

"WOW...THEY CARE, RIGHT?"
MAKING SCHOOLS SAFE(R) FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL,
TRANSGENDER AND QUESTIONING YOUTH

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctorate in Education

Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership for Social Justice

California State University, East Bay

2012

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Lori Anne Watson
June 2012
Educational Leadership

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Abstract

Schools contribute heavily to the feelings of isolation and stigmatization that many gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth experience. Research demonstrates that the climate of US middle and high schools are generally unsupportive and unsafe for many of these youth who are often susceptible to harassment, discrimination, and other negative events, often specifically related to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or how they express their gender. The research reports that in order to create safe schools for students who identify as LGBTQ, school districts must have 4 components in place: nondiscrimination policy specifically addressing sexual orientation and gender identity; inclusive curriculum; support groups for students; and staff development for teachers and support staff.

San Leandro High School has a safe schools program which consists of the 4 components. This mixed methods study sought to analyze the program through an analysis of the school policies, programs and practices by answering the question, *How is the Safe Schools work at San Leandro High School impacting the climate for students who identify as LGBTQ?* Quantitative data was collected through the GLSEN Local School Climate survey. Qualitative data was collected through focus group interviews with staff members, heterosexual students, and LGBTQ students.

Major findings of the study include the following: (1) prevalent use of homophobic language; (2) discomfort of staff regarding LGBTQ issues; (3) limitations of the Safe Schools curriculum; (4) the positive influence of Club Rainbow; (5) fewer boys “out” than girls; and (6) additional 9th grade campus support needed.

Recommendations made are: (1) yearly program evaluation; (2) reviewing and revising the Safe Schools curriculum; (3) ongoing staff development and support for staff; (4) continued support to the club rainbow advisor; (5) outreach to gay boys as well as other gay students that are not “out”; and (6) additional 9th grade campus support.

This study supports the research that schools that implement the 4 components—nondiscrimination policy, inclusive curriculum, support groups, and staff development—do have safe(r) school climates for students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning. These findings may help educators to better understand LGBTQ students and how to better support them in school; provide information to schools that don’t have “safe schools” programs about how to start them, as well as make recommendations to schools that have existing programs in place as to how to strengthen them.

California State University, East Bay

Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership for Social Justice

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank the Good Lord above for blessing me with the gifts that enabled me to write this dissertation. The two greatest gifts that I was given are the greatest parents in the world, Constant W. Watson and Annie B. Watson. Although they are no longer of this world, they are with me and inspired me through this whole process (you too, Teddy). I thank them for encouraging me to always do my best and never settling for mediocrity. I hope that I have made them proud—this is for them. I would like to thank my brothers, Byron and Darryl, and my cousin Bonnie for pushing me from afar and telling me that I'm smart (well Byron and Bonnie did), even when I didn't think so. I'd also like to acknowledge two special role models, my Uncle Joffre, Ph.D. and Aunt Zadie, Ed.D. Although Zadie is with my parents in heaven, I know she sprinkled some of her brain dust on me on many days. A huge thank you goes to my girlfriend, Kimberly who believed in me from the very beginning of this process. She made me work harder to earn the Ed.D. than CSUEB! She awarded my Ed.D. one letter at a time (E, after the first year; d, after the 2nd year; and I don't know when I'll get the last D—I guess after graduation)! She is working toward her first degree, and her focus and drive to complete it is amazing. I'll be so proud of her when she's done. A shout out to my co-administrators who took up the slack for me on Friday night supervisions when I told them, "I have class!" now what excuse will I use? And also my coworkers at FTK who supported me til the end. Kudos to SLUSD for making this work important; and to the SLHS staff and students who participated in my study. I also want to acknowledge Chris

who initially led this work and made me realize that this is what I want to do. Last but not least I'd like to give a HUGE THANKS to my committee members. Thanks Ardella for joining the team when I so desperately needed you. Kyzyl, I'll never forget our Farley's meetings. Your brain is something out of this world! I don't know half of what you're talking about, but I just feel smarter listening. Thanks for helping me think through this thing. And Ginny, you're the greatest! I connected with you from the very start in class and I knew then that you were the one for me. You make me feel as if I could write a bestselling novel on anything. You've been supportive, helpful, encouraging and everything anyone could ask for in a chair. I know you're the reason that this felt "easy." Thank you all!

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CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite increasing visibility, persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ) continue to face extreme social, legal and institutional discrimination within the United States. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning youth are an even more vulnerable subset of this population. Research has consistently shown that LGBTQ youth are particularly at risk for suicide, as well as verbal and physical harassment, depression, substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, homelessness, prostitution, and declining school performance (Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Robinson, 1994; Remafedi, 1987; Savin-Williams, 1994; Munoz-Plaza, 2002). A 1989 U.S. department of health and Human Services study cited suicide as the number one cause of death of LGBTQ youth with gay youth 2-6 times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual youth, as well as accounting for 30% of all teen suicides annually. In addition to suicide, LGBTQ youth are at risk for other social and health problems. LGBTQ youth use alcohol and marijuana at higher rates than the national average for all youth and account for 42% of teenage runaways (Cooper-Nicols, & Bowleg, 2010).

Schools contribute heavily to the feelings of isolation and stigmatization that many gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth experience (Unks, 1995). Research demonstrates that the climate of US middle and high schools are generally unsupportive and unsafe for

many of these youth who are often susceptible to harassment, discrimination, and other negative events, often specifically related to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or how they express their gender (Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009). LGBTQ students often encounter high levels of verbal and physical harassment and assault, sexual harassment, social exclusion and isolation, and other interpersonal problems with peers (Bontemps & D'Augelli, 2002; D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Bochenek & Brown, 2001; Fineran, 2001; Pearson, Muller, & Wilkinson, 2007; Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001). In Pilkington and D'Augelli's study of 194 LGBTQ adolescents (1995), they found that 44% of participants reported one or more threats of physical assault, 33% reported having objects thrown at them, 31% reported being chased or followed, and nearly 20% reported an experience of physical assault (e.g., being hit, kicked, or punched) related to their sexual orientation. Studies of gay and bisexual male adolescents revealed that 55% of the participants reported regular verbal abuse from classmates (Remafedi, 1987; Jordan, Vaughn, & Woodsworth, 1997). It was discovered that a majority of LGBTQ students heard derogatory statements about themselves (e.g., "dyke" or "faggot") at least once per day from their peers while some high school students heard anti-gay slang approximately 25 times a day. Rivers, Duncan, and Besag (2007) reported that over 1.6 million public school students are still bullied because of either actual or perceived sexual orientation.

Stories about students who are gay, or perceived to be, are numerous. Lawrence King (15 years old) was shot twice in his head on February 12, 2008, by a 14-year-old

classmate at E. O. Green Junior High School in Oxnard, California. The eighth grade classmates of the perpetrator and the victim described the "bad blood" that existed between the two because of the victim's openly gay appearance (Conoley, 2008). Classmates admitted that the victim, a child from a foster setting, had been the target of harassment because of his feminine dress, hair arrangements, and other mannerisms that were gender non-normative. Gay-baiting and taunting turned deadly with the announcement that he was brain dead by February 14th (Saillant & Covarrubias, 2008). A Mississippi school district cancelled a local high school's prom on Wednesday after an openly lesbian student asked to bring her girlfriend as a date (The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation [GLAAD] website, 2010). The *LA Times* reported that in January 2009, three football players posted a video on Facebook, in which they voiced anti-gay slurs and suggested sexually assaulting and killing their female classmate, Hail Ketchum, who was playing the role of Mimi in the high school's version of the musical 'Rent.' Six hundred students viewed the video before it was removed. And a blog published the day that the ACLU filed its suit reported that administrators did little to punish the boys or protect Ketchum, who had to rearrange her class schedule to avoid the boys, one of whom threatened her in person (GLAAD website, 2010).

Personally, when I hear stories like these I experience a range of emotions. First I feel sadness for the senseless loss of life. I feel sadness because I imagine the emotional torture that these children must have been going through. I feel anger toward the discrimination and mistreatment. I feel respect for the children who were brave enough

to be who they are and stand up for who they are. I feel worry for other students who are experiencing or might soon experience the same thing. I feel a kinship because I imagine I shared many of the same thoughts and feelings that these children did both growing up and as an adult. I relate to these people because I am a gay individual. No, I was not harassed or bullied in school as a child, but that is because I was not brave enough to say who I was, like these kids are. I am not even sure I knew what to call it then. But I knew that I was different. I knew that I didn't feel "normal" like everyone else. I also knew that it wasn't ok to 'like girls,' in Mississippi in the 1970s and 1980s, although I knew I did. I was afraid and because of that I lost a huge chunk of my life, hiding and ashamed to be who I am. I was afraid I would hurt and disappoint my parents, my family, and embarrass them. I was afraid people would talk about me or not like me, or hurt me. I'm still afraid—not as much, but still.

Professionally this topic is of interest to me because it is my belief that students shouldn't have to feel the way that I did. It is my belief that it is essential that school communities provide a safe environment for learning while simultaneously nurturing and supporting the growth of LGBTQ youth. Every school has LGBTQ students. Harassment, discrimination, verbal abuse and violence in schools create a hostile environment and must not be tolerated. Fortunately, I work in a school district that is working toward creating a safer environment for students by implementing a comprehensive program for students and staff on addressing issues of diversity and

nondiscrimination, including sexual orientation. However, this Safe Schools work began only after the district was sued and lost in the Debro case.

When Karl Debro, a heterosexual high school teacher in the San Leandro Unified School District, expressed his opposition to racism and homophobia in a classroom discussion, the school disciplined him for raising ‘objectionable’ topics in class. He sued the school district in federal court, arguing that the district had violated his First Amendment right to free expression. After the trial court ruled against him, the ACLU of Northern California helped his appeal with a friend-of-the-court brief, arguing that Debro’s speech was constitutionally protected. Before the federal appeals court heard the case, the case settled favorably for Debro (ACLU.org, 2012).

An Alameda County Superior Court jury found that the San Leandro Unified School District and superintendent Tom Himmelberg violated the First Amendment rights of veteran San Leandro High School teacher Karl Debro. The jury also found that the district and the superintendent retaliated against him and racially discriminated against Debro, one of the few African-American teachers at the high school. [NOTE: The jury also found that Himmelberg violated state policies and engaged in "despicable" practices of fraud, oppression or malice.] The jury awarded Debro \$500,000. As the trial went into its penalty phase Aug. 28, the school district and Debro agreed to a total settlement of \$1,155,000 (Kiritsy, 2002).

San Leandro Safe Schools Work

As a result of this lawsuit, in 2001, San Leandro Unified School District developed and implemented Board Policy 5145.3(b) which states:

The Board affirms the right of all students, staff, and parents/legal guardians to be free from hate crimes, or any hate-inspired activity which degrades an individual including, but not limited to, race, religion, ethnicity, culture, heritage, gender (including gender identity) or sexual orientation. Such acts may cause injury to victims and will not be tolerated in an educational setting. The Board encourages the Superintendent and staff to develop programs which enhance self-esteem, raise awareness and sensitivity, and foster respect and understanding for all individuals and their unique qualities. (sanleandro.k12.ca.us, 2011)

The policy's stated process of "prevention" of hate motivated behavior consists of the following steps: specify the rules of conduct in documents, speeches, and orientations at the beginning of each school year; review annually incident reports at both site and district levels; conduct a school/district climate assessment to improve programs; provide staff training to help staff members respond immediately and appropriately to hate-motivated incidents; provide workshops for teachers, parents, families, and community partners; support curriculum and student activity programs that promote appreciation and respect for differences among people; and involve community partners as resources to develop, implement and monitor prevention plans.

The Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services leads the Safe Schools Task force. This task force, which consists of teachers, counselors and administrators from all schools, meets two times a year to plan and develop the Safe Schools work plan for the year. Members have sometimes been provided with professional development from outside experts, and it is their responsibility to lead and provide staff development back at the sites, regarding laws, curriculum, support services, etc. Within the district task force there are also sub-committees that meet throughout the year. The sub committees are charged with focusing on and improving GSAs, staff development, community connections, and curriculum.

The Safe schools curriculum is included at all three levels—elementary school, middle school, and high school. At the elementary school level, there are lessons that are taught in K-5 that are embedded into what the curriculum is already doing. Selected stories are used as replacement stories with the English Language Arts textbook so that the message can be integrated into the curriculum rather than an “add on.” In addition, the elementary team developed brochures to be shared with families to help answer questions about the safe school work at the elementary level. Additionally, teachers use books such as *“Tango Makes 3”* for read-a-loud and focus a lot on family structure, gender and gender expression. They also incorporate lessons on swearing, teasing and bullying.

In the middle schools, there are lessons integrated into the sixth-grade English Arts classes. This curriculum was developed by consultants, but has since been re-worked

by a teacher curriculum committee. These lessons emphasize respect for all, but also incorporate a focus on anti-bullying and bystander behavior, since middle school is where most bullying occurs. A few years ago the “Let’s Get Real” curriculum, which revolves around anti-bullying, was taught at the middle school. The library spotlights books that are gay-themed as well as books that are written by gay authors. The middle schools also participate in National No Name Calling week and Day of Silence.

At the high school level, there is also a ninth grade Safe Schools curriculum that is taught during a two -week unit through English Language Arts classes. The curriculum was originally developed by consultants and included lessons on Board policy; California Education code; an introduction to LGBTQ issues and terminology; and gay rights as human rights. The “Let’s Get Real” anti-bullying program, as well as the “Not in Our Town” program, were implemented as well. The curriculum has since been evaluated and revised and now includes other lessons, activities and videos. The school library houses books that are gay-themed or by gay authors and school-wide the students participate in Day of Silence, Harvey Milk Day, No Name Calling Week, and National Coming Out Day. Some of the teachers at the high school incorporate lessons about people who are LGBTQ within their curriculum.

Support groups for students and families are present at some of the elementary schools, both middle schools and at the high school in San Leandro. A few of the elementary schools have gay parent alliance groups that meet on a regular basis and highlight their goals and achievements on their website as well as in their schools. The

middle schools both have established Gay Straight Alliance clubs to support their LGBTQ students. The high school has a GSA that has renamed itself Club Rainbow. During Club Rainbow meetings, anywhere from twenty-five to forty students come together weekly for a variety of reasons—support, leadership building, planning of club and school wide activities and field trips. Club Rainbow is intended to provide a safe place and serve as a support system for its members at SLHS.

SLUSD and SLHS have all of the components in place that the literature says are necessary to create a safe climate for LGBTQ students—policy, inclusive curriculum, professional development, and support groups; however, the district does not conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the Safe Schools work to see if it really is working. To determine its effectiveness, the district relies heavily on adult perception, discipline data which is inconsistent, and responses from a sample of students from the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS). However review of the CHKS survey reveals that only two items address sexual orientation. Therefore the district has not truly assessed the climate for LGBTQ students. The Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) has a more comprehensive survey that specifically assesses the climate for LGBTQ issues; however, it has not been utilized as an evaluative tool by SLUSD.

