schooling for LGBTQ youth and families.

Carmen, as the Eugene 4J Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Director was rallying our largest partner school district's middle and high school principals to send GSA student leadership teams to the Youth Leadership Summit. For a fifth year Carmen was organizing school busses, negotiating to get teachers substitute support, collaborating with two additional school districts to get their students onboard, ordering school lunches and generally bringing together the p-12 community to make this event happen for any and all LGBTQ youth and allies in the area.

This was to be the fifth annual Youth Leadership Summit for the UOTeachOUT project, and on this April morning the three of us realized that the 2015 registration numbers had just exceeded the capacity of the Eugene Unitarian Universalist Church, the host location of the past year.

This would be the third year in a row the youth leadership summit for middle and high school GSA's tripled in attendance and outgrew our reserved location. Five years earlier in 2010 we hosted a mere six middle and high schools for a total of 30 youth and this year we would have

the opportunity to engage with 240 youth. In addition we would provide support and advocacy training for 40 teacher advisors working with these students. Due to the significant growth in the registrations, Carmen proposed we move the event to an empty school district building.

When May 14th finally arrived, our 30 University of Oregon students welcomed the 240 LGBTQ and ally youth as each bus arrived to this new district building. As each teen entered the building they received a t-shirt boldly stating, "Ally is a VERB" and a name-tag where they could indicate their preferred pronoun. Once checked in, the youth headed off into a classrooms and gym to begin a day long leadership camp.

Visual artist Julio Salgado shared a political poster workshop with youth where each GSA group designed a poster about their identity. Salgado's professional project, UndocuQueer, resonated with the youth who experience the sting of racism and nationalism along with homophobia in their daily lives. Multimedia youth activists from Seattle shared their film entitled, Put this on the Map, and then led the group through a series of thought provoking activities. Each school's advisor took home a copy of the film as well as instructional materials to use at the school and district level.

Throughout the day youth from all of the local middle schools were trained in advocacy and leadership while simultaneously offered the opportunity to network with their future high school classmates. Given the disproportionately high drop out rate for these youth, the chance to build a support network into the high school is one crucial element in maintaining their access to education. And while the youth were experiencing an affirming and inclusive leadership day, their teachers were working with HRC Welcoming Schools trainer Tracy Flynn. Tracy was teaching these advisors about how to best support these students success in school.

Finally the future teachers of the UO class were hosting mini-workshops and projects throughout the day. Providing for smaller and more intimate

discussions for these students and a chance to see themselves at the center of education rather than on the edges.

As the day came to a close, all of the youth stood in a circle of nearly 300 people and saw school board members, superintendents, teachers, administrators, professors and college students all present and announcing to them that their lives were beautiful, amazing, and valuable. They saw faces they would remember in future years, faces they would see again in high school, and perhaps in one another they saw something new in themselves.

The day finally ended in a dance session in the gymnasium. Hugs and goodbyes were exchanged and students headed back to the reality of middle school or high school where their unique identities were perhaps less celebrated than they had been that day.

*“I didn’t know what to say so I didn’t say anything.”  
(teacher quote)*

### **BREAKING SILENCE:**

Research indicates that two thirds of LGBTQ youth report teachers do nothing in response to the overwhelmingly homophobic climate at school. In fact half of LGBTQ youth report teachers actually participate in homophobic harassment at school. Given these statistics, Julie and Tina determined five years ago to provide the education students at the University of Oregon the

opportunity to learn how to talk about LGBTQ youth, homophobia and gender harassment before they begin their careers in teaching.

Carmen, a long time equity advocate for p-12 youth and families, offered to collaborate to provide opportunities for community LGBTQ youth to experience enrichment and self advocacy training. While the political will of the community, and the country, had not yet caught up with the three of them, they began in earnest to work with a hand full of UO students and a few car loads of middle and high school students.

UOTeachOUT began that year in what has evolved into a five-part field project for students in the UO College of Education class Equal Opportunity: Education as Homophobia.

The field projects annually take place during the second half of spring term during the month of May. The five field projects students organize and participate in are as follows:

- GSA meetings at regional high schools and middle schools
- BBQueer: A BBQ fundraiser for the regional LGBTQ inclusive high school prom
- Pink Prom: The five district LGBTQ inclusive high school prom
- UOTeachOUT: GSA Youth Leadership Summit
- UOTeachOUT: University Open House and Workshops

The 2016 UOTeachOUT will take place throughout the month of May.

### **AUTHOR:**

**Julia Heffernan, Ph.D.**

UOTeach: Master’s Degree and Teacher Licensure Program Director  
*University of Oregon*

Julia taught middle and high school social studies and language arts for eight years and was an education administrator for another eight years before beginning an academic career in education studies. Her research is on gender identity and sexual orientation issues in education. She and Tina Gutierrez-Schmich have been developing the UOTeachOUT Public Pedagogy project for the past five years. Julia joined the OSSCC board in August of 2015.

### **COLLABORATORS:**

**Tina Gutierrez-Schmich, MPA**

Director of Equity  
*Bethel School District  
Faculty UO Department of Education Studies*

Tina has worked in early education for twenty years, higher education for seven years, and is now the Equity Director in Bethel School District. She is also an experienced mediator and conflict resolution consultant. Tina is an ABD doctoral student in the University of Oregon Education Studies program. Her research in on preservice teacher education and preparing teachers to teach, advocate, and support marginalized students.

