



AMERICAN PRINCIPLES PROJECT

The Innocence Report

October 2009

A Monthly Publication of the
Preserve Innocence Project
An Activity of
American Principles Project

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The Innocence Report
Executive Summary
October 2009

The October 2009 Innocence Report focuses on the use of Safe Schools programs to achieve certain non-heterosexual (*i.e.*, lesbian, bi-sexual, gay and trans-sexual) social and political agenda. Kevin Jennings --the founder of The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and presently the Assistant Deputy Secretary for the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools at the U.S. Department of Education-- pioneered that tactic in Massachusetts the 1990s. Now, several school districts have implemented or are in the process of testing Safe-School programs based on that model. In addition, several other advocacy groups have developed similar programs.

The GLSEN model suffers from several defects. It is deceptive in that its dominant purpose is not school safety but to propagate acceptance and affirmative support for LBGT lifestyles. It often denigrates the dignity of students by asking them to reveal deeply personal experiences or views. And it interferes with the associative rights of parents to direct the spiritual and values formation of their children; it raises concepts to children that go to the heart of the family and that include fundamental religious views, and it does this far before parents could reasonably be expected to have introduced such concepts to their children.

GLSEN has been highly effective in propagating its views. In varying degrees, it has garnered the support or acknowledgement of much of the relevant professional elite. Professional teachers, school administrator and counseling organizations have endorsed one or more GLSEN programs or initiatives. It has laid an imposing infrastructure for its future and continuing activities --an infrastructure that has all the more elite heft with its founder now in a senior position at the U.S. Department of Education.

I. Introduction

About ten years ago or so, America fell asleep at the wheel. Certain organizations began to look to our elite professions, our elite institutions, and our schools as vehicles to shape the minds of our children to accept alternate lifestyle agenda. The key drivers crafted brilliant strategies. Their implementation has been shrewd and effective.

We are a nation founded on Judeo-Christian values and bases on the belief that --as stated in Genesis and repeated throughout the Good Books-- we are all created in the image and likeness of God. That founding impels us to recognize the inherent dignity of each individual --a dignity that we hold sacred because it is sourced in the infinite Creator. Students of history and civics must readily agree that, as a nation, we are at our best when we are faithful to that founding.

Some of the literature reviewed for this report cites horrific acts of violence such as the brutal murder of Matthew Shephard. It is difficult to describe the evil of that incident --except as nothing less than evil incarnate.

Much of the literature focuses on hurtful language used by children such as referring to something or someone as “gay” as a means of insult or degradation. As the literature points out, such words often isolate and hurt the feelings of the intended target and other children who hear it. Schools ought not to tolerate such insults --or any insult-- to their students or staff. As noted in the literature, the use of such language even when unintentionally insulting bespeaks of intellectual sloth.

Nonetheless, the overall efforts discussed herein suffer from inexcusable flaws. They suppress the rights of parents. They suppress the rights of children. And they do so in a deceitful manner.

II. An Innovative Strategy

A cadre of groups is following the lead of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and its founder Kevin Jennings. They are prevailing on society to positively affirm non-heterosexual lifestyles through a two-point strategy. They have “re-framed” their agenda by characterizing it as a matter of health and safety, and they target children starting in kindergarten.

According to the World & I, GLSEN originated that "safe schools" strategy in 1994 in order to pass a precedent-setting law in Massachusetts banning "discrimination" in schools based on "sexual orientation." Peter LaBarbera, *The World & I* (July 2002). Student activists claimed gay students were at high risk for suicide and lobbied state legislators with stories about how they urgently needed protection. Kevin Jennings, GLSEN's founder, described how the strategy worked:

In Massachusetts the effective reframing of this issue was the key to the success of the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth. We immediately

seized upon the opponent's calling card-- safety--and explained how homophobia represents a threat to students' safety by creating a climate where violence, name-calling, health problems, and suicide are common. Titling our report 'Making Schools Safe for Gay and Lesbian Youth,' we automatically threw our opponents onto the defensive and stole their best line of attack. This framing short-circuited their arguments and left them back-pedaling from day one.

Kevin Jennings, *Winning the Culture War*, presented at the Human Rights Campaign Fund Leadership Conference (March 5, 1995).

GLSEN and its progeny are even more candid in explaining why they target kindergarten children. For example, GLSEN's *What Do We Really Think?: A Group Exercise to Increase Straight Ally Participation* posits a "Straight Ally Development Model" that describes "Stage I-Innocence" as children "typically until approximately the age of 4" who do not have "social consciousness" and therefore "have no assumptions about sexual or gender appropriate behaviors." At "Stage II-Ignorance" children learn "misinformation about LGBT people...from family members, peers, faith communities, schools, the media, etc." that the child accepts "without question."