This research is aimed at evaluating the Safe Schools program at San Leandro High School to see if it is really doing what it is intended to do – creating a safe and supportive environment for LGBTQ students. The overarching question to address through the research is: How is the Safe Schools work at San Leandro High School

shaping the climate for students who identify as LGBTQ? I look at the policies and programs in place and determine how they have shaped the climate for LGBTQ students by probing into the following factors—relationships with teachers; relationships with peers; identity at school; and how safe and supported they feel there. This is done through discovering the real lived experiences of LGBTQ students and heterosexual-identified students as well. I also investigate the enforcement of safe school policies; Safe Schools curriculum implementation; and staff reactions and actions around LGBTQ issues. My ultimate goal is to determine the effectiveness of the Safe Schools work and present my findings to district administrators as well as site administrators to make them more aware, so that they can better address and better meet the needs of LGBTQ students at San Leandro High School and the San Leandro Unified School District as a whole.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Schools as reflections of larger society, weave messages about normative culture through the formal and informal curricula. Adolescents by nature are progressing through a tumultuous time in life in terms of trying to resolve their own identities. Thus, school, including peers as socializing agents, assumes a larger role than in childhood in helping adolescents shape their identities and experiences (Nichols, 1999). The literature is clear. In order to create learning environments where students feel safe to be who they are, there must be change—systemic change in school districts. This change comes in the form of policy, inclusive curricula, ongoing staff development, and student support groups such as Gay Straight Alliances or other gay-themed groups (Michaelson, 2008; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Rofes, 1989; McFarland & Dupuis, 2001; Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; Griffin & Ouellett, 2002; Griffin & Ouellette, 2003; Morillas & Gibbons, 2010). Addressing sexual orientation issues through school-based programs and policies that promote understanding and tolerance would, in the words of high school senior Amanda Schlesinger, result in a “place where...acceptance and openness can become universal values” (Rienzo et al., 2006).

In this literature review, I critically assess and examine the role that policy, inclusive curricula, staff development, and student support groups play in shaping a safe school climate. I then critique existing evaluation results of established Safe Schools

programs to inform my practice as I move toward evaluation of the Safe Schools program at San Leandro High School.

Policy

It appears that nearly all resources, both practitioner and scholarly, aimed at ending homophobic harassment in the schools agree on one tactic: establish a clear and explicit written policy that forbids harassment in the school (Boland, 2002; Holtzhauer, 1993; Horowitz & Loehnig, 2003; Macgillivray, 2000; Schneider & Owens, 2000; Szalacha, 2003). Combined support from statewide legal mandates and policy recommendations play a crucial role in facilitating organizational change and providing external legitimacy and “back-up” support for administrators, educators, parents, and students at the local level (Griffin & Ouellette, 2003; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Anagnostopoulos, 2009; Michaelson, 2008; Goodenow et al., 2006; McFarland, 2001). In March 1997, The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) released new Title IX guidelines that for the first time made explicit reference to gay and lesbian students as being protected against sexual harassment (McFarland & Dupuis, 2001). OCR mandates that school policies should also pointedly address the range of behaviors that comprise gender-based bullying, including intimidation and assaults based on sexual orientation, to signal intolerance of gender-based bullying more broadly and to meet their legal obligations.

However, due to its controversial nature, the policy-making process surrounding sexuality education, and particularly programs involving sexual orientation, has become increasingly politicized. Heated debates over gay-straight student alliances, inclusion of

LGBTQ youth in important school functions such as proms, and sexuality orientation education illustrate the extent to which public schools have become a battleground within the culture war conflicts of the United States (Rienzo et al., 2006). Single-issue groups have mobilized both for and against school policies related to these issues. Yet in many school curricula and policies, gays seemingly do not exist. This omission contributes to homophobia. Heterosexual students are given no reasons not to hate gays, while LGBTQ students are given no reasons not to hate themselves (Rienzo et al., 2006).

Barriers to Policy

Anagnostopoulos and colleagues (2009) as well as Varjas' (2009) exploratory studies, determined that clear, comprehensive and accessible school policies are necessary in preventing homophobic harassment and sexual orientation. However Anagnostopoulos et al. (2009) found in their study that most formal efforts tended to focus specifically on sexual harassment in a very general sense, and that there was very little to help guide school staff or students to understand and respond specifically to gender-based bullying. This was found to be consistent with other research findings that the vast majority of school antiharassment policies are not in compliance with OCR guidelines (Lichty, Torres, Valenti, & Buchanan, 2007).

An empirical study conducted by Rienzo et al. (2006) to analyze the extent to which public school districts across the United States have implemented policy recommendations with regard to sexual orientation confirmed that certain political and societal forces exert significant influences over the status of school policies and

programs. Despite the fact that professionals and the US citizenry concur that the inclusion of sexual orientation issues in school programs is acceptable, the survey found that most school districts are not assuming this responsibility and have not institutionalized recommended policies or programs. Although many are adopting antigay harassment and discrimination policies on behalf of their students and staff, the efforts end there without full implementation. One administrator who refused to participate in the study about policy adoption said, “All hell would break loose in this community if I responded to a survey about gays” (Rienzo et al., 2006, p. 96).

Enactment of Policy

Compared to other states in the United States, Massachusetts has taken important steps to expand rights to the LGBTQ population. In 1992, Massachusetts’s Governor William Weld created a Governor’s Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth. The recommendation of this commission led to the development of the first state-sponsored Safe Schools program for Gay and Lesbian Youth in 1993, for the purpose of enhancing support for and safety of LGBTQ youth (McFarland & Dupuis, 2001). The Massachusetts Department of Education provided resources to high schools that were implementing recommendations to make schools safe for lesbian and gay students. In 1993, the legislature also passed an amendment to the students’ rights law adding “sexual orientation” to the list of protected categories (Griffin & Ouellette, 2003). On the west coast, a public and private partnership of individuals and organizations formed the Safe Schools Coalition of Washington State in 1993 for the purpose of making schools safe for

“sexual minority youth” (Griffin & Ouellette, 2003). In 2012, two states (Massachusetts and Wisconsin) have non-discrimination laws designed to protect students based on sexual orientation, but not gender identity. Ten states (California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, New Jersey, Oregon, Vermont, Washington, and the District of Columbia), have enacted safe schools laws or policies prohibiting discrimination and/or harassment based on sexual orientation as well as gender identity. The remaining states have not passed nondiscrimination laws pertaining to LGBTQ students (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network [GLSEN], 2012).

With regard to discrimination and harassment in its public schools, California Education Code Section 2000 states:

It is the policy of the State of California to afford all persons in public schools...regardless of any basis that is contained in the prohibition of hate crimes set forth in subdivision (a) of Section 422.6 of the Penal Code, equal rights and opportunities in the educational institutions of the state. (cde.ca.gov, 2011)

The California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000 (AB 537) amended the California Education Code’s prohibition against discrimination and harassment of students and staff in schools to include sexual orientation and gender identity as legally protected characteristics. It states that all California public schools have a duty to protect students from discrimination and/or harassment on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Effectiveness of Policy

Does policy implementation establish a safe and supportive climate for LGBTQ students? As documented by the American Association of University Women (AAUW), policies alone do not appear to reduce harassment in schools (American Association of University Women, 2001). And despite the Massachusetts Safe Schools Program's success in improving the school climate for LGBT students and in increasing tolerance for diversity, the results of one empirical study indicates that more work needs to be done. A significant proportion of LGBT students attending Boston Public High Schools say that they experienced discrimination in the past year because someone thought they were gay, lesbian, or bisexual (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009).

Summary

Despite the overwhelming evidence that LGBT students are not afforded equal access to educational opportunities, schools are reluctant to implement initiatives that include them in the learning communities. When confronted with reports of homophobia, schools tend to be more concerned with the 'maintenance of the power structure than with creating a more socially just school' (Mills, 1996, p.319). Policy alone is not going to create a safer school environment. However, school administrators and educators report that legal mandates containing specific recommendations along with access to technical and financial resources to support individual school initiatives are essential to the successful implementation of Safe Schools strategies and to shaping a safe school environment.

Inclusive Curriculum

An LGBTQ inclusive curriculum is perhaps even more important than anti-bullying legislation as it could work to destroy homophobia, the cause of the problem, rather than simply punishing the homophobic offenders, which may not have lasting effects (Morillas & Gibbons, 2010). A report of the National Education Association Task Force on Sexual Orientation (2002) noted that, “including education about sexual orientation, sex roles, and gender identity in the curriculum will enable heterosexual youth to better understand and develop healthy attitudes towards gay and lesbian students and adults” (p. 3). Kevin Jennings, executive director of Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), posited that it’s not a question of teaching kids to approve of homosexuality, but about teaching young people to respect people who are not like them, to teach students of different backgrounds and different value systems how to coexist in a respectful and peaceful way (Loschert, 2005). However, the inclusion of gay-affirmative material in the high school is still perceived as too controversial and too explosive an issue.

Heterosexist Curriculum

Curriculum content is often heterosexual in nature and filled with heterosexist language that perpetuates myths and stereotypes that condemn homosexuality and deny youth access to positive adult lesbian and gay role models. When LGBTQ issues are excluded from the curriculum, misunderstandings are perpetrated and the ability of LGBTQ students to reach their fullest potential is diminished, often leaving LGBTQ

students on the sidelines of the educational institutions they attend (Koerner & Hulsebosch, 1996; Latt, 2007). One example of heterosexism in education is in the way in which problems in mathematics are usually worded. The question asked: “George earns \$2400/weekly as a supermarket manager. His wife, Martha, makes \$4800/month as a teacher. Who makes more money annually?” Superficially, this question seems quite reasonable and inclusive. However, if every question in a mathematics class assumes heterosexuality as this one, then the summative nature of the instruction inevitably becomes heterosexist (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2000).

Students appear to have limited access to positive or accurate information about homosexuality in schools. This is exemplified by a policy of the Readers’ Guide to Periodical Literature, a favorite index for high school students writing research papers. The guide has refused to index many gay and lesbian publications despite requests to do so by the Gay and Lesbian Task Force of the American Library Association (Kielwasser & Wolf, 1994). In sexual education curricula, students are often given the message that sex is primarily a reproductive act. When discussed, it is often only mentioned in the context of discussing AIDS, giving the message that homosexuality is unhealthy and dangerous (Leck, 1994; Savin-Williams, 1990).

Inclusive Curriculum

Murdock and Bolch (2005) found through their research survey that integrating LGB-specific issues into class curriculum or discussion can send messages of acceptance to often “invisible” youth. LaFontaine (1994) writes about the need to incorporate sexual

diversity themes in the curriculum; she argues that schools should provide their students with knowledge about sexual minorities. With existing curriculum, simply acknowledging the homosexuality of major contributors to their field, teachers can provide necessary role models for their students (Riddle, 1996). Examples of inclusive school curricula include the historical contributions of gay men and lesbians to increase the visibility and accomplishments of the population (Rofes, 1989). In English classes, books by gay authors, involving gay characters, or with gay situations are already widely used, and these characteristics should be emphasized and discussed, not ignored. The political aspect of the gay civil rights movement continues to be part of the headlines and could easily be incorporated into similar discussions in history or current events classes.

Elementary schools can also be more inclusive. Teaching about gay and lesbian issues in the elementary school does not mean discussing sex. Age-appropriate topics include treating everyone with kindness and respect and that families come in different forms are (McFarland & Dupuis, 2001). At this level, teachers can also be inclusive by addressing such topics as name-calling, families, and, in later grades, role models, civil rights, and social justice. Although many may feel that gay issues should not be addressed with younger students, it is important to remember that many children have gay or lesbian family members (including perhaps even their parents), and that some will grow up to become lesbian or gay themselves. The important point is that these issues can and should be incorporated into most subject areas and most grade levels in age-

appropriate ways, so that the silence is broken and we actively combat the negative images and messages that our students hear outside school (Riddle, 1996).

Bullying Curriculum at Work

Bennett (2008) conducted a quasi-experimental study to examine the usefulness of a new short-term anti-bullying intervention program, Take a Stand against Bullying (TASAB) (Sullivan & Bennett, 2001), in middle schools. Bennett measured changes in student participants' self-reported bullying and anxiety by both bullies and victims. Specifically, Bennett studied eighth-grade students from 12 intact classrooms in a Washington State middle-income suburban school who were randomly assigned to comparison and intervention groups. Bennett explained that the TASAB program uses a comprehensive approach to bullying prevention that includes all school staff, the school resource officer, students, and families. The curriculum provides an audio/visual presentation and uses a combination of PowerPoint presentations, discussions, assignments, activities, books, and games to teach students about bullying prevention and to improve school safety. The TASAB program empowers students to change bullying behaviors and create a safer school environment.

Bennett evaluated the efficacy of the TASAB program in her study and found that students reported decreases in bullying behaviors. Bennett stated that analysis of current school-based intervention programs revealed that whole school programs that include outlawing bullying, victim education programs, increased adult supervision, and the involvement of parents, bystanders, bullies and victims in the intervention process can

also help to decrease bully and victim behaviors (Gazelle & Ladd, 2002; Randle, 2002, as cited in Orobko, 2009). The broad-based TASAB program used in the Bennett study appeared to complement these findings. Bennett (2008) reported that her study supports the theory that a whole-school approach intervention program can foster a reduction in bullying behaviors; furthermore, Bennett's results suggested moderate to strong changes in student fears and behaviors

Summary

The effects of curricula and programs on LGBTQ students themselves have not been well studied. However, through the limited existing research, it has been realized that educators must educate our youth about issues revolving around homophobia and abandon the concept that by discussing homosexuality in a positive way, they will cause young people to grow up to be gay or lesbian. Until we get beyond thinking that, perhaps one of the saddest aspects of what our culture does to gay youth is that a period of life that could be filled with the discovery of one's own identity in a positive and growth-filled way becomes mired in shame, denial, and self-hatred (Rofes, 1989).

Staff and Professional Development

For schools to be safe environments for LGBTQ students, teachers play an important role. In studies that surveyed LGBTQ adolescents and solicited their recommendations and ideas about how to improve schools, a clear message emerged—students who experienced sexual minority status in high schools asked that teachers and other staff members speak out (Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997; Malinsky, 1997).

Research demonstrates that harassment proliferates in schools where staff do not actively monitor peer social interactions and provide guidance on ways to interact effectively (Pellegrini & Blanchford, 2000; Stein, 1995). Therefore, the most proactive and immediate strategy is to equip teachers with the skills they need to feel confident in determining what acts constitute bullying and in responding when they occur (American Association of University Women, 2004, as cited in Anagnostopoulos et al., 2009). This may require that schools have ongoing training in crisis intervention, violence prevention, and the issues and concerns of gay and lesbian students.

Barriers to Staff Support

In Varjas' (2009) study to identify strategies that adult advocates could implement to help improve school climate for LGBTQ youth, the author recommended that before staff attempt to become advocates, they need to know their own views on sexual orientations. Advisers recommended that school personnel increase the awareness of their own personal boundaries, biases, thoughts, and feelings about sexual orientation and to increase awareness of their personal comfort level related to LGBTQ issues. Many well-meaning people may have a desire to offer assistance to gay and lesbian students, but due to misunderstandings, they may do more harm than good (McFarland, 1998, as cited in McFarland, 2001). In some instances adults may allow bullying, especially of children from certain minority groups, as a way to satisfy their own aggressive impulses toward those children or groups (Mudrey & Mediana-Adams, 2006). Sears (1992) discovered that fewer than 20% of school counselors have received any training on

assisting gay and lesbian students, and many school employees have negative feelings towards gay and lesbian people. Some faculty and staff may have personal or religious views against homosexuality and may not be in favor of developing materials and programs on gay and lesbian youth (Rofes, 1989).

Staff Training

McFarland (2001) writes that staff development should stress professional and legal responsibilities rather than trying to change personal beliefs. Programs must emphasize that personal viewpoints should not allow a classroom to be so homophobic that gay and lesbian students cannot learn. In addition, training should also note that ethical obligations that attach to a teaching license could require educators to prevent discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Black and Underwood (1998) suggested that schools coordinate staff development strategies such as annual presentations about gay and lesbian youth for all teachers; utilize expert speakers and panels; facilitate discussions of homophobia and its effects on all students; and provide resources for staff who have a difficult time overcoming their homophobia and prejudice.

School counselors are in a unique position and ethically bound to support and advocate for sexual minority youth in order to create a safe and supportive school climate (American School Counselors Association, 2007; American School Counselor Association, 2004; Stone, 2003). Support activities may range from individual counseling for sexual minority youth to providing group counseling for victims of

homophobic bullying. Counselors are also in key positions to advocate for and develop the type of diversity training for school personnel regarding sexual minority youth.

University Programs

The education of teachers in issues of sexual minority youth could begin before they step into a classroom. Conoley (2008) writes that the preparation and socialization of teachers to have both the skills and values to protect all children from bullying depend in part on their teacher education programs. Teacher educators and school leadership university faculty could (and should) exert influence in this area by arming educators with relevant research findings and with dispositions and values that focus on the needs of all children. Colleges of education also educate principals and superintendents. These relationships provide a fertile ground for influencing school climates given the well-documented effects that principals have on setting standards for teacher and student behavior (Conoley, 2008).

Results from *Respect for All*

The Gay Lesbian Student Education Network (GLSEN) reported on the evaluation of a professional development program that the New York City Department of Education implemented in their secondary schools to increase staff competency at addressing name-calling, bullying and harassment on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, and creating safer school environments for LGBTQ students. According to the GLSEN, nine out of ten educators (92.2%) said the *Respect for All* initiative training had caused them to do something differently in their educational

practices (GLSEN.org, 2010). According to GLSEN executive director Eliza Byard, the report indicated that an in-depth training program specifically focused on ensuring LGBTQ student safety can successfully prepare school staff for their role in maintaining a welcoming and safe environment for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression (GLSEN.org, 2010). The report is based on a study evaluating the effectiveness of educator trainings that focus on reducing anti-LGBT bias and behavior in school—the first evaluation of its kind.

GLSEN surveyed 813 educators at three times -- before the training, six weeks after and six months after, and educators were also compared to those who had not completed the training. The report focused on the effects of the training on educators' knowledge, awareness, beliefs and behaviors. Six weeks after the trainings participants had increased:

- Knowledge of appropriate terms
- Access to LGBT-related resources
- Empathy for LGBT students
- Communication with students and staff about LGBT issues
- Engagement in activities to create safer schools for LGBT students (i.e., supporting Gay-Straight Alliances, including LGBT content in curriculum)
- Awareness of how their own practices might have been harmful to LGBT students
- Belief in the importance of intervening in anti-LGBT remarks

- Frequency of intervention in anti-LGBT name-calling, bullying, and harassment

All but two of the above areas – empathy for LGBT students and frequency of intervention – maintained a statistically significant increase six months after the training. These findings suggest that a single training experience may not be sufficient to sustain long-term change in terms of empathy or intervention. Providing additional support and incorporating opportunities for skill-building may be crucial for longer-term changes in these areas (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, 2010).

Summary

Only one study emerged in this review of literature to support the applied implementation of staff development in improving the school climate and experiences of LGBTQ youth, illustrating that more research is necessary. However, many studies reveal and support the notion that existence of supportive staff members is related to positive outcomes for LGBTQ youth (Griffin & Oullett, 2002; Munoz-Plaza, 2002; Rofes, 1989; McFarland & Martin, 2001; Murdock & Bolch, 2005; Anagnostopoulos, 2008). Teachers are huge role models in the lives of children. Rofes (1989) advised that teachers should “demonstrate to your students that you are accepting of all minorities and that a person’s character and behavior are what is important, not color, not religion, not sexual orientation” (p.106).

Student Support Groups

The most widely known approach to making schools safer and more supportive for LGBTQ students has been the establishment of school-based support groups (Goodenow, 2006; Michaelson, 2008; Uribe, 1994; Rofes, 1989; Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002; Griffin & Ouelett, 2002; Russell et al., 2009). One of the most visible manifestations of the contemporary movement for social justice within schools is in the emergence of the Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) across the United States (Herdt et al. 2007). These school-based clubs are partnerships between sexual minority and heterosexual students with the purposes of promoting sexual justice, supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) students within the educational setting. Over the course of the last ten years, the GSA movement has transformed from adult-initiated school clubs into youth-led organizations aimed at activism for sexual justice (Herdt, Russell, Sweat, & Marzullo, 2007). Most GSAs exist as an alternative social environment in the school, a place to “hang out” that is safe and supportive for a wide range of “alternative” students who do not fit into the dominant culture of the high school. Recent evidence suggests that GSAs do make a difference in school climates and for individual students (Lee, 2002). In schools that have GSAs, students and school personnel report more supportive climates for LGBTQ students; further, sexual minority students in schools that have GSAs report lower rates of victimization and suicide attempts (Szalacha, 2003; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006).

Support Groups at Work

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) began Project 10 in 1984 as a way of addressing the underserved needs of gay and lesbian students in the LAUSD. It is recognized as the first organized effort to provide systematic support and education for LGBTQ youth in American public schools. Although the program is carried out through workshops for teachers, counselors, and other support personnel, the heart of Project 10 is support groups for students, focusing on education, reduction of physical and verbal abuse, suicide prevention, and dissemination of accurate AIDS information (Uribe, 1994). Testimonials from students indicated that the support groups were valuable and empowering for them. Support was also measured in terms of improved attendance and academic performance, and improved relationships with primary family members (Uribe, 1994).

Russell et al. (2009) and Lee (2002) conducted qualitative investigations to explore the impact of belonging to GSAs, and both studies revealed that being members of the GSA had overwhelming positive impacts on students' lives. Although participants in the studies still experienced some of the hopelessness and despair common to gay youth, the support groups helped them to move beyond the depressing statistics and gain stronger identities—expressed in their educational lives as well as their personal and social lives. Lee's results supported previous research that Alliances positively impact academic performance; school, social, and family relationships; comfort level with sexual

orientation; development of strategies to handle assumptions of heterosexuality; sense of physical safety; increased perceived ability to contribute to society; and an enhanced sense of belonging to school community. Russell and colleagues (2009) reported that students found empowerment through their experiences that were contextually grounded in their broader goals of social and sexual justice, as well as social and institutional change. The activists spoke about three dimensions through which they experienced empowerment—empowerment through having and using knowledge, personal empowerment, and relational empowerment.

Summary

The programs and activities of GSAs are often the catalyst and vehicle for an infusion of new information and perspectives for students, educators, and administrators who are interested in making schools safe and productive places for all students (Griffin & Ouelette, 2002). It appears that one of the things that GSAs do best it to pique the interest and involvement of a range of students (including heterosexuals) in learning about cultural and social issues related to sexual orientation. In such discussions, issues important to all participants often intersect, for example, experiences of prejudice and understanding the perspective of someone perceived different.

Literature Summary

This literature review demonstrates that there is consensus among many researchers that in order to create safe schools for students who identify as LGBTQ there

must be systemic change. For effective systemic changes to be institutionalized, all members of the school organization must play a role in long-term efforts to meet the school-based needs of these students. If schools are to become truly hospitable to the interests and needs of LGBTQ youth, school leaders must employ multiple intervention strategies and engage the best efforts of students, parents, community members, and school personnel. These strategies must first include system development and implementation of a nondiscrimination/harassment policy that specifically addresses sexual orientation. Incorporated into the policy are support systems that include inclusive curricula being taught in the classroom to provide positive images of homosexuality as well as to combat homophobia before it starts; professional development for staff to equip them with the tools necessary to advocate for their gay students; and support groups for students such as GSAs or other gay-themed groups to create a safe space to socialize. These combined efforts are said to bring about positive systemic change in school districts to protect their LGBTQ students.

Although the literature repeatedly emphasizes that these are the systemic elements necessary for change, the literature does not present much evidence that change does occur when implemented. I found this to be a significant gap in the literature. My study attempts to fill some of the gap in the literature with regards to the effectiveness of systemic change. The findings enable me to evaluate and study the effects of the Safe

Schools work at San Leandro High School and how it has shaped the climate for LGBTQ students.

Another gap in the literature is that of student voice. Throughout the studies and literature that I have discovered, there is very little heard directly from students about the effects of these programs and policies in schools. I don't know if that is because it is difficult to obtain permission to speak with students, especially students from a "protected" group. However, I intend on featuring that group. That is the voice that I want to be heard throughout this study because that is who all of the work is for. The research provides an opportunity to hear that voice while researching. Also I have found that much of the literature reveals the negative side of being an LGBTQ student in high school, and not much literature that highlights the positives. I hope that my study will result in somewhat of a positive aspect of LGBTQ youth experiences in high school.

In San Leandro Unified School District we have begun to do what is necessary to create safe schools by adopting policy that has in it all the recommended program components. From that we expect that we will see positive outcomes in teacher practices and beliefs, student understanding of and behavior toward LGBTQ issues, and changes in how LGBTQ students view themselves. The ultimate goal is the creation of a safer environment and a culture of accepting and celebrating differences.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

To date there are few systematic evaluations of the effectiveness of Safe Schools policies and programs or of their implementation process (Griffin & Ouelett, 2002; Lee, 2002; Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; Szalacha, 2001). Are school districts' leaders just espousing what their programs are doing without really knowing? My research seeks to know. I sought this knowledge by evaluating the Safe Schools program at San Leandro High School, addressing the research question: How is the Safe Schools work at San Leandro High School shaping the climate for students who identify as LGBTQ? I looked into the policies, practices, and programs in place to determine how they have shaped the climate for LGBTQ students by probing into the following factors: LGBTQ students' relationships with teachers; relationships with peers; identity at school; and how safe and supported they feel. This was done through a mixed-methods design of quantitative as well as qualitative research.

Recognizing that all methods have limitations, researchers claim that biases inherent in any single method could neutralize or cancel the biases of other methods; thus the mixed-methods design emerged (Creswell, 2009). This approach to research involves philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches and the mixing of both approaches in a study. It is more than collecting and analyzing both kinds of data; it also involves the use of both approaches in tandem so that the overall strength

of a study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative alone (Creswell, 2009). In the concurrent mixed methods strategy, the researcher collects both forms of data at the same time and then integrates the information in the interpretation of the overall results (Creswell, 2009). I conducted this program evaluation using a mixed-methods strategy incorporating a school climate survey as well as a series of small focus groups with students who identify as LGBTQ; heterosexual-identified students; and staff members, which included teachers, counselors, support staff, and administrators.

Setting

San Leandro High School (SLHS) is an urban high school located in the City of San Leandro, which is situated 20 miles southeast of San Francisco. The school district has an enrollment of 8,725, with 12 schools (eight elementary schools, two middle schools, one comprehensive high school, with a separate 9th grade campus, and one continuation high school). At the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year, approximately 2,700 students were enrolled at San Leandro High School. The ethnic breakdown was approximately 35% Latino, 18% African American, 18% Asian, 14% Caucasian, 10% Filipino, and the remaining Pacific Islander or no response (slhs.net, 2011).

Although the population of SLHS is very diverse now, In 1971 San Leandro was named one of the most racist suburbs in America. It was so racist that its systematic pattern of housing discrimination prompted Congressional hearings (Copeland, 2006). That racist and homophobic behavior led to the 2002 lawsuit brought about by a teacher,

Karl Debro. With the ruling of the lawsuit, which Debro won, SLUSD began implementation of its Safe Schools work. As a result of the work to date SLUSD has board policy, inclusive curricula taught in grades K-5, 6 and 9, staff/professional development two to three times a year, and support groups for students – Gay Straight Alliance/Club Rainbow – in both middle and high school.

Participants

Purposive sampling, stratified random sampling and snowball sampling were utilized to select participants for this study.

Student survey (GLSEN Local School Climate survey)

The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students. Established in 1990, GLSEN envisions a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. GLSEN seeks to develop school climates where difference is valued for the positive contribution it makes to creating a more vibrant and diverse community (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network [GLSEN], 2012). The Local School Climate survey was developed to help advocate for better school policies and for educational events for students about LGBTQ issues. The survey asks how often students hear homophobic, racist and sexist remarks and where. It also determines whether students feel unsafe in school because of sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, or race. Stratified random sampling was

employed to collect survey data. I selected classes that every student on both campuses took at each grade level, so that I could select approximately twenty-five percent (25%) of the number of students from each grade.

In the ninth grade, English classes were selected because every ninth grader is enrolled in English, and the Safe Schools curriculum is taught in those classes, so there would be some level of connectedness of the survey to the Safe Schools instructional unit. These classes were chosen across academic levels as well, in order to gather information from students representing what I anticipated would be varied school experiences. Classes were selected from the lowest level of English to the highest for ninth graders: One (1) Resource (Special Education) class; one (1) Intensive English class; three (3) Companion English classes; four (4) College Prep classes; and three (3) Honors classes.

Tenth-grade through twelfth -grade students were selected through their Social Science classes because every tenth through twelfth grade student is enrolled in at least one. Tenth graders are enrolled in World History, eleventh graders are enrolled in US History, and twelfth graders are enrolled in US Government or Economics. Again, classes were chosen across academic levels as well: One (1) English Learner World History Class; four (4) College Prep World History classes; three (3) World History Honors classes; two (2) US History College Prep classes; four (4) US History Honors classes; three (3) US History Advanced Placement classes; one (1) Leadership class; one

(1) College Prep Economics class; two (2) American Government College Prep classes; two (2) American Government Honors classes; and two (2) Economics Honors classes.

Approximately two weeks before I wanted students to take the survey, an email was sent to the teachers of these classes explaining what the research was about and asked them if they would be willing to allow their students to participate, even though it would mean missing class time. All of them agreed that they would take part. I then provided them with the rotation schedule of when to take their students to the computer lab, as well as a short, written description of the survey to read to their students about why they were taking the survey. Over a two week time period between both the ninth grade campus and the main campus, the computer-based survey was taken by 912 students in grades 9-12. Eight hundred eighty-one (881) of those students reported their grade level, while eight hundred twenty-nine (829) of those students identified their sexual orientation. The percentages of how students identified themselves can be found in Table 1, Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4.

Table 1

Student Survey Participants by Grade Level

Grade	Percentage of participants
9 th graders	34%
10 th graders	23%
11 th graders	22%
12 th graders	21%

Table 2

Student Survey Participants by Gender

Gender	Percentage of participants
Male	48.2%
Female	50.6%
Transgender Male to Female	1.4%
Transgender Female to Male	1.5%

Table 3

Student Survey Participants by Race or Ethnicity

Race or Ethnicity	Percentage of participants
White or European American	19.2%
Black or African American	19.5%
Hispanic or Latino	32.3%
Asian or Pacific Islander	18.3%
Native American	3.6%
Other	8.1%

Table 4

Student Survey Participants by Sexual Orientation

Sexual Orientation	Percentage of Participants
LGBTQ	17%
Straight/Heterosexual	83%

Staff survey

A modified version of the student survey was sent to the staff through the school's email system. They were given one week to complete the survey. Seventy-nine (79) responses were collected out of the one hundred thirty-four (134) teachers, counselors, and administrators to whom it was sent. This yields a 59% response rate. The

percentages of how staff identified themselves can be found in Table 5, Table 6, Table 7, and Table 8.