**Carmen Urbina**

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Manager  
*Eugene School District*  
Carmen is a bilingual and bicultural professional with twenty-five years of experience performing asset based, complex and targeted outreach in communities of color to implement effective parent involvement and recruitment strategies in school districts, schools and community based organizations. Her equity-based professional development work with teachers and leaders is designed to enlighten and empower without guilt, shame, blame or judgment of self or others.

*“I can’t wait for next year!” (student quote)*

### **UOTEACHOUT 2016 MAY 12 AND 13, 2016**

The 6th Annual UOTeachOUT LGBTQ youth leadership summit will feature the documentary filmmakers Dean Hamar and Joe Wilson and primary subjects of their newest films Kumu Hina and A Place in the Middle.

Dean Hamar and Joe Wilson are amazing documentary film-makers with an educational, advocacy, and activist praxis. Teacher Kumu Hina and her student Ho’onani have wonderful stories to share about culturally sustaining pedagogy, language preservation, gender diversity, and schooling.

More details about the 2016 TeachOUT will be announced as plans are developed.

# LGBTQ training makes schools 'safe'

## A Q&A With Portland Public Schools Leader

*Taken from an Oregonian article originally published on Sept. 29th, 2015.  
An interview with Rudy Rudolph (rrudolph@pps.net), a project manager for Portland Public's equity department, about why the district prioritizes this work.*

*Link to original story: [http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2015/09/portland\\_public\\_schools\\_lgbtq.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2015/09/portland_public_schools_lgbtq.html)*

**P**ortland Public Schools is one of the most progressive districts in the nation when it comes to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues. Each year, the district trains teachers at its 90 schools to better serve LGBTQ students. Principals begin school years by telling teachers to ask students which pronouns they prefer to use. And a widely distributed FAQ reminds teachers they have the right to be out, keep photographs of their partners in their classrooms and use the pronouns and bathrooms that suit them.

The Oregonian/OregonLive spoke with Rudy Rudolph, a project manager for Portland Public's equity department, about why the district prioritizes this work.

**Oregon law says you can't fire teachers because of their gender identity, but the law doesn't require you to offer training. Why is that professional development important?**

If we don't give people an opportunity to understand what life is like for an LGBTQ person in the schools and at work, how can we ever really truly say that PPS is a safe place for all?

People have been so appreciative that the district is making people aware and giving them the tools to move forward.

The first question some districts ask is, 'How much is it going to cost?'

The first question I get is, 'What do you need? How can we help you?' I've never once gotten a no. They want to make it right.

**Were there any challenges in getting this off the ground?**

Yes. There are so many important things that the leaders of our schools need to know about and do, involving curriculum, new teaching techniques, all the testing that goes on.

What's challenging is being able to get in front of them with all the other things that are important. Every year, we have gotten in front of the whole leadership to make presentations. Last year, we did it twice. But that's the biggest challenge. Time is precious.

**Are students having better experiences now?**

Absolutely. When a person has a training in a school and the principal is leading this work, can you imagine what that means to this individual who is closeted? That says my administrator understands that I'm just a person like anyone else. It sets a totally different tone.

We had one kid who said, 'I changed my pronoun,' and the teacher said, 'Would you like me to use 'he?'' And he said, 'If you would do that, it would make my year.' The teacher did that every single time. Another teacher came up to the same student and said, 'I heard Mr. So-and-So call you with a male pronoun. Do you want me to do that, too?'

Here's a student not feeling comfortable to go tell all of the teachers, but the teachers picked up on that. A little thing like that in our eyes is a huge thing in our eyes.

**Have you heard any feedback from parents?**

I haven't heard a thing. I was invited by PSU to come and listen to a talk they had last spring. They invited people working in school districts to talk to students about what it is like to be an LGBTQ individual at a school. I was in shock at some of the experiences people were talking about in other school districts, really negative experiences and lack of support and fear in a number of them. I was thinking, 'Wow, just apply to PPS. It's so different here.'

**Have you heard from other local districts wanting guidance?**

I haven't. I'd be glad to share. We have a huge PowerPoint with facts and questions for discussions.

It takes more time and more money when you wait. You're reactionary then. If you have things set up in the right way, if you are tuned into what happens in schools and giving people the tools they need, you're not going to be running around putting a bandaid on something. That bandaid can be pretty expensive and take a lot of time.

**Where should a district start?**

What was beneficial for us is when we started our professional development, we had a real connection with the resource groups in our area, TransActive and SMYRC. You want to be able to provide people additional resources. Then start with your administrators. They're the leaders. They have to understand it. They're the ones who will make it happen in the schools.

We have a checklist regarding transgender students. It helps guide staff through name changes. It says don't assume a particular gender. Here are some words and phrases you can use. Ask them if they are feeling comfortable and wanting to go into the standard restroom or a gender-neutral restroom. Show them where that is in the school. We have that all laid out for all of the school offices.

Every kid who comes in there has to feel comfortable and safe. This is what we have to do to make that happen.