According to the World & I, Debra Chasnoff, a co-creator of two gay-affirming films aimed at grade-school youths and their teachers--*It's Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in School* and *That's a Family!* (discussed below in the Alameda section) said, "I would like to see mandatory homophobia-prevention education integrated into [all] elementary and secondary school curricula." Peter LaBarbera, *The World & I* (July 2002).

Similarly, Robert Skutch --whose book *Who's in a Family* is also prominently featured in the Alameda curriculum-- echoed this sentiment in an NPR radio interview in which he stated:

The whole purpose of the book was to get the subject [of same-sex parent households] out into the minds and the awareness of children before they are old enough to have been convinced that there's another way of looking at life. . . It would be really nice if children were not subjected to the -- I don't want to use the word 'bigotry,' but that's what I want to say anyway -- of their parents and older people.

Robert Skutch, National Public Radio interview, "Here and Now," May 3, 2005.

III. GLSEN's Tragic Success

In 1990 Kevin Jennings founded the Gay and Lesbian Independent School Teacher Education Network. That organization first changed its name to the Gay and Lesbian School Teachers Network before settling on its current name --the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). It promotes itself as a "national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students and their allies." It strives for "a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual

orientation or gender identity/expression.” GLSEN carries out its mission through policy efforts aimed at Congress and the state legislative bodies and through its outreach programs.

The GLSEN policy agenda lists nine education policy items. It calls on the governing bodies of all parochial and private/independent schools adopt and enforce measurable non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies that include sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. It argues that students in all grade levels have access to curricula, trainings, texts and materials --in all areas including history, literature, family life, sexuality and health education -- that are inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. It argues for the rescission of laws (and presumably policies) that forbid or discourage in-school discussions of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. It argues that all students should have access to information relating to LGBT people, history, culture and ideas through school libraries, guidance, health services and all other resources. And it argues that students must have the right to organize and lead school-supported Gay-Straight Alliances and other groups that address LGBT issues in schools.

GLSEN has achieved an extensive organizational reach. Examples of its outreach programs include:

- Gay-Straight Alliances (student clubs), frequently referred to as GSAs
- ThinkB4YouSpeak, a web site to raise consciousness about anti-LGBT language
- Day of Silence involving students from middle school through college
- No Name Calling Week
- Trans-gender school-centered action programs

A. Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs)

The GLSEN web site boasts that it has formed over 4,000 GSAs. As reported in the Bay Windows newspaper (4/3/2008), which promotes itself as New England’s largest GLBT newspaper, middle school (grades 5-8) GSAs are new territory. In that regard, the 2008 GLSEN conference in Boston held two break-out sessions on “GSAs in Middle School?!?” and “Empowering Middle School LGBTQ Students.”

B. ThinkB4YouSpeak

According to the GLSEN website, “ThinkB4YouSpeak is a web site launched in conjunction with the Ad Council campaign to fight anti-LGBT language by raising awareness among straight teens about the prevalence and consequences of anti-LGBT bias and behavior in America’s schools.”

C. The Day of Silence

The Day of Silence --initiated in 1996 by university students and first sponsored and organized by GLSEN in 2001-- has grown from 300 participating high schools in 2001 to over 8,000 middle schools, high schools and institutions of higher learning in 2008.

Focus on the Family notes that GLSEN “uses Day of Silence to transform students into political lobbyists who advocate specific legislation and pro-gay policy changes at their schools. It notes that in its ‘How to Get What You Want--*With an Ask!*’ GLSEN encourages students to push for things such as pro-gay books in their school libraries, teacher trainings and even a “queer-friendly prom.” Focus on the Family Handout, “Materials from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network,” directing to <http://www.daysofsilence.org/downloads/r119.pdf>

The Day of Silence website also features the publication *Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation and Youth*, a primer for principals, educators, and school personnel that has been mailed to all 16,000 public school superintendents in the United States (also available at www.apa.org/pi/lgbcc/publications/justthefacts.html). *Just the Facts* is endorsed by:

- American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Counseling Association
- American Association of School Administrators
- American Federation of Teachers
- American Psychological Association
- American School Counselor Association
- American School Health Association
- Interfaith Alliance Foundation
- National Association of School Psychologists
- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- National Association of Social Workers
- National Education Association
- School Social Work Association of America

Focus on the Family has responded that *Just the Facts* is based on several misleading statements and unsubstantiated claims. It has countered with the publication of *Fact-Based Responses to Unsubstantiated Claims*, available for download at the “Take Action” section of www.truetolerance.org.

