



Press conference statement, March 17, 2015

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Good morning. I am happy to stand here with Andrea Bowen of Garden State Equality, Assemblywoman Huttel, and all our partners in work to affirm all students in our schools and I welcome all of you. I am Carol Watchler, Co-Chair of GLSEN Central New Jersey. We are New Jersey's chapter of GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students. As GLSEN, we envision a world where every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

GLSEN research over the past 20 years shows that name-calling and bullying is experienced by far too many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students, and many others in the school environment. We know from our research that bullying has the negative effect of lowering academic success, dampening aspirations for further education, and undermining student well-being.

But our research also highlights the impact of several measures that have a positive effect on student success at school. Our most recent report of the GLSEN National School Climate Survey illustrates that several of these supports make a difference in schools and have a positive impact on students. For example, our research shows that 1) Gay Straight Alliances, 2) supportive educators, as well as 3) LGBT-inclusive curriculum benefit LGBT students and lead to greater school success and well-being. And every step that makes schools safer for LGBT students makes schools safer for *all* students.

We in GLSEN Central NJ have joined with additional community partners particularly HiTOPS

- to foster student organizations with our GSA Forum,
- to bring professional development to school districts and encourage educators to be allies to LGBT students,

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- to partner with schools and districts in facing the challenges around sexual orientation and gender identity issues in school.

To school districts and young people alike we say: You know us-- we've been working with your GSA Advisors, your counselors, and your school staff to foster awareness, understanding, and action. We look forward to continuing on this path together. And for those who are not aware of our services, we invite you to contact us for collaboration to strengthen a welcoming and affirming school climate that will empower our young people ---our nation's greatest resource--- to be the most successful, healthy and engaged persons they can possibly be.

Thank you.
