

BRO backs off marriage proposal

Basic Rights Oregon announced last week that it would not be pursuing a ballot measure to assure freedom of marriage for all. Although this is not strictly an education issue, it is an equality issue, which has always been strongly supported by both NEA and OEA through numerous actions and resolutions.

Jeanna Frazzi, the Executive Director of BRO, said that the organization had been holding numerous conversations with supporters as well as traveling the state to hold town halls to talk about when and how to win the freedom to marry for same-sex couples.

She said that so many individuals “made it clear ... to continue the education work we are doing and not to move forward into a political fight until we are ready to win.”

After careful consideration of the input, Frazzi said the BRO Board of Directors voted unanimously to extend its public education campaign so as to continue to build public support for a future ballot measure campaign but not in 2012.

She said it was a painful decision, “but it would be even more painful to make the choice to put our rights up for a public vote and lose again. A second loss at the ballot on the issue of marriage equality would be devastating, especially for LGBT Oregonians in small towns and rural areas, and for our youth. And it would be devastating to our ability to bring this to yet another public vote in the near future.

“In the meantime struggle continues, and we should all join together in moving equality forward through everyday acts of bravery and honesty as we come out and tell our stories to friends and neighbors.”

OEA attends event

Nine individuals represented OEA at the annual Basic Rights Oregon Event on October 7 at the Portland Art Museum.

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Co-Chair Brian Haliski, OEA Vice President Hanna Vaandering, Sally

Miller, OEA Executive Secretary Richard Sanders, Jane Sanders, Portland Association of Teachers President Gwen Sullivan, Bob Gray, Vickie Walker and Ray Johnson attended the reception, dinner and dance, titled “What Ignites You?,” with speaker Kate Kendell, National Center for Lesbian Rights.



Attending the Basic Rights Oregon Event on October 7 were (top): OEA GLBT Caucus Co-Chair Brian Haliski, Portland Association of Teachers President Gwen Sullivan, Secretary of State Kate Brown and Bob Gray and (above) Sally Miller, OEA Vice President Hanna Vaandering, Jane Sanders and OEA Executive Secretary Richard Sanders.

Kendell began by saying how far we have come in this “human struggle” (for sexual minority rights) and “in no state is sexual orientation a legal problem” anymore. She said that in 1994 there were no Gay Straight Alliances in schools and now there are 4,000 across the country and that “this nation has been transformed and Oregon is in the forefront of this with a gay mayor and two state Supreme Court justices.”

During the fundraising part, OEA put up \$25,000 that was matched.

Feds consider law

Education Week reports that nearly every state has its own laws addressing bullying, but now federal lawmakers are weighing legislation to protect students from bullying and harassment that would apply to every school and district in the country and could also add an explicit layer of protection for students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

The U.S. Senate Education Committee, while considering the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (otherwise known as No Child Left Behind) and near the close of its hearings last month, heard Sen. Al Franken, D-MN, offer an impassioned plea for the law to include language specifically protecting LGBT students.

Sen. Franken told the stories of several high-profile cases in recent years in which students who had reported being bullied for being gay or perceived to be gay committed suicide. "Nine out of 10 LGBT kids are harassed or bullied in school. One-third report having skipped school in the last month because they felt unsafe, and study after study has shown that LGBT youth are more likely to commit suicide," Sen. Franken said.

"But the sad fact is that our federal laws are failing" those students, he said. He compared his proposed addition to civil rights protections in federal antidiscrimination laws that cover students on the basis of race and sex.

The U.S. Department of Education's office for civil rights has faulted at least one school district—Tehachapi Unified in California—for failing to prevent schoolmates from repeatedly harassing an openly gay 13-year-old who killed himself last year.

In Mr. Franken's home state of Minnesota, where several other students committed sui-

cide, the agency is investigating districts on how they handled the bullying of students based on their sexual orientation.

However, worried that his proposal to make LGBT students a protected class and empower the harassed to sue would be the entire ESEA bill's undoing, Sen. Franken withdrew his proposal. He said he would wait until the ESEA rewrite hits the Senate floor to offer his proposal. His bill has 34 cosponsors, all Democrats.