D. No Name Calling Week

GLSEN and Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing created No Name Calling Week. It targets students in grades 5-8. It is an annual event of activities aimed at ending name-calling of all kinds and providing schools with the tools and inspiration to launch an on-going dialogue about ways to eliminate bullying in their communities. CISCO Systems sponsors it with a grant. GLSEN's coalition partners for the event are:

Advocates for Youth
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
American Counseling Association
American School Counselor Association
American School Health Association
Amnesty International

Anti-Defamation League
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Big Brothers Big Sisters of America
Children's Defense Fund
COLAGE: Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere
Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders
Council of Chief State School Officers
Educators for Social Responsibility
Facing History and Ourselves
Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network
Girls Incorporated
Girl Scouts of the USA
Groundspark
Human Relations Media
Human Rights Watch
It Takes a Team! (Women's Sports Foundation)
Jewish Mosaic: The National Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity
Mix It Up
National Association for Gifted Children
National Association for Multicultural Education
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of School Nurses
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE)
National Conference for Community and Justice
National Education Association
National Mental Health Association
National Middle School Association
National School Board Association
National Urban League
New Moon Publishing
The Ophelia Project
OUTHHistory.org
Parents Action for Children
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Rainbow Rumpus
School Social Work Association of America
Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing
Simon Wiesenthal Center - Museum of Tolerance
Skipping Stones, Inc.
Stories of Us (USA)
Teaching for Change
Youth Service America

E. Trans-Gender School-Centered Action Programs

GLSEN provides “Gender 101” and “Gender 201” workshops. It promotes the 101 Workshop as an activity for teachers to use in their classroom in conjunction with “TransAction! Day.” The workshop is an hour and a half exercise geared to train children to use gender neutral pronouns such as “zie, hir, and hirs” in place of common gender based pronouns such as she, her, hers, he, him, and his. The goal is for children to use these substitute pronouns so that transgender children will not feel uncomfortable.

The “Gender 201” Workshop, another hour and a half instruction section, uses peer pressure to encourage students to conform to desired opinions regarding the transgendered community. In doing so, the workshop intrudes on matters very personal to each child in an effort to bring out the transgendered individual in all of them. The workshop begins with an exercise in which the teacher creates a line that represents a continuum from feminine to masculine and then requires the entire class to stand on a point in that line that represents their gender identity. The supposition is that initially some students will stand closer to their non-biological sex than their biological sex and that this will encourage other individuals to move away from the two gender determinative terms and toward the gender neutral middle. However, the exercise invades a very personal aspect of a child’s life that, out of respect for her dignity, she should not be pressured to disclose.

The workshop continues with the teacher exhibiting gender-based words and phrases associated with transgendered individuals. The students then go to the front of the room and write their understanding and thoughts about the word or phrase. This could unduly pressure the child to reject her beliefs out of a feeling of a need to conform.

IV. The Proliferation of the “Safe-School” Strategy

This year California’s Alameda Unified School District (AUSD) added “Lesson 9” to its Caring Schools Community Curriculum. Lesson 9 is a K-5 curriculum consistent in part with the GLSEN agenda.

Other groups and entities have adopted the strategy of using K-12 school safety curricula as a means of advancing a non-heterosexual social and political agenda. For example, National Youth Advocacy Coalition and Lambda Legal recently produced *Bending the Mold, An Action Kit for Transgender Youth*. In or around 2007 the Human Rights Campaign Foundation piloted *Welcoming Schools-An Inclusive Approach to Addressing Family Diversity, Gender Stereotyping and Name-Calling in K-5 Learning Environment*; it has introduced the program in 13 schools in three different states. In 2005, Girl’s Best Friend Foundation & Advocates for Youth published *Creating Safe Space for GLBTQ Youth: A Toolkit*.

The Alameda school board states that, in adding Lesson 9, its:

primary goals are to create safe schools for all children, i.e., free from teasing and name calling to create inclusive, welcoming environments that reflect the identity of all students and their families.

AUSD's Lesson 9 FAQs, at <http://www.alameda.k12.ca.us/images/boe082509lessson9faq.pdf>. It further states that its rationale is that "[e]ducation is needed to support students who are teased, bullied or harassed because of their sexual orientation identity." *Id.*

However, as with other programs following the GLSEN safe-schools strategy, the Alameda program exceeds the bounds of what is needed to combat teasing, bullying and harassment. Its overriding purpose is clearly to advance a certain social and political agenda. To accomplish that purpose it (i) preempts parental prerogatives by introducing moral or religious concepts before a parent has a reasonable opportunity to do so; (ii) invades student privacy; and (iii) demeans and trivializes religion and parents.