Table 5

Staff Survey Participants by Number of Years Working at SLHS (N=79)

# Years working at SLHS	Percentage of Participants
0-5	52.3%
6-10	20.0%
11-15	18.5%
16-20	6.2%
21 or more	3.1%

Table 6

Staff Survey Participants by Gender (N=79)

Gender	Percentage of Participants
Male	24.6%
Female	75.4%
Transgender or Other	0

Table 7

Staff Survey Participants by Race or Ethnicity (N=79)

Race or Ethnicity	Percentage of Participants
White or European American	75.4%
Black or African American	13.8%
Hispanic or Latino	9.2%
Asian or Pacific Islander	9.2%
Native American	1.5%
Other	

Table 8

Staff Survey Participants by Sexual Orientation (N=79)

Sexual Orientation	Percentage of Participants
Gay	4.6%
Lesbian	4.6%
Bisexual	9.2%
Straight/Heterosexual	86.2%
Questioning	1.5%

Focus Groups

Straight students. Teachers were provided forms to give to students to complete and return if they were willing to participate in a focus group. The forms were used to recruit straight students to participate in a focus group to discuss “what San Leandro High School is like with regard to LGBTQ issues from a straight student’s perspective.”

Teachers told students about it; school- wide announcements were also made for a week for interested students to pick up a form in the Assistant Principal’s office. Students were asked to provide their name, grade and email address to be contacted at a later date with more detail about the focus group. They were then sent emails explaining what the focus group commitment would entail and were told that they would have to sign and have their parents sign a consent form. Snowball sampling was utilized to select this group. Because there were only a few respondents willing to participate, they were then asked if they knew of a friend who would also be willing to take part.

It became quite difficult communicating with these students to set up the focus group. I didn’t receive many return emails or they had other planned activities, so my

group was falling apart. As I shared that with colleagues, they suggested that I conduct a focus group with the Leadership classes. These students play important roles on the campus in student government, activities, athletics, etc. Their belief was that these students were involved in a myriad of campus happenings and had contact with a lot of different groups of students. They also said that I could conduct the focus group during their class time. This made it much more convenient. We met in the student center, and a couple of other students that were interested in participating (who were not in Leadership), joined in as well. Thus, this focus group was selected using convenience sampling. The demographics of this group can be found in Table 9.

Table 9

Demographic Information of Straight Student Focus Group

Student #	Grade	Gender	Race or Ethnicity
1	12	Female	Biracial-Mexican and Caucasian
2	9	Male	Filipino American
3	9	Male	Chinese American
4	9	Female	Mexican American
5	12	Female	African American
6	10	Female	Caucasian
7	12	Male	Mexican American
8	11	Female	Biracial-African American and Caucasian
9	12	Female	African American
10	12	Male	African American

Semi-structured interview questions:

1. How much knowledge did you have about the Safe Schools work before I explained it today?

2. How would you describe in general students' attitudes or behaviors toward students and staff that identify as LGBTQ?
3. What do you think has shaped or impacted students' views towards LGBTQ people or what has shaped or impacted your views?
4. How often do you hear homophobic language on campus and what places?
5. When its (homophobic language) said around teachers, how are they reacting?
6. How many of you have friends who are openly gay? Are you worried about anybody thinking that you're gay because you're friends with a gay person? Why or why not?
7. What do you remember about the Safe Schools curriculum that was taught?
8. What recommendations do you have for improving the school climate for students who identify as LGBTQ? What does a better climate look like, sound like, and feel like for students who are LGBTQ?
9. Does Safe Schools work really create Safe Schools?

Staff. Staff focus group members were selected through purposive sampling, based on the role that they play at San Leandro High School. I selected one (1) ninth grade English teacher who teaches the Safe Schools curriculum and one (1) Leadership teacher, both from the ninth grade campus; the Club Rainbow advisor from the main campus; (2) main campus teachers—Leadership teacher as well as another teacher who also works with Club Rainbow; two (2) assistant principals—both from the main campus; two (2) counselors, one from the main campus and one from the ninth grade campus; and

one (1) district office administrator. I sent these adults an email asking them if they would be willing to participate. They all agreed. I informed them of their rights and told them that I would contact them at a later date with more detail about the consent form, and when and where we would meet. The demographics of this group can be found in Table 10.

Table 10

Demographic Information of Staff Focus Group

Role	Yrs at SLHS	Gender	Race or Ethnicity
Club Rainbow advisor/Teacher #1	7	Female	Caucasian
English teacher #2	3	Female	Caucasian
Leadership/Teacher #3	8	Female	Caucasian
Club Rainbow assistant/Teacher #4	4	Female	Caucasian
Leadership/Teacher #5	3	Male	Mexican American
Assistant Principal #1	4	Male	African American
Assistant Principal #2	2.5	Female	Caucasian
Counselor #1	5	Female	African American
Counselor #2	12	Female	African American
Campus Supervisor #1	2	Female	African American
District Office Administrator #1	5	Transgender	Caucasian

Semi-structured interview questions

1. What do you know about the district's Safe Schools work?
2. How do you think that it (the work) is impacting the campus?
3. How do you think it (the work) has affected straight students' attitudes towards students who identify as LGBTQ?

4. How often do you hear homophobic remarks? Do you intervene? Have you seen other students intervene? Is the office getting referrals for bullying or harassment of LGBTQ students?
5. What comfort level do you think most of our staff has with regard to addressing these issues? What type of support do you think needs to be provided for staff?
6. What are your recommendations for improving the school for LGBTQ students?
7. Does Safe Schools work really create Safe Schools?

LGBTQ students. These focus group members were selected through purposive sampling. I asked for volunteers from Club Rainbow to participate in my focus group. I had attended several meetings prior to the day of the focus group to lay the foundation for the research that I was doing. Ms. Love, the Club Rainbow advisor, had also spoken to several students who said that they would participate. However, on club day Ms. Love told the students that were going to participate to go with me to another room and since I was competing with club time, I didn't have as many participants as I would have liked. Club Rainbow is very important to them, and they hate to miss the meetings. The demographics of the LGBTQ student focus group can be found in Table 11.

Table 11

Demographic Information of LGBTQ Student Focus Group

Grade	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Race or Ethnicity
9	Male	Pansexual #1	Filipino
9	Female	Bisexual #1	Caucasian
10	Female	Gay/Lesbian #1	Caucasian
11	Female	Bisexual #4	African American
12	Female	Queer #1	Caucasian
12	Female	Gender Queer #2	Caucasian
12	Female	Bisexual #3	African American
12	Female	Lesbian #2	African American
12	Female	Bisexual #4	African American

Semi-structured interview questions:

1. What is life like for you at SLHS being a student who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning or queer?
2. Which of you are out at school? Why or why not?
3. How would you describe students' attitudes toward people who are LGBTQ?
4. How often do you hear homophobic language on campus? Is it mostly 'no homo' and 'that's so gay'?
5. Do you hear the language used in conversation or has it been directed at someone as hate?
6. If teachers hear the language, do they address it?
7. What's your relationship with adults on campus—teachers, counselors, administrators, or other staff?

8. Do you feel supported by any adults? Do you feel supported by the school being who you are?
9. What role has Club Rainbow played in your school life?
10. Tell me what you remember about the Safe Schools curriculum.
11. What does a better school climate look like, sound like, feel like for students who identify as LGBTQ? Describe that school to me?
12. Do you have any recommendations for improving SLHS?
13. Does Safe Schools work really create Safe Schools?

Participants Rights

The approval of the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained prior to data collection. The consent/assent process was followed prior to data collection. Participants remained anonymous and were protected through the use of pseudonyms, as well as removing identifiable features. All data was destroyed at the completion of the study.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the term evaluate *to determine the significance, worth or condition of usually by careful appraisal and study* (Merriam-Webster dictionary, 2012). The data that was collected in this study provides information to do that – determine the significance and worth of the Safe Schools work in the San Leandro Unified School District, by appraising and studying its culminating effects for LGBTQ students. As described in Chapter 3, the data included survey responses as well as focus group interviews.

Before I began my study, I had already pre-identified several categories that I wanted to examine. Those categories were: LGBTQ students' relationships with peers; relationships with adults; their identity on campus; and whether or not they feel safe and supported at school. Because I knew that I had interest in those categories, my questions were developed to explore them. However, as I moved into the analysis process by reviewing the survey responses and reading and re-reading the focus group transcripts, which illustrated the relevance of those initial categories some other common themes began to emerge as well – the staff's feelings of discomfort when dealing with LGBTQ issues, and the difference in climates between the ninth-grade campus and the main campus of students in grades 10-12. Thus, the five common themes that have emerged from my data collection are: 1) peers and homophobic language; 2) positive relationships with adults; 3) climate of perceived acceptance and support of LGBTQ students; 4) 9th

grade campus vs main campus; and 5) staff discomfort with LGBTQ issues. All of these have direct implications for the types of recommendations I make.

In this chapter I will describe through survey results, but particularly through the language of the staff and students themselves, how these five themes are interrelated and how the interrelationship has impacted the climate at San Leandro High School. As a caveat, I want to point out that 17%, (138) of the students who took the survey identify as LGBTQ. However, not all of these students participate in Club Rainbow. So, the responses of the LGBTQ focus group may be skewed toward a sub population of that group. Additionally, 17% seems to be quite high when compared to GLSEN’s 2003 poll that reported about 5% of American high school students "identify as gay or lesbian"; however, the 17% figure is what students self-reported (GLSEN, 2004).

Peers and Homophobic Language

In this section we look at the prevalence of the use of homophobic language by students at SLHS. I will first show the GLSEN survey data results, then share staff and student perceptions concerning homophobic language including the terms, “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay”; how they handle the situation when its heard; what peers do or do not do; and what staff members do or do not do.

GLSEN results

It appears that LGBTQ students and straight students have similar experiences with regards to the frequency of homophobic remarks that occur at school—and this frequency is high among all students, with ‘frequently/often’ at 70%, (Table 12) for both

LGBTQ and straight students. Sixty-two percent (62%) of students, both LGBTQ and straight, report that they ‘frequently/often’ hear the terms “faggot,” “dyke,” or “queer.”

When it comes to peers intervening, LGBTQ students report greater confidence in fellow students intervening than straight students do: more than half of the straight students say that students ‘never’ intervene, while only 38% of LGBTQ students say ‘never.’ Also, the percent of LGBTQ students that claim that students ‘frequently/often’ intervene is twice that of straight students – though the percentages are low for both groups at that level as shown in Table 12.

Table 12

Student Responses About Hearing Homophobic Language, by Sexual Orientation LGBTQ (N=138) Straight (N=691)

Survey Questions	Frequently/Often		Sometimes/Rarely		Never	
	LGBTQ	Straight	LGBTQ	Straight	LGBTQ	Straight
1. How often do you hear the expression “That’s so gay” in school?	70%	70%	29%	27%	1%	3%
2. How often have you heard other homophobic remarks used in school such as “faggot,” “dyke,” “queer,” etc.	62%	62%	36%	36%	2%	2%
3. How often do you hear these homophobic remarks from other students?	61%	64%	37%	34%	2%	2%
7. When you hear homophobic remarks how often does another student intervene?	23%	11%	39%	35%	38%	54%

The GLSEN survey also asked students about staff use of and response to homophobic language; both LGBTQ and straight students report at 92% and 95% respectively that staff members ‘sometimes/rarely’ or ‘never’ use homophobic language. Although that is a very high percentage, 5-8% of the staff is reported as using it. LGBTQ students also report that only 33% of the time does staff ‘frequently/often’ intervene when homophobic remarks are made by their peers. Straight students report that staff ‘frequently/often’ intervenes only slightly more often, 41% of the time (Table 13).

Table 13

Student Responses About Staff Use of and Reaction to Homophobic Language, LGBTQ (N=138) Straight (N=691)

Survey Questions	Frequently/Often		Sometimes/Rarely		Never	
	LGBTQ	Straight	LGBTQ	Straight	LGBTQ	Straight
5. How often do you hear these homophobic remarks from teachers or school staff?	8%	5%	42%	32%	50%	63%
6. When homophobic remarks are made and a teacher or other school staff person is present, how often does the teacher or staff person intervene?	33%	41%	49%	45%	18%	14%

Focus Groups

Given that the survey results pointed to a prevalence of homophobic language on campus, I asked all three focus groups their perspectives on the topic.

Staff. Staff members were asked, **How often are you hearing homophobic remarks? Do you see other kids intervene? Have you had to intervene?** The campus supervisor said that she hears a lot of homophobic remarks, but “mostly between straight males talking to each other.” She said that she hasn’t had to deal with any kind of mediation or conflict because of someone being called gay, but she knows it’s being said. She said, “I think students are getting a little smarter, and they’re just doing it so that no staff member ever hears it, or...they’re making up all kind of different words now that, of course, mean the same thing that staff are not aware of.” Teacher 4 agreed and said she personally deals with homophobic language a lot, but said that it’s,

mostly the straight male students saying these things to each other, and I’ve been able to have a lot of conversations with these boys and not just, ‘stop,’ but actually pull them aside and talk to them about why these different things they are saying are inappropriate, why they are actually homophobic statements, how they make other people feel.

Administrator 1 said that he isn’t getting reports or referrals to the office regarding homophobic language. He said,

No, not at all actually. Nothing in terms of sexuality or anything like that or derogatory terms or words. I know last year, I was talked to about an incident...where there was some harassment and bullying...but since there has been really nothing...not in terms of sexuality or preference or anything like that.

Teacher 4 chimed back in and said that she believes that there are not many referrals because there are still some teachers that aren't addressing it or just say, 'Stop. Not appropriate.' Conversely, she suggested that perhaps teachers may be able to address it within the classroom without taking the situation to the referral level. The issue of teachers' comfort level of addressing homophobic language as well as other LGBTQ issues then became a huge topic of conversation. I will discuss that more in another section.

Straight students. The straight students were asked, **How often do you hear homophobic language on campus and what places?** Most of them say they hear it but not with a negative connotation. Student 1 said she hears, 'Oh that's gay.' I mean they're not saying it like kind of calling someone like a bad name, like they're just using it as another word." Student 8 said that she hears it more with straight people. "Like they're saying it to each other...like they won't be talking about gay people but they're using it with another straight person, but it's not really a putdown. It's just like they've taken it as a part of their normal dialogue." Student 7 said she agreed as well, "Our culture today has taken the word 'gay' and changed it to mean...it used to mean like, it used to stand for like a homophobic person...but today in our culture they use it as like 'oh, that's so gay. That's so uncool or like lame.'" Student 10 added, "...we've taken it from a negative meaning into a whole different meaning...like the '*N word*'...but if you ask any young people it's not used in a bad way. It's used to say, 'what's up' to your friend."

A few did say, however, that they did feel like sometimes the term has been said in a negative way, even if it wasn't being directed toward anyone in particular. Student 10 said that one day a campus supervisor stepped in when a student was calling the music being played on the quad, "*faggot music*." Student 10 said that he went and told the campus supervisor because he got offended:

I honestly wanted to fight the kid because I found it really offensive of how...he had to try and put down someone else. Because I know if there was other kids around it that really were gay they would have...they probably wouldn't have done anything because it's hard for them to stand up for themselves and I just feel like if they can't defend themselves then someone else has to step in there for them and try and help them out, because if you don't then who will?

The students said that they primarily heard the language in the hallways during passing periods or even on the field or court during athletics, but some reported it being said in the classroom as well. They said that most teachers get offended. Student 5 said that she's actually been sent out for saying it... "So I think teachers are trying to kind of make it a safe place for everybody you know." Students 1 and 9 said that their teachers told offending students that it was inappropriate or sent them out of class. However, Student 8 said that when she's heard phrases like "*that's so gay*" or "*faggot*," "some teachers act like they don't hear it so they just ignore it and they don't try to correct the student in what they're saying."

LGBTQ students. How often do you hear homophobic language on campus?

Most of the LGBTQ students said that they hear “*no homo*” or “*that’s so gay*” often.

They said that the words “*fag*” or “*faggot*” are used as well. Gender Queer 1 said that she hears it all the time “and people don’t think that it’s insulting when it is.” Bisexual 2 said that when you try to tell people not to say that, they sometimes get defensive.

Bisexual 4 said that she sees people use it in everyday language between friends. She said, “They don’t realize that it’s a bad thing so that doesn’t bother me as much.”

However, she said that on National Coming Out Day, Club Rainbow was attempting to get people to sign their banner, and “while most people were cool with it, some were rude and said ‘I don’t want to be associated with faggots’ and really hateful things that, I mean like that’s not cool.” Lesbian 2 said that some students will use the Spanish term, “*marica*,” which is like the Spanish equivalent for *faggot*. “Some of the people that say these things are my friends and some people are just people I hear that are saying these things in Spanish.”

Queer 2 had quite a different perspective from the other students,

Otherwise known as Ms. Rose Colored Glasses, um, it’s better here, um, the fact that “*that’s so gay*” and “*no homo*” are the worst thing here is a really great thing...but if you’ve been somewhere else where it’s not like that, where you don’t have an accepting community, it’s like this is great if ‘that’s so gay’ is the worst thing...it’s such a fixable problem um, it’s kind of awesome.

Bisexual 3 said that a lot of people in her classes were saying something on a daily basis, but now they're catching themselves because they say,

Bisexual 3 is about to say 'stop that' or whatever so 'watch what you say', so they're catching themselves now, but even if I'm not around, they still shouldn't be saying it or directing it toward people. I have used 'oh that's gay' myself, but not in a bad way. I use it toward something happy, like I call people like 'penis' or 'vaginas.' Like, you're being such a vagina!

I asked, **Do you just hear people using it in conversation, or have you seen someone directing it at someone else or toward you for hate?** Pansexual 1 said that he not only hears hateful language, he sees it as well. He then demonstrated a sign with his fingers which he said was an "f" for "*faggot*." Gender Queer 1 then said she's never had it said to her at SLHS, but in middle school. She said there, "they called me so many names, it was terrible...nothing directed harshly towards me at high school." Bisexual 2 added that nothing had been said to her face, but "it's very apparent." She said,

this is just the other day I was telling, um, these guys across from me were talking about stuff and I was like, he was like 'oh, I didn't know you were bisexual' and I was like 'yeah' and this girl who sits like way over in the corner, I could hear her with my supersonic bat hearing, um, she was like 'oh did you hear that, that girl up there's a dyke?' and I was like, 'amazing.'

Although the majority of the focus group participants say that they have never been personally verbally harassed, GLSEN survey results tell something quite different as seen

in the table below (Table 14). The results clearly show that over 50% of LGBTQ students have been verbally harassed at least once in the past year.

Table 14

*Student Responses of Being Verbally Harassed at School
LGBTQ (N=138) Straight (N=829)*

In the past year, how often have you been verbally harassed at our school because of...	Frequently/Often		Sometimes/Rarely		Never	
	LGBTQ	Straight	LGBTQ	Straight	LGBTQ	Straight
11. Sexual orientation?	27%	5%	27%	14%	46%	81%
12. Gender expression?	23%	4%	23%	13%	54%	83%

LGBTQ students were then asked, **if teachers hear the language do most of them address it** Bisexual 3 said, “No, not mine. Some of them laugh and it gets really aggravating.” Bisexual 1 added that with some, “it kind of just goes over their head, they don’t even pay attention to it, but they hear everything else so...”

Bisexual 2 said,

A lot of teachers...they’re just like ‘hey, stop it, don’t say that’...then they’re just like ‘yeah, get out.’ I’ve had a couple teachers who when they hear the language will pull the student aside—which I find to be really helpful—and say ‘this is not okay because...’ I think that helps a lot because then they know not to say it, not only because the teacher told you not to say it but because you could be hurting someone or you could...or because you’re being offensive.

Summary

Homophobic language does appear to be quite prevalent on the campus of SLHS. Quite interestingly, though, is that staff and the majority of the students' perceptions are that most of the language is being used between straight male to straight male; that it's not being used in an attempt to personally offend or harm anyone; and that it has just become a part of normative culture and not primarily viewed as homophobic in nature. Although all of the LGBTQ students said that they hear homophobic language often and whether they believe its offensive or not, they do agree that they are grateful when teachers intervene and use it as a teachable moment to educate their classmates.

Numerous studies have shown that LGBTQ adolescents who experienced sexual minority status in high schools asked that teachers and other staff members be supportive. It is quite obvious through these conversations that students at SLHS, both gay and straight, are looking for adults whom they can trust and feel supported by, whether it be through intervening when inappropriate things are said or done, or just by being someone that they can connect with.

Relationships with Adults

To explore the relationships between staff members at SLHS and LGBTQ students, this section looks at several factors. It begins with staff members' discussion of their relationships with LGBTQ students and the impact those relationships have had on their lives. Straight students talk about their relationships with their 'out' teachers. And finally, LGBTQ students reveal the importance of having an adult on campus that they

can trust. LGBTQ students also tell of the impact that Club Rainbow and its advisor have played in their high school lives.

Focus Groups

Staff. Although I asked students about their relationships with adults on campus, I didn't ask the staff about their relationships with LGBTQ students; however, several responses to other questions addressed this topic. Teacher 4, who is openly bisexual, stated that she has built trusting relationships with students over the years. She said she has been told by students that they feel support from 'out' adults on campus, and see them as "role models that they can look up to." She went on to say that students have said, "Oh, we have positive role models. We have, you know, our lesbian teacher who we can go talk to or we have this other teacher that told us about his boyfriend."

Counselor 2 said that, in prior years, she's worked with students who trusted her enough to 'come out' to her and share those feelings with her, even when they were afraid to tell their friends and families.

Counselor 1 then shared details regarding her relationship with a 9th grade transgendered student and how it made her a better person:

It was really difficult for me in the beginning not because she was transgender, it was just because, just I know that he's a he, but I know that she prefers to be called a she, and so I had to just switch my thinking because it was always instant to say 'he' instead of 'she' even though she looked like a she.

She said that didn't prevent her from building a relationship though:

We've had numerous discussions about not her being transgender but just her accepting, just who, just really accepting herself with just, because she has some, you know, some difficulties just being out...it's just been ...a really interesting experience for me...but she's comfortable with me, and you know we've had wonderful conversations about her outside life, not just the school. And I asked her, I'm like, okay, I was like, 'ok, do you feel safe in the school?' And she said, 'yes.' So I felt good about that.

District Administrator 1 said that since he's been involved with Club Rainbow, he's gotten to know the kids really well. He talked about how a lunch-time club with only about 10 kids has grown closer to 60 that show up for an after school club. He spoke highly of the Club Rainbow Advisor, who he describes as "an amazing support to those students." Administrator 2 chimed in too about the Club Rainbow advisor's and another teacher's relationship with students when she talked about how they "...incorporate their life experience into their lesson...in a way that is effective and appropriate... and make it just part of life and exposure to 150 students every year that may have not had that exposure...."

Straight Students. The straight students spoke of their relationships with "out" teachers. They said that their teacher's sexual orientation doesn't affect how they feel about them or how they teach. Student 9 talked about his teacher who is homosexual and said their relationship is "great." He said, "She's really close to me and everything. I feel like it doesn't affect the learning process or anything," and then added that he doesn't

see students treating them any different. Student 3 said that her experience was similar to Student 9 where her teacher was openly lesbian and they had a really good friendship. She said “all my other classmates accepted her for who she was. It made no difference if she was lesbian or not.”

LGBTQ Students. It was important for me to know whether or not the LGBTQ students felt that they had a supportive relationship with an adult on campus. I asked, **What’s your relationship with adults on campus – teachers, counselors, administrators? Do you feel supported?** Bisexual 4 started by saying,

For me personally, I have had a really great relationship with my teachers, especially my teachers who are openly gay, like Ms. Love or my French teacher, because they know what it’s like to be discriminated because you’re LGBTQ. They are very supportive and they’ve always told me—and all of our classmates—that if anything negative ever happens that they can come...we can go to them for support or help or anything like that, so that’s good.

Gender Queer 1 said that she hasn’t had any issues with teachers at the school, because being in an academy, she’s always had the same teachers. She said, “The only thing that changes is my math teacher and you usually don’t talk to your math teacher the same way.”

Bisexual 4 apparently has had a different experience. She said,

Sometimes I wonder why the teachers here even became teachers...if you’re going into that field, you need to know that obviously there are going to be

students who don't agree with your religious beliefs, there's going to be students who are gay, who are, you know, LGBTQ and there's gonna be students...all kinds of people exist. So if you're a teacher you need to be open...and you can't force your personal beliefs onto these students. That's just not right.

Lesbian 2 agreed. She added,

I think she's [Bisexual 4] completely right because some teachers feel like okay, I'm here for the paycheck or that I'm here to teach them this...Just like people being a different race is gonna be at this school, there are also gonna be some LGBTQ students here. They need to understand that you can't change that, you cannot force them to be straight; get over it.

Club Rainbow. The students' relationships with the Club Rainbow advisor, was the most supportive one they spoke of. It is apparent that she has built strong, supportive relationships with these students, and they trust her immensely. So I asked the students to **tell me about Ms. Love and Club Rainbow.** Bisexual 3 said "I was in Ms. Love's class and that's when I started coming (to Club Rainbow) faithfully because Ms. Love's awesome and Club Rainbow is a great open space and like you could just be as gay as you want, like it's great. And then Ms. Love, oh my God, is great!" Bisexual 2 said that being with Ms. Love and Club Rainbow has

done a lot for me personally because I was...feeling bad about myself because I had some friends who weren't okay with like people who were, you know, lesbian and gay...then one of my friends who I met in another class when I came here

was like ‘oh yeah, you should go to Club Rainbow’ you know, that kind of thing and so we went together and when I got here like...it’s like I walked to Ms. Love’s classroom and then I never left. I feel like I never left.

Gender Queer 1 said that Club Rainbow is an open space that makes her feel that she can “be herself...and I can change, even if it’s just this school, I can change something. Like it makes me feel like I have an important part in the school with those issues.” Bisexual 4 said that when she heard about Club Rainbow during her freshman year, she thought, “Wow...they care, right?” She also alluded to the same empowerment as Gender Queer 1 when she said, “...we have events at the school, I feel like it makes people more aware of the fact, you know, there are a lot of LGBTQ students here and they are people just like the straight kids. You need to treat them with respect regardless of who they love.” Lesbian 2, who moved from Mexico, said that Club Rainbow has been very good for her because it helped her to come out of the closet. She added that it was very difficult for her before, but now she can “share a lot of things with others that are like me.” Finally Lesbian 1 said, “Yes, I feel that Club Rainbow is like...one of the only good things about this school because it’s like you get to express yourself and learn like a lot of stuff about people and everything. I love it because like I never had that at the other schools I went to.”

Summary

It appears as if relationships between LGBTQ students and staff members are largely limited to their connections with the Club Rainbow advisor. However, LGBTQ

students do seem to seek out other staff members who are ‘out’ as role models and as individuals they can identify with and trust. Straight students seem open to relationships with their ‘out’ teachers and their perception is that their other classmates feel the same. They said that a teacher’s sexual orientation does not affect what and how they are teaching. Through interactions with LGBTQ students, it seems that some staff members are being impacted themselves, becoming aware of their own biases and working through them. The Club Rainbow advisor, Ms. Love, seems to be making the most positive impact on the lives of these students through the great work she does with Club Rainbow and the trusting relationships she has built with students.

Climate of Perceived Acceptance and Support

School climate is shaped by what goes on at school—the prevailing attitudes, mood and atmosphere. It has already been discovered that homophobic language is quite prevalent at SLHS and that relationships between LGBTQ students and adults are limited. This section will explore how the school climate has been impacted by such factors. I will first discuss the GLSEN survey results regarding the school climate, and I will then share the three focus groups’ perceptions of what the climate feels like for them with regard to LGBTQ issues.

GLSEN results

At SLHS, 30% of the 138 LGBTQ students who responded to the GLSEN survey feel that the climate is unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation; as compared nationally to the GLSEN data where over 61% of the more than 7,200 students surveyed

reported that they felt unsafe (GLSEN, 2009). Clearly, this is not an issue for straight students, with only 3% of them at SLHS reporting feeling unsafe. In addition to that, twenty percent (20%) of LGBTQ students feel unsafe because of how they express their gender, compared to 7% of straight students (Table 15).

Table 15

*Student Responses to Feeling Unsafe at School, LGBTQ (N=138)
Straight (N=691)*

Survey Question	LGBTQ		Straight	
	YES	NO	YES	NO
8. Do you feel unsafe at school because of your sexual orientation?	30%	70%	3%	97%
10. Do you feel unsafe at school because of how you express your gender?	20%	80%	7%	93%

Focus Groups

Although the survey results show that a significant portion of the LGBTQ population feels unsafe, students who self-selected to participate in the LGBTQ focus group told a different story. Each group—staff, straight students, as well as LGBTQ students, voiced a common belief that the SLHS campus is an accepting and supportive environment for students who identify as LGBTQ. I gathered this information through asking the question, **How do you think it's (Safe Schools work) impacting the campus climate?**

Staff. An administrator who primarily handles discipline responded, As far as school climate, I would say that, you know, students feel a bit safer than I think it was when I first started here...students that are, you know, that have different sexual preferences...I think they feel...to a certain extent the school environment is a little bit safer.

He acknowledged that when he arrived four years ago there were some incidents of harassment toward LGBTQ students. However, he said that now “homosexual, or what have you, and students that are straight...interact with no problem ...when I started here that wasn’t really the case.” I wanted to know if he was receiving a lot of discipline referrals for bullying or harassment around the issue. He said actually he hadn’t”...not in terms of sexuality or preference or anything like that.” I wanted to know if counselors had students reporting problems to them instead of perhaps going to the office. Counselor 2 said that she hadn’t. She said that students who come to her with issues regarding sexuality primarily deal with being afraid to come out or feeling guilty about their feelings, but not about harassment or bullying. The leadership teacher/activities director said:

Something’s got to be working because...I’m on the quad a lot, and we have a lot of students here that are transgender and gay, and they’re out on the quad and they get along. I recall two years ago there were two gentlemen, and people loved them and they would dance. And everyone would get with them and there was no ridicule at all. And I remember standing there going, ‘This is unbelievable!’

Um...I also see it like in the hallways. There are definitely some gentlemen in our school who, you know, wear makeup and dress like a young lady, and I've never heard anyone say anything negative to them at all. And I think that says a lot about our school and how diverse we are.

A district office administrator who is openly transgendered recalled a student who graduated last year who uses a traditionally male name but very much female identified. He spoke of that student's full page yearbook spread and how he accepted his scholarship award in "extremely intense high heels." He then shared about being invited to tell his story to some classes,

I don't think that I could go do that [tell his story of being a transgender person] in any high school in the Bay Area even, so for me that says a lot about, you know, the community that's here and the Safe Schools work...as a differently gendered person can go and talk to students and be respected and like you know actually a class that has a lot of football players in it...hear my story and be respectful and, you know, cool, and act like more respectful than adult audiences I've spoken with over years of being out about my story.

The Club Rainbow advisor then shared that she thinks one of the big changes has been the media. She said, "...We see so many more gay characters and, um, I think that's really helped in part." She went on to recall a rough time at SLHS three years ago when Proposition 8, the gay marriage law, was on the ballot. "Yeah, that was a rough year for every gay person here. That was ...so hard and there were a group of students

who were so vocal and so, and I think not having that political issue has really been good for our climate.” The Leadership teacher interjected that she had just recently had a discussion about Proposition 8 in her government class. She said that there are some kids who have some strong feelings about it (gay marriage)... “um, and that scared me a lot, because I knew I had to direct my conversation the other way...and talk about respect and all of that. So I think it (the tone of the conversation) improved a lot.”

Straight Students. When asked to **Describe in general students’ attitudes or behaviors toward students who identify as LGBTQ**, student 9 said that he felt that there are good reactions toward it. Student 7 agreed when he said that there is really no hate. He said, “I mean they might not approve of it, but they let them be because that’s fair.” Student 1 said that she feels like

Everyone’s pretty accepting and especially at a high school age; people understand it now. I agree that our school is pretty open with each other. Like you can just come out and say what you have to say...even if it has to do with your sexual orientation. Just whatever; it is like people get along here.

Student 6 added that she feels that the diversity of the high school contributes to the climate of acceptance. Student 10 said that when he visits other schools, “I see more like hate towards it...so I feel like we are doing really well in what we’re doing to accept them.”

To determine whether or not it was some aspect of the Safe Schools work that had influenced the behavior, attitudes and opinions that were being reported, I asked the

students, **What do you think has shaped or impacted students' views or your views towards LGBTQ people?** Students 8, 9, and 10 all spoke about getting to know the person and realizing there's nothing different about them. They did not mention anything about school programs or practices.

LGBTQ students. To assess the climate for LGBTQ students, I wanted to know how they felt at school, because that is the reason for the study. So I asked the question, **What is life like for you at SLHS being a student who identifies as LGBTQ?**

Bisexual 3 said that when she first got to SLHS, she was kind of scared to come out. But once she met a lot of other LGBTQ students, she said, "it's kind of good so, yeah, it's good." Bisexual 2 said that it's been pretty okay for her too. Pansexual 1 added that SLHS has been more accepting than most places he's been and overall "it's a good experience." Queer 2, who just recently moved to San Leandro from New York, said,

The high school is amazing! I was not 'out' in New York because I didn't feel safe being 'out.' I knew a lot of students who were harassed because of it. It's a really safe place here. I'm 'out,' I don't care, I have supportive teachers, nobody even looks at me funny or even surprised which might be because of how I look.

But, um, about my sexuality, like no one cares and it's a really good feeling.

When I asked how many of them were 'out,' 7 out of 9 students raised their hands. The two students that were not 'out' felt that information should be shared only on a need to know basis and dependent upon trust.

I then asked, **How would you describe students' attitudes toward people that identify as LGBTQ?** Pansexual (the only male) responded "mean, rude, disrespectful." He said that "...you get weird looks; you get those side conversations that you know they're talking about you in a hateful mean way and whatnot." This was quite contrary to his initial response of this being an "overall good experience" for him. Bisexual 3 said that she felt during 9th through 12th it's been good. She said,

It's been good, at least all my friends, well I lost some friends before when I first came out but we came back because they found out that it was normal, at least for SLHS. Some people still have that phobia and are rude and disrespectful...on the freshman campus...but they didn't understand that once you get into 'real high school' [referring to the main campus of 10-12 grade students)] most or all of us are gay or bi or transgender. It's mostly gay people here so they need to understand that.

Bisexual 4 said that she too had been at SLHS since her freshman year and her experience "has been actually surprisingly really great." She as well as Gender Queer 2 said that they surrounded themselves with really trustworthy, open minded people who have been their support group. Queer 2 said that she has never felt unaccepted for her sexuality from anyone, but always "felt comfortable, welcomed, and loved."

Summary

So although GLSEN results show that many LGBTQ students feel that the school climate is an unsafe place, staff, straight students, as well as LGBTQ students expressed

that the SLHS campus is very accepting and supportive for them to be who they are. An LGBTQ student compared it to other places such as New York, while a straight student compared it to other high schools in the area; and they both believe that whatever is being done at SLHS is definitely impacting the school climate and making the difference.

Although the school climate at SLHS has been described as a place where one student said she felt “comfortable, welcomed and loved,” the ninth -grade campus seems to feel quite different. Another theme that came through from staff and students during interviews was the distinct difference between the ninth- grade campus and the main campus. I will discuss the varying viewpoints about the two in the next section.

Ninth Grade Campus vs. Main Campus

In the 2010-2011 school year, San Leandro opened a ninth-grade campus in a new building that was a block away from what had traditionally been SLHS. Now SLHS refers to itself as *one high school with two campuses*. With the hub of the Safe Schools support system being on the main campus—Club Rainbow and its activities, a significant number of “out” teachers, established existence of policies, programs, and practices—the ninth-grade campus seemed left to fend for itself with regard to LGBTQ issues. The one component of the Safe Schools work that did exist on the campus is the Safe Schools curriculum, because it is and always has been taught through ninth-grade English classes.

This section will show the survey data results with regard to how students feel about the climate at the ninth- grade only campus versus the main campus. I will then report the focus groups responses which discuss staff and students’ varying experiences

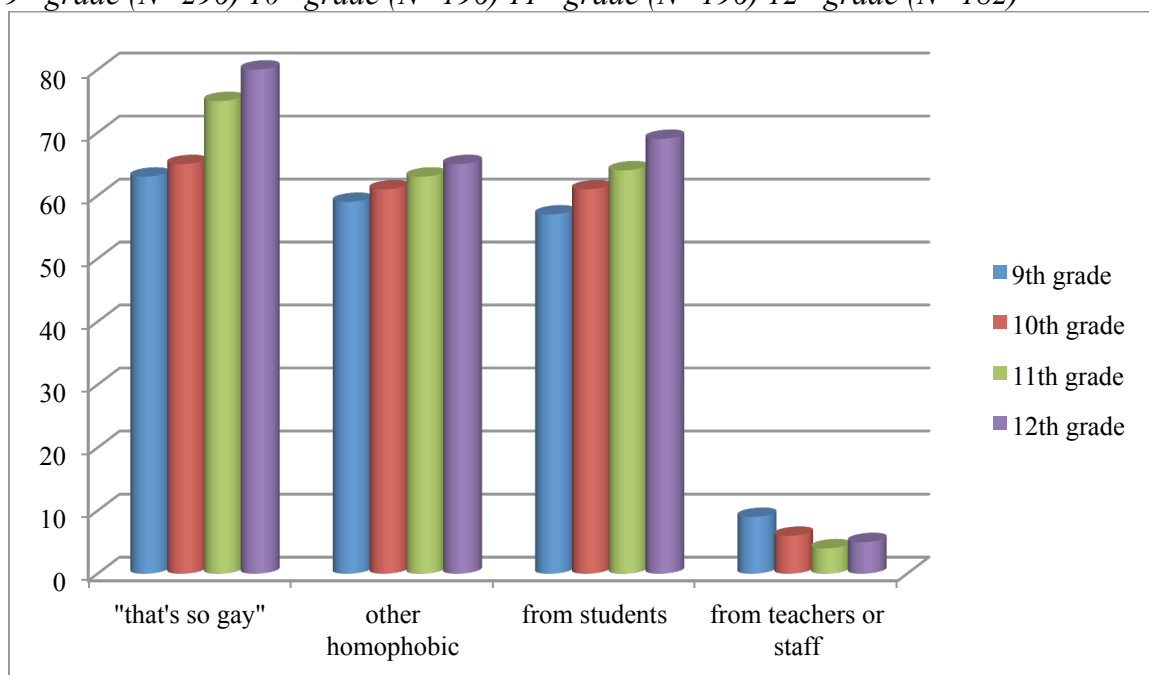
between the two separate sites. Additionally I will address the Safe Schools curriculum from the viewpoint of a teacher who teaches it and with students that have been taught it.

GLSEN results

The survey data is quite interesting to look at when disaggregated by grade. The percentage of respondents that said they hear the terms, “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay” in school increases from 9th grade through 12th. In fact all of the homophobic remarks percentages increase in the ‘frequently/often’ category from 9th grade up through 12th grade. Conversely, the percentage of homophobic remarks heard by students that were made by staff decreases after 9th grade as shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1

Student Responses About hearing Homophobic Language ‘Frequently/Often’, by Grade
 9th grade (N=296) 10th grade (N=196) 11th grade (N=196) 12th grade (N=182)



Ninth -grade students report that they hear homophobic remarks less frequently than students on the main campus, but they report being verbally harassed at a slightly higher percentage as shown in Table 16.

Table 16

Student Responses of “YES” about Verbal Harassment Due to Sexual Orientation or Gender Expression. 9th grade (N=296) 10th grade (N=196) 11th grade (N=196) 12th grade (N=182)

	9th grade		10th grade		11th grade		12th grade	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Have you ever been verbally harassed at school because of...								
11. your sexual orientation?	11%	89%	6%	94%	7%	93%	8%	92%
12. how you express your gender?	8%	92%	7%	93%	9%	91%	5%	95%

This data coincides with more ninth graders feeling slightly more unsafe at school than upperclassmen due to sexual orientation as well as gender expression (Table 17).

Table 17

Percentage of Student Responses of “YES” to Feeling Unsafe at School Due to Sexual Orientation or Gender Expression. 9th grade (N=296) 10th grade (N=196) 11th grade (N=196) 12th grade (N=182)

Do you feel unsafe at school due to sexual orientation?	% of LGBTQ students who responded “YES”
9 th grade	10%
10 th grade	6%
11 th grade	5%
12 th grade	6%

The ninth- grade campus, in its one year of existence, has not had the opportunity to establish its own culture and climate, not only with respect to LGBTQ issues, but just in defining what it is about. So at this point, much of what students brought to that campus –attitudes, beliefs, perceptions--would be the result of the Safe Schools work through eighth grade. Additionally, the culture would be influenced by the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of the staff as well.

Focus Groups

Staff. I asked the staff, **How do you think that it’s (Safe Schools work) impacting the campus? Do you think it’s (Safe Schools work) affected straight students’ attitudes towards students who identify as LGBTQ?** The Club Rainbow advisor, who works only on the main campus, brought the Club Rainbow students to the ninth-grade campus on club day this year. She spoke of her experience on the ninth-grade campus this year, “We had a lot of trouble on the ninth-grade campus for children feeling bullied and feeling name called...there was a lot of reports of bad language and

hate language.” However Teacher 5, who only works on the ninth- grade campus, said that she’s seen a shift on that campus. She said this year she feels like there are a good handful of kids who are just out there. She said, “You know, they’re out, and they’re, and they’re pissed. They’re like ‘don’t talk to me that way’ and they’re really like outspoken and they are having a hard time...but they’re out, I mean, like that’s already---that’s a step forward to me.” She also said that she feels that the atmosphere feels safer for them to do that. She said, “Maybe it’s also speaking to the Safe Schools work and the, the groups at the middle schools too....I think it’s really different already.”

Teacher 2 who also works only on the ninth -grade campus agreed and said that he thinks it’s different too. He said that last year intolerance was a bit more visible:

But I think this year it’s been the issue of being more accepted, accepted and we have our little clique during lunch that gathers together and eat together and guys and girls and everyone’s coming together and I think a lot of it has also been the fact that some teachers, when they do in fact hear a put down or someone being called a name, they do step in, and they put an end to it....

Straight Students. As the students were talking about the use of homophobic language on campus, student 6, who is a 10th grader said that when she was at the ninth-grade campus last year she did hear the slang, “*that’s so gay*” more, “but I feel like it was because of the community at the big campus. Like you see the older kids and they really don’t say it. You see they’re really mature about it. It’s a really loving environment.”

Student 6 who seemed to have the strongest opinion on how to improve 9th grade, since she was the only student present who had attended school on both campuses, said that

Coming from the perspective of both, I feel like if we have some of the upperclassmen come to the freshman campus and participate in games or show that...we are family. We do accept everybody. It's not just the Club Rainbow that sticks together, like everybody accepts them. All the upperclassmen are doing it, like it's not weird to do.

LGBTQ students. The LGBTQ students didn't really discuss the ninth-grade campus, perhaps because Pansexual 1 was the only student in the group that had spent much time on that campus. He is presently a ninth grader. Although he initially described SLHS as "...more accepting than, um, most places I've been but overall it's a good experience," when this question was asked he describe students' attitudes toward LGBTQ students as "*mean*," "*rude*," and "*disrespectful*." He said, "Uh, when not being the norm, expressing yourself as in knowing that you're not straight, so you act differently, because it's you, but you get weird looks, you get those side conversations that you know they're talking about you in a hateful mean way and what not." Obviously this has been his experience on the ninth-grade campus.

Safe Schools curriculum

As mentioned earlier, much of what students brought to the ninth-grade campus – attitudes, beliefs, perceptions – would be influenced by the Safe Schools work through eighth grade. The Safe Schools curriculum, which is supposed to be taught throughout

elementary school; sixth grade in the middle school; and then finally in ninth grade at the high school, should play a great role in this. These lessons are intended to teach about kindness and respect for all people. However when the issue of the curriculum came up, staff and students had some very strong opinions regarding it.

Teacher 5 who teaches English on the ninth grade campus and teaches the curriculum said that last year the full curriculum was lost and then they had to scramble to create another one, but she didn't think what was created was very effective. She said that this year they wanted to begin the year with it; but because the students didn't quite know each other yet, they were shy and not ready to open up. However, she said that the original curriculum was hard (teaching it) because a lot of students reacted to it. She said, "I think maybe some of it wasn't like quite hitting the mark where we wanted it to be. I do think some teachers don't want to talk about it because it really takes skill to deal with, you know, the kids' feelings around it." She then added,

I wonder, too, if like other teachers should offer to teach it or should be asked to teach it rather than—it's not that I as an English teacher mind being asked to teach it at all. I'm happy to do it...but I think some teachers really have a hard time with those discussions, so I think...they would be a lot more successful with teachers who are skilled at that and who would want, you know, and who are ready to have those discussions with kids. I do believe that some teachers didn't do it, or they did part of it.

She also said, “We were trying to really more try to create community than anything else, just teach respect, you know, how to communicate in the classroom respectfully and all.”

It was interesting to hear her opinion about the curriculum and her belief that some teachers don’t teach all of the lessons or don’t teach it at all. However it became quite clear that her beliefs or assumptions might be correct after talking to students.

I asked both groups of students, **Do you remember the Safe Schools curriculum that was taught to you?** It was quite clear that many of the students could not recall the curriculum. Students 2 and 4 said that they didn’t remember anything about those types of lessons. Student 9 said that she remembers a conversation, “but I feel like it was so casual that it didn’t really stick. Like it wasn’t a big discussion like, ‘oh show respect and be...’ Like it wasn’t a really big conversation.” Bisexuals 2 and 3 both said that they “*never had anything like that.*” Bisexual 2 said, “the only thing I remember learning in school about gay people ever, was last year in my English class we did a unit on Walt Whitman and...this week in government we were talking about Harvey Milk for like a day or two...but other than that, no, nothing that deals with gay.” Gender Queer was kind of bothered by not having been exposed to such a curriculum. She said “I have yet to have a class that wasn’t like during Club Rainbow. I remember at Bancroft (Middle School) we had this like workshop thing but it wasn’t on being gay...I didn’t even know they were supposed to do that!”

However, there were two students that offered some hope. Student 8 said that he remembered a curriculum. “I remember my English teacher...we went into deep

discussion about LGBTQ and I think we had to like do activities on it and essays and yeah it was helpful.” Bisexual 4 offered the same information when she said,

My freshman year in my English class for I think about two weeks we had a Safe Schools LGBTQ unit and there was a lot of, like they showed us videos and things and a lot of those things made me cry in class because I realized that I’m lucky because being out about my sexual orientation I haven’t really had any bad traumatizing experiences and realizing that there really are people out there who do suicide or they cut themselves or...it’s sad, it’s depressing, and I’m glad that we have the unit because a lot of people didn’t really realize that it’s a serious thing.

She also said that during the lesson, “My teacher did tell me that they were supposed to but a lot of teachers didn’t want to so she told me, she’s like...I remember her telling me this now that ‘I’m one of the only teachers that willingly does this because a lot of teachers feel uncomfortable about it.’”

Summary

The ninth- grade campus data definitely demonstrates that more support is needed in the area of Safe Schools work. Although homophobic remarks are prevalent on both campuses, there is more verbal harassment at ninth grade, and ninth-grade students report that they feel less safe than those on the main campus. It is also evident that teachers need support as well, especially those charged with the task of teaching the Safe Schools curriculum. Not only did this come through in my conversations regarding the

curriculum, but it was evidenced in the GLSEN data and repeated throughout the study. The SLHS staff needs support.

Staff Discomfort with LGBTQ Issues

For schools to be safe environments for LGBTQ students, staff plays an important role. Many studies reveal that LGBTQ students in high school asked that teachers and other staff members speak out on their behalf. GLSEN survey results and focus group conversations reveal explicitly that a large percentage of the staff at SLHS is uncomfortable speaking out on their behalf to deal with LGBTQ issues.

This section will give readers an idea about what the staff members are doing when homophobic remarks are made. It will be illustrated through the data results of the modified GLSEN survey that they took, as well as through what students reported in their school climate survey. I will also share data from focus group interviews. Comments from focus groups will reveal what some staff report that they need, to handle different situations related to LGBTQ issues, as well as the student's perception of staff comfort, whether it be dealing with remarks, teaching the curriculum, or just being around them.

GLSEN survey (modified) results

Survey results show that staff is not hearing homophobic remarks as frequently as students are hearing fellow students, but 68% of the staff respondents said that they are hearing the terms "*you're so gay*" and "*that's so gay*" 'sometimes/rarely,' while 32% say that they hear it frequently. Additionally, 28% of the staff report that fellow staff members 'sometimes/rarely' use homophobic language; an additional 68% say that they

never hear it from adults. However, 4% of the staff responds that staff members are making homophobic remarks on a frequent basis. These results are shown in Table 18.

Table 18

Staff Responses About Hearing Homophobic Language (N=79)

Survey Question	Frequently/Often	Sometimes/Rarely	Never
1. How often do you hear the expression “That’s so gay”, “You’re so gay” or other homophobic remarks made by our students in school?	32%	68%	0%
3. How often do you hear these remarks from teachers or other school staff?	4%	28%	68%

When the question was asked how many of them intervene or had witnessed other staff intervene, 79% report that they intervene, but only 39% report that they’ve seen other staff intervene (Table 19). This does not necessarily mean that other staff isn’t intervening; this could possibly be because they haven’t been around other staff when homophobic remarks were made. It could, however, also possibly mean that staff members are overestimating their own interventions.

Table 19

Staff Responses About Intervening When Homophobic Language is Heard (N=79)

Survey Questions	Always/Most of the time	Some of the time	Never
4. When you hear homophobic remarks how often do you intervene?	79%	20%	1%
5. When you hear homophobic remarks how often have you seen other staff intervene?	39%	47%	14%

To discover what the adults on campus had to say regarding how they feel about dealing with issues of LGBTQ and all that that entails, I first wanted to know what their

knowledge of the Safe Schools work was. I wanted to gauge whether or not they knew the history of it, the reason for it, and if they knew they had the legal responsibility to make sure that all students felt safe on campus. So after giving a brief overview of the history including the Debro lawsuit and the components that the district has put into place, I asked the question, **What do you know about the district's Safe Schools work? Do you know it exists? Do you know any of the details?** Ten out of eleven staff members were not very knowledgeable. They knew that everyone was supposed to “have the flyer in the classrooms or offices ...to provide a safe environment...” but didn't know “anything in particular about what kind of was the reason behind the flyer.” A counselor said, “...I started asking questions, but it wasn't like it was something that was given to me, brought to me, or anything like that...” One teacher, as well as a district office administrator, said that they didn't know anything until they volunteered to be on the district-wide Safe Schools Task Force, which restarted last year. The administrator said that “...at some point I learned that there had been a lawsuit that made the district do Safe Schools work and since I've now been involved...I learned about the district policy....” The Club Rainbow advisor, who was the one staff member who knew a lot of the history of the Safe Schools work and has taken a site leadership role as a member of the district Task Force, said that she spent time creating a document that lists the California state laws as well as federal laws, district and board policies for staff members. She said, “We've had two opportunities to bring that flyer to all the teachers... hoping to publicize them but it's always a struggle to get everybody.” To follow up what the Club

Rainbow advisor said, another teacher said, "...Club Rainbow advisor and another colleague would get up there at the beginning of the year and say, you know, this is a Safe School and then, you know, some minor details and then keep going. That was the only introduction we would get as a staff." When I asked if they believed that was the consensus amongst staff regarding a lack of knowledge of Safe Schools work, they agreed and said that staff needed more information, support and resources.

Focus Groups

Staff. I asked the staff **How comfortable are you all addressing these issues?**

Campus supervisor said that she feels comfortable addressing remarks made but she feels that there are students "we're just not going to be able to get to them because they are going to throw the religion in there... 'This is my religion and this is how I feel.'"

Teacher 3 chimed in and said that when she talked about Prop 8 in her class, religion played a big part. She said she addressed it by saying, "I respect what you're saying, but you have to respect them as well. They're respecting you...I'm not trying to change your mind." She said that she believes teachers need to know a bit more, but she thinks some are scared because they don't know how to confront in a way that's more comfortable because "some of us have different comfort levels around things."

Teacher 5 said that it would be helpful to have a language about how to talk when those comments come up in class. She said "teachers need to learn that language...and practice and be comfortable with it...just to start with even a script and just role play with teachers and just teach them how to, you know, be comfortable with the language of

deconstructing like these you know hurtful things that kids say that they don't even realize they're saying." She believes that teachers need direct instruction about what to do such as,

Here's what you can say in this situation, here's what you can say in that situation. This is why. And here's what... all these things mean and I think maybe...trying to just keep in mind that you can't...I don't try to change their mind about anything. I just try to teach them to be respectful of each other, and even if it means that they totally don't.

Teacher 4 said that even staff who are extremely supportive and open-minded could use some more information. District Administrator 1 said that he definitely agrees and that it needs to be "ongoing work that we're engaged in because he said that even if people are on board, and there's always new people coming into the district as staff..."

Teacher 5, who shared her belief that some teachers weren't fully teaching the curriculum said, "A lot of teachers get emotional or a lot of teachers get angry, or they just don't know what to say..." She added,

I think definitely some teachers really, you know, they have their own feelings about it as well...if you're not very certain about where you stand then the kids are just going to know, and if you can't, you know, if you don't really feel strongly about the issues yourself, you know, and I think it comes through.

Teacher 3 added, "I think maybe teachers need to know that a little bit more, because I think some teachers—not myself—I don't mean to speak for all—but I think they're

scared because they don't know. And when something's scary, you just want to avoid it."

Straight Students. I didn't ask this group a direct question about whether or not they believed their teachers were comfortable dealing with LGBTQ issues; however, it was definitely revealed through some of their responses. Student 8 said that although she felt SLHS was the "best it can get," she thinks "the only thing better would be to have teachers to be onboard with it" (LGBTQ issues). She was the same student who responded that "some teachers act like they don't hear it (homophobic language)." Student 10 also hinted at perhaps some discomfort when he said,

if you have some teachers that are using the program (safe schools) to its fullest it is getting across the students, but if you have other teachers that kind of just put it off and don't give too much thought into what they're actually going to teach the class with it, I feel that it's kind of going to waste....

LGBTQ students. I referred back to some comments made earlier about how teachers handled or didn't handle homophobic language, safe schools curriculum, etc, I asked, **Do you feel that teachers are uncomfortable talking about subjects like that?** Lesbian 1 immediately responded with "Yes, very uncomfortable." She told the story of a teacher that confronted her with religion a few years ago. She said that the teacher pulled her aside when she was talking to a friend and questioned her Christianity. She said that he asked her, "Do you know what you're getting yourself into? You're going to hell!" Bisexual 3 spoke up about being very outspoken and openly bisexual with her

teachers. However she said that one day she was talking to her friends about “kicking it with this girl” and the teacher overheard. She said that the teacher just looked at her like, “why’d you say that?” She said, “They’re okay with it, but when you talk about it, that’s when they get a little uncomfortable.”

Summary

It is quite apparent that staff recognizes their own discomfort when it comes to dealing with LGBTQ issues. From the survey data revealing the lack of consistent staff intervening, as well as the staff focus group – asking for language to address issues and support with teaching curriculum – staff members are signifying that they are not supporting students with full fidelity, whether it be intentionally or unintentionally. It is also quite obvious that the comfort level of the staff appears to be pretty transparent to students, particularly those that need their support most, students who identify as LGBTQ.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will discuss the implications of the major findings of the current study. More specifically, the results of the current study will be examined in relation to its application to school district and school practice. I will address the research question: **How is the Safe Schools work at San Leandro High School shaping the climate for students who identify as LGBTQ?** by discussing my major findings, offering my personal reflections and recommendations as well as the recommendations of those involved in the study. I will also discuss the limitations to the study, its implications for practice, and finally suggest implications for further research in this area.

This study was introduced by identifying and describing what the literature cites as the negative school climate experiences of those students who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Queer. It also made known, very specifically, what the literature defines as four necessary components that must be implemented in schools, in order to create safer and more supportive school environments for these students. Those components are district policy, staff development, inclusive curriculum, and support groups for LGBTQ students. However, what was missing in that literature was the evaluative evidence that the implementation of those components would create that safe and supportive climate.

This study sought to do that—to evaluate a school site where the four components are “at work,” by hearing the experiences of those that are responsible for implementing

the components as well as those who are intended to benefit from it. The findings of this study will be helpful to SLHS as it works toward strengthening its Safe Schools work, but also to other schools and school districts that are seeking to address the needs of LGBTQ students. Additionally, it will provide data that will hopefully enlighten those who have not yet reached that awareness.

Any discussion of findings needs to recognize the differences that are represented in the spoken vs. written responses. Although most of the literature shows that high school can prove to be a very negative experience for students who identify as LGBTQ, results from this study are somewhat different in that SLHS comes across through interviews as quite a safe and supportive environment. This was the overwhelming theme from staff members, straight students and even LGBTQ students who participated in focus groups. The LGBTQ students said that they feel accepted, comfortable, and safe being out at school as well as feel supported by adults. They report that, although they do hear homophobic language, mostly straight boy to straight boy, they have not been verbally or physically harassed due to their sexual orientation. When asked their ideas about what a better school climate looks like, sounds like and feels like for LGBTQ students, the straight students said that they feel that “San Leandro is like top. You can’t get any better”; and “it’s on its way for becoming a model for other schools.” LGBTQ students agreed and said that they believe “it’s actually a good place already.” They described SLHS as “going pretty good”; “doing really well”; and “doing very well” with

regard to its climate. However, both student and staff groups made recommendations to improve the school that I will share later.

Although the focus group discussions painted SLHS in a positive light, the GLSEN survey results told somewhat of a different tale. Looking at the disaggregated data results from straight students compared to LGBTQ students, both groups reported prevalent use of homophobic language and over one-fourth of the LGBTQ population surveyed say they are being harassed with it. Additionally, only half of those surveyed, both LGBTQ and straight students, report that teachers or staff intervene when they're in the presence of homophobic language 'some of the time or rarely'; and a full third of the LGBTQ population surveyed feel unsafe at school due to their sexual orientation.

It became quite apparent to me that there is still a population of students that aren't being served as well as they could be by this Safe Schools work because they are the "invisible" youth that Murdock and Bolch mentioned in their 2005 research. These are the students who are not 'out,' do not participate in Club Rainbow, and are probably suffering in silence. These are the students that I worry about and will continue to work, somehow, to reach. However, for now I can only share my findings from those that I did hear from. The synthesis of my findings are as follows: prevalent use of homophobic language; discomfort of staff regarding LGBTQ issues; limitations of the Safe Schools curriculum; the positive influence of Club Rainbow; fewer boys 'out' than girls; and additional ninth-grade campus support needed.

Prevalent Use of Homophobic Language

It's quite clear from survey data as well as interviews that the use of homophobic language is quite prevalent at San Leandro High School. Although the majority of those that I spoke to now describe it as being a part of normative culture, it still is what it is—homophobic and offensive. One student compared it to the use of the “N” word now and noted how the hip hop culture has “turned the meaning of the word around.” I told him, “It's still racist and offensive.” No matter how a word might be used or by who, the words “faggot,” “dyke,” and “nigger” were born out of hate toward homosexuals and African Americans.

Teachers said that they hear the language and some of them are uncomfortable addressing it. They reported that they need support with how to do it. Many of them said that they would prefer to educate students about the history of the words and how offensive they are, rather than immediately issuing punishments. When I asked the administrators whether or not they were getting discipline referrals about the use of this language they said that they were not—or that it was rare that they did. When an average 66% of your student body report that they hear homophobic remarks ‘frequently or often’, there is a serious problem that needs to be addressed.

Discomfort of Staff Regarding LGBTQ Issues

With the prevalent use of homophobic language, most students report that many teachers are not intervening. Teacher survey data suggests that they think other teachers aren't intervening as much as they should (Table 20). Both groups agree that this is

largely due to the comfort level of staff. Staff members report that some of them are fearful of stepping into a situation that they may not be capable or competent enough to handle. Role playing, scripts, etc. were some of the suggestions made by teachers to help them develop the skill, comfort and the language to use when they are confronting offending situations.

Staff members also talked about needing education. Some were not very clear about the concept of transgender students and what exactly “being transgender” means. Other staff suggested having outside resources come in and work with staff about specifically LGBTQ issues; they also recommended ensuring that staff members are aware of the laws that govern them and the responsibility they have to make sure they keep all students safe.

Limitations of Safe Schools Curriculum

The original Safe Schools curriculum was introduced into San Leandro schools during the 2005-2006 school year. It was brought in by expert consultants who had worked with the San Francisco and Hayward Unified School Districts, as they were already using the curriculum. Since the initial curriculum was launched, curriculum teams of teachers have since worked to develop new curriculum by updating, rewriting redeveloping and introducing new materials to the curriculum. However, it appears that it still needs some continued work—both from the perspective of the students as well as the teachers.

When asked about the lessons, the majority of the students replied that they did not remember the Safe Schools curriculum that was taught to them in the 9th grade. Even current 9th graders did not remember it and it was taught to them only a few weeks prior to the interview. This shows a definite weakness in either the curriculum itself or the preparation of the teachers who teach it. A staff member who teaches the curriculum said that she felt like “it (curriculum) wasn’t like quite hitting the mark where we wanted it to be.” She added that “better materials” have come out since they created the curriculum that is being used.

A district office administrator proposed having people teach it who want to teach it—whether that is teachers, counselors, district office staff or even having students involved. He believed that that would make it more engaging and accessible for students. An LGBTQ student suggested that a time be set for the curriculum to be taught , and that the school “send in someone who can, you know, monitor that and make sure that they are actually teaching it...and not being like half-assed about it ...I think that could be good.”

The LGBTQ students also had suggestions for other curriculum as well. They said that they would like to see *gay studies* or *gay history* as an elective course, and that sex education should include topics about gay relationships as well as straight. One student said that there could be a course such as Human Relations that talks about everything and teaches tolerance about different sexual orientations, religions, and races. She suggested that course which would focus on diversity because she said that she

doesn't want people to feel like "LGBTQ students are being babied or they're being treated differently than everyone else."

Positive Influence of Club Rainbow for LGBTQ Students

Club Rainbow quite obviously provides a great support for LGBTQ students on campus. It provides a space where students feel free to be "as gay as you want." In that safe space students have, in their words, made new friends, found acceptance, support, free expression, and empowerment. One student described it as being "one of the only good things about this school." Some of the LGBTQ students who reported that that were feeling bad about who they were because other friends began talking about them when they revealed their sexual orientation said that they found comfort in Club Rainbow. Another student who attended other schools before coming to SLHS said that having Club Rainbow on campus makes her feel like "they care." These students believe that the presence of Club Rainbow helps to provide a safe space for everyone and shows that "the school is okay."

Ms. Love, the Club Rainbow advisor, has established herself as the 'mom' to the LGBTQ students as she refers to them as her children. It is quite obvious that she genuinely cares for them; it is clearly evident through all that she does. The club is a well established and well respected club that is very active. It sponsors numerous campus events, goes on field trips to local university GSAs, and provide student panels to speak to staff and students at other schools, just to name a few. Not only does it serve as a space for these students to socialize, it serves as an educational and political tool for them as

well. The students learn about and discuss a plethora of issues (such as historical and present day gay figures), get involved in gay political issues, and engage in other positive experiences. Straight allies also participate with the club, further strengthening their outreach to the whole school community.

Fewer Boys ‘Out’ Than Girls

The absence of a significant number of ‘out’ boys at San Leandro High School was quite evident throughout this study. Girls who were either ‘out’ as lesbian or who identified as bisexual were much more prevalent. The LGBTQ focus group only included one male, and the attendance at Club Rainbow meetings definitely shows a significantly higher number of girls than boys.

One of the staff members also mentioned during the focus group that she felt a weakness that she has seen in the Safe Schools work is how effectively they’re reaching girls as opposed to boys. She said,

In my classroom and amongst both my queer-identified and straight-identified students, it’s really the girls that I see that are a lot more comfortable being out, and a lot more comfortable attending Club Rainbow, are a lot more comfortable speaking openly and honestly with their classmates or with adults. I was incredibly shocked at how divided it was and how fewer boys I see that are out, that are comfortable compared to what’s going on with the girls.

A straight student told of a situation that he dealt with as a basketball player where the “angels,” who are the school’s dance team members, give them gifts on game

days. He said that on one particular game day his angel was the boy dancer and another student asked him if that made him feel weird that his angel was a boy. He said he asked her, “What does that matter? That’s my angel.”

Apparently the more negative, homophobic societal outlook toward gay males more so than gay females contributes to the lack of “out” gay boys at SLHS. Lesbian 1 in the Club Rainbow group described a situation where one of her male friends said that during a sex education unit in Health class, the boys and girls were split into different groups. She told of how he tried to ask a question about what if you prefer guys and she said, “They didn’t accept it and they looked at him weird.” So, she said, he stopped talking.

Additional Ninth Grade Campus Support Necessary

The climate of the ninth-grade campus and its support of LGBTQ students is definitely a work in progress. Although both campuses need development, the ninth-grade campus needs more. The main campus already has established policies, programs and practices in place that the ninth-grade campus lacks. On the main campus there are already teachers who have been identified by students as supportive adults they trust; and that message is passed around from student to student from year to year. At the ninth-grade campus, it is always new. Students come in August and they’re gone in June, making it hard to build those truly meaningful and trusting relationships in such a short amount of time—although some try. And, while Club Rainbow is a well respected club on the main campus, so are the majority of its members, and its activities – on the main

campus. So, the safe haven that LGBTQ students describe on the main campus is missing for 9th graders.

In my opinion, I believe a lot of the bullying and harassment that takes place on the ninth- grade campus is, to some degree, due to homophobia, but I also believe that some of it is indicative of the age of the students and the lack of older student role models present. Name calling and bullying are not okay whatsoever, but they are typical 14 year old behavioral actions which was evidenced by the comments and behavior reported by the Club Rainbow advisor, when the Club came over for club day. On the second visit, however, when they brought football players with them, and the younger students saw the older football players participating and showing that it was cool to interact and be friends with students who are LGBTQ, it became okay for them to interact with the LGBTQ students as well. At that age it is most definitely all about what others think of you.

Students suggest doing more to connect the two campuses, where upperclassmen come over more frequently during lunch time and participate in activities or serve as mentors to show that “everybody is accepted.” One of the teachers on the ninth-grade campus said that she was going to start a ninth-grade campus GSA so students would know that there is a safe space for them on that campus as well. She also said that she would work with The Club Rainbow advisor to coordinate more activities between the two campuses.

Recommendations

Using the discussion above, the next part of this chapter presents recommendations from the data directly as well as interpretations and/or suggestions based on the data, and including what I believe to be necessary next steps based on my experience at the site. San Leandro Unified School District and San Leandro High School are serious about this work, yet they still need to continuously ask themselves, how well are we doing at accomplishing our goals of safe schools for all? Based on my data and analysis of that data, I will present specific steps and strategies that can be taken to accomplish those goals. While these are specific to the San Leandro High School case, the general principles of data—examining what exists or what a school/district would like to exist—can be used by other sites to examine the climate for their LGBTQ students.

Yearly Program Evaluation

SLUSD has all of the components in place to create safer schools for our students who identify as LGBTQ. The district has already established a policy of its stated process of “prevention” of hate motivated behavior which consists of the following steps: specify the rules of conduct in documents, speeches, and orientations at the beginning of each school year; review annually incident reports at both site and district levels; conduct a school/district climate assessment to improve programs; provide staff training to help staff members respond immediately and appropriately to hate-motivated incidents; provide workshops for teachers, parents, families, and community partners; support curriculum and student activity programs that promote appreciation and respect for

differences among people; and involve community partners as resources to develop, implement and monitor prevention plans. These steps should definitely serve to evaluate the program; however, there are some “holes” in the consistent execution of this plan that have been evidenced through my data.

Cycle of Inquiry. In order for the Safe Schools work to continue to strengthen, there needs to be a more thorough ongoing cycle of inquiry to evaluate and reevaluate the program. In order to accomplish this, I recommend yearly feedback (survey) from staff and students about their experiences on campus, but I believe we would also benefit by getting feedback from parents and the community as well. Presently the district utilizes the California Healthy Kids survey to purportedly assess resilience, protective factors and risk behaviors of the students in our school district. I have administered this survey to students in the school and reviewed results; however, I have not been that impressed with what it actually gauges, due to the fact that only a very few questions have to do with the LGBTQ issue of safety in schools.

The GLSEN Local School Climate survey that I administered during this study has provided, I believe, greater insight to what is actually going on at San Leandro High School and provides more practical information to assess the weaknesses in the school climate, most specifically for LGBTQ students, but also with regards to racism and sexism as well. The district has a focus on Equity work to support students of color. This survey would also help them to assess how minority students are feeling at school, thereby killing two birds with one stone. The feedback data would then be reviewed by

district administration, site administration, teachers, as well as some students—leading to discussions to determine how to improve the policies, programs and practices in place.

Discipline Data. As a follow-up to the climate surveys, the district needs to also take a look at the discipline data. Despite the policies, programs and practices in place, 30% of LGBTQ students still report feeling unsafe. Is this not being reported or when it is reported is it being treated as something else? To ensure that homophobic bullying is not getting lost in general bullying/harassment incidents, a closer look might need to be taken at how incidents are being input into the information system. .

Safe Schools Task Force. The task force is the body of people that lead this work. It includes district office administrators, site administrators, teachers and counselors. The critical missing piece from the task force is student members. Their voices need to be heard more so than the adults'. Another significant aspect of the task force that needs to be considered is where and how the Safe Schools work needs to be situated within the system's organization in order for it to be most effective. I recommend the following for data collection:

- Yearly implementation of the GLSEN survey to students
- Yearly implementation of a staff survey
- Yearly implementation of a parent/community survey
- Reviewing discipline data

Ongoing Review of the Safe Schools/Inclusive Curriculum

As stated earlier, the Safe Schools curriculum does not appear to be making much of an impact on students—gay or straight. Based on the data gathered, I am unable to discern whether or not that is due to the curriculum itself or the implementation of it. In order to make sure that the curriculum and the teaching of it are effective, I believe that what the district is supporting—the re-evaluating and tweaking of the curriculum—needs to be ongoing and revisited yearly. However, evaluation and feedback about the curriculum needs to come from the students as well as the teachers. The students are a crucial part of the development of the curriculum and their opinions are not being utilized. In order for it to “stick,” as one student said, the curriculum must be relevant and engaging to them.

According to some teachers, the curriculum can be challenging to teach, and staff members need to be skilled at doing so. Teachers need to be provided an opportunity to work together so that they can become more comfortable and effective at implementing it. If necessary, they should be provided professional development to learn and develop strategies and techniques necessary when imparting this very important information. They should also be provided support while teaching the curriculum. Perhaps the “experts” on campus could work with teachers while they are teaching. Or perhaps have this unit taught in a class that it might be better suited for, Science perhaps. Although my recommendations include staff development and support to those teachers who teach it, I believe that students would benefit most and the lessons would be most effective if

teachers who wanted to teach it taught it—those that have the will and the skill. I'm not sure how that could be executed, but I think it's worthwhile to think about it.

The Safe Schools curriculum is just one aspect of the need for inclusive curriculum. Inclusive curriculum should be encouraged and supported throughout other classes as well, to send messages of acceptance to LGBTQ students. Although some teachers are including such topics and teaching about the contributions of gay people throughout history or present day, many are not. I believe that when possible, teachers should try to include these topics as well as pay attention to heterosexist language and exclusiveness when teaching. I recommend:

- Ongoing evaluation, refinement and updating of the Safe Schools curriculum
- Having teachers that have the will and the skill to teach the curriculum—perhaps move to Science
- Encouraging and supporting inclusive curriculum across subject matters
(Continued awareness of heterosexist language and exclusiveness)
- Developing curriculum for all grades, 9-12

Ongoing Staff Development and Support for Staff

From the minute that a teacher applies for a job, she/he should know what SLUSD has as its focus—social justice and equity for all students. Some of the interview questions, as I believe a few already are, should be geared toward equity; but a question about LGBTQ should be included as well. Furthermore, new teachers should be provided staff development opportunities in order to support them early on. There used

to be an introduction to the Safe Schools work for new teachers; however, of course due to budget constraints, that training has been somewhat diminished. In addition to new teachers being provided this pertinent information and development, all teachers should be provided ongoing professional development to support them in dealing with LGBTQ matters. The Safe Schools Task Force members who are on campus could provide that to a certain degree; however, the staff might benefit more from consultants who are skilled at helping staff face their own personal beliefs around this issue if needed, but also to help them develop the skills necessary for them to support students.

Teachers' comments indicate that they might also benefit from a forum in which they can discuss and support each other. Some suggested during the focus group that they would like to be given scripts and role plays to work on building their confidence for approaching various situations. Presently, the Safe Schools Task Force does have a sub-committee that is creating scripts for role playing in different situations that can be provided at staff meetings and provide opportunities for teachers to work together to practice them. I recommend:

- Education
 - District policy , programs, laws, responsibilities
 - LGBTQ issues—gender identity, etc
 - Strengthening of counselor's role
 - For teachers who teach Safe Schools curriculum

- Forum
 - Role playing
 - Discussions and peer support

Continued Support for Club Rainbow and Advisor

Club Rainbow appears to be having the most positive affect and impact on the lives of LGBTQ students at SLHS. I don't believe that many recommendations are necessary for Club Rainbow. However, I do think that the outreach to the ninth-grade campus needs to occur a bit more frequently. A bridge needs to be built to support ninth grade LGBTQ students, and I know that Club Rainbow can be that bridge. The ninth grade students go to the club every Wednesday after school; however, they need some more visible support during the school day as those students on the main campus have. When Club Rainbow hosts events on the main campus during lunch time, perhaps the following day or week they could host it on the ninth-grade campus so that they become an expected and accepted part of the culture and climate there.

I also recommend that the district and site continue to support the advisor in the work that she does with the students. She often takes student panels to other sites. They share their personal stories of what it is like being an LGBTQ student in SLUSD. They provide insight for elementary and middle schools as to how to strengthen their work. Therefore, she should definitely be provided release time whenever necessary, whether it is for that event or the other educational field trips that she takes the students on—to museums such as Harvey Milk in San Francisco or to visit one of the Gay Straight

Alliance chapters at one of the local universities. Ms. Love plays an essential role in the lives of these students. I recommend:

- Club Rainbow extend its outreach to the ninth-grade campus
- Site/District continued support of the advisor

Outreach to Gay Boys

It was quite obvious throughout the study that the number of ‘out’ boys is significantly lower than girls. Society tends to tolerate or accept gay females more so than gay males. Since schools reflect society, the same appears to hold true. What supports need to be in place in order to create an environment where boys feel safer to come out? Is it possible? When I think of the campus itself, there are more ‘out’ gay women than men. Perhaps there are just more in existence there, but there does appear to be a correlation.

In order to support gay boys at San Leandro High School, I think the overall LGBTQ student support that is provided needs to continue. In the past, there was a male teacher that sponsored the GSA, and I wonder if