The provisions in Sen. Franken's Student Non-Discrimination Act would be in addition to proposed language by Sens. Robert Casey, D-PA, and Mark Kirk, R-IL. Their Safe Schools Improvement Act would require schools and districts that accept federal funds to establish codes of conduct that specifically prohibit bullying and harassment for any

Under the Casey-Kirk bill, all states also would have to track bullying cases and report the statistics to the Education Department, which would have to report the state data to Congress. That bill has 32 cosponsors, but Sen. Kirk is the only Republican to endorse it. Sen. Franken said he would work to write his proposal in such a way that Sen. Kirk could endorse it, too.

Whether antibullying language and explicit protection for students based on sexual orientation or gender identity would clear both chambers is uncertain. The House companion to the Safe Schools Improvement Act has 106 cosponsors, including a few Republicans. The House companion to Sen. Franken's bill has at least one Republican among its 126 co-sponsors.

Both of Oregon's senators, Jeff Merkly and Ron Wyden, are cosponsors for SSIA whereas only Rep. Earl Blumenauer has signed onto the House one. Be sure to contact the senators and your representatives and encourage them to pass this legislation.

Triangle Connection



Editor: Ray Johnson
rayugene@att.net

Triangle Connection is

the official publication of the Oregon Education Association Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Caucus and is published four times a year—September, November, March, June—as a benefit of membership.

OEA GLBTC Purpose

The Oregon Education Association Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Caucus is established

to protect the rights and interests of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender members of the Association, students and their supporters.

OEA GLBTC Officers

Co-Chairs: Brian Haliski & Pam Kokstis
Secretary: Renee Hathorn
Treasurer: Erick Swehla

oeaglbtc@gmail.com

Bullies lower scores

Not that this should be a surprise, but the American Psychological Association reported in August that students attending high schools dominated by bullies are more likely to have lower standardized test scores.

In a study by researchers in Virginia, it was found that schoolwide passing rates on three different standardized exams--Algebra I, Earth Science and World History--were three percent to six percent lower in schools where students reported a more severe bullying climate. The findings, they added, highlight the fact that bullying is a pervasive problem in schools.

"Our study suggests that a bullying climate may play an important role in student test performance," Dewey Cornell, a clinical psychologist and a professor of education at the University of Virginia, said in the news release. "This research underscores the importance of treating bullying as a schoolwide problem rather than just an individual problem."

In conducting the study, researchers compiled surveys about bullying from more than 7,300 ninth graders and about 3,000 teachers at 284 Virginia high schools. The researchers pointed out that even the small percent drop in test scores associated with bullying is significant.

Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, students must receive a passing grade on these standardized tests to graduate. Moreover, in the state of Virginia at least 70 percent of a school's students must pass the tests for the school to keep its state accreditation.

"This difference is substantial because it affects the school's ability to meet federal requirements and the educational success of many students who don't pass the exams," said Cornell. "This study supports the case for schoolwide bullying prevention programs as a step to improve school climate and facilitate academic achievement."

The researchers argued the poor academic performance was due to the fact that students are less engaged in learning when they are afraid about bullying. They also suggested bullying leads to a greater level of school disorder, which may have negatively affected

test scores.

The study authors noted bullying programs should not only provide help for victims, but also counseling and discipline for bullies. Bystanders, they added, should also be discouraged from supporting bullying.

"We have always had bullying in our schools. What has changed is we have become more aware of bullying due to a series of high-profile tragic cases involving school shootings and suicides," concluded Cornell. "Our society does not permit harassment and abuse of adults in the workplace, and the same protections should be afforded to children in school."

US attorney's office adds to growing list of videos

During the first week of October, Oregon's US attorney's office joined the growing list of organizations who have joined the It Gets Better Project. Started in 2010 by Dan Savage, a Seattle writer who has an advice column in the *Portland Mercury* news-paper, the Project includes videos to reassure and support gay and lesbian youths who feel alone and/or harassed.

The Oregon video can be seen at tinyurl.com/6y4dbf5 and is six minutes and 22 seconds long. It features a handful of prosecutors and staff who candidly reveal their own experiences. One woman describes the relief her teenage son felt after coming out. Another woman talks about being bisexual in a conservative community.

Referral fails down south

An attempt to refer the California law requiring that the contributions of gays and lesbians be taught in public schools failed to gain enough signatures for the ballot.

The law is to take affect in January and is the nation's first law to require presentation of sexual minorities' milestones in social studies classes.

Events on now

November 14-18: National Anti-Bullying Week. Resources at: nea.org/tools/14837.htm and www2.beatbullying.org/abw2011.