Such safe schools programs introduce subject-matter to a child that is at the heart of a parent's association with the child, *e.g.*, the meaning and importance of the family – often in terms of its centrality to religion. Furthermore, they do this prior to the time that a parent would have a reasonable opportunity to do so (*i.e.*, they start introducing it at the kindergarten level). This *a priori* infringes the highest and most sacred form of free speech -- the right of a parent to introduce moral and religious concepts to her flesh and blood (whether biological or adopted) within a reasonable time. If the state abrogates that right, it reduces the parent to nanny status, and it elevates itself to a status wholly incompatible with our founding.

On the contention that its opt-out provisions relate to sexuality programs rather than safety programs, AUSD does not let parents opt-out of the program.

The following notes illustrate the over-reaching nature of the Alameda program:

The Alameda kindergarten lesson asks students to give examples of "the times when their feelings might have been hurt."

The Alameda County first grade (6-7 year old) lesson plan is to teach children about families. It is entitled "Who's in a Family?." The stated purpose of the lesson is:

- To identify what makes a family
- To identify and describe a variety of families
- To understand that families have some similarities and some differences

The course description includes discussing with first graders various configurations of families, their responsibilities and the sharing that takes place in a family. Robert Skutch's book *Who's in a Family* is a central part of the lesson plan. That book is about a girl named Robin and her family. Her family includes her dad Clifford, her dad's partner Henry, and Robin's cat Sassy. In discussing the

book *Who's in a Family*, the Alameda first grade lesson suggests that families might include pets.

Alameda's grade 2 (ages 7-8) lesson plan calls for children to "begin to discuss and respect different types of families" and to "be able to identify alternative types of family structure." A central part of the lesson plan is to read to the class "And Tango Makes Three." That story is about two gay penguins that form a bond. The penguins, after observing other penguins building a nest and sitting on an egg, build a nest of their own and push a large rock into the center of it. They sit on the rock as if it were an egg. At some point, someone gives them a real egg. They care for it until it hatches and then raise the baby penguin. The second grade lesson asks students to recall their observations from zoo visits as to the composition of zoo families and to extrapolate from that as to what "all families have in common." In discussing the book "And Tango Makes Three" the lesson plan calls on students to discuss whether the penguins in the book were good parents. It takes the second graders through contemplation of a parent's ministerial duties, it then asks them to reflect on some of their other caregivers -- such as babysitters and care providers.

Alameda's third grade (ages 8-9) lesson focuses on developing a vocabulary related to "family diversity" (e.g., discusses "two moms" and "two dads") and in developing student "sensitivity to gay and lesbian family structures." It asks third graders to identify "people/animals in my family," and the third-grade lesson concludes that "[w]hat binds a family together is their love for each other and their common experiences."

Fourth grade students (ages 9-10) review an article by an eleven year old in a family with two mothers and discuss the meaning of concepts such as gay, lesbian and LGBT. The fourth grade lesson asks students to identify what hurts their feelings; what "types of name calling they have heard or been a target of out on the playground"; how they responded; and what made them feel better.

Fifth grade students (ages 10-11) "increase their awareness" of all stereotypes including "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people." It asks fifth graders to "brainstorm all the words that come to mind when they think about LGBT people" and to then identify where they learned "the things you brainstormed."

V. Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools

Kevin Jennings, GLSEN's founder and long-time Executive Director, is now Assistant Deputy Secretary for the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools at the U.S. Department of Education. Programs relating to teacher safety, classroom discipline and bullying fall under his purview. The Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act --a part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001-- established the office in 2002. Jennings is its third director.

The Office of Safe and Drug-Free schools gives extensive grants each year to implement anti-bullying initiatives in schools across the nation. It makes the grants available to local educational agencies ("LEAs") and state educational agencies ("SEAs"). Under the "Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative," it awards grants to LEAs and SEAs totaling between \$30 million and \$75 million per year. It awards other grants under the "Partnership in Character Education Program."

To obtain these grants, LEAs submit applications to the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, outlining their objectives in one of five specified categories. The LEAs often make sub-awards to non-governmental organizations to help implement the programs. Over the last seven years, grants have gone out to LEAs in almost every state and the District of Columbia. For example, in 2006 the Alameda County Office of Education received a four-year grant for nearly \$2 million to implement "Project Heart, Head, Hands" in its schools. This program has the goal of increasing mutual respect and tolerance amongst students by teaching students to act toward people from different walks of life with empathy.

GLSEN's safe school philosophy is now embedded in the highest levels of government. It has been embraced by the elite educational, school administrative and child counseling organizations. And it is supported by a well-developed grassroots effort. In the near future, we will see replays of the situation in Alameda County --again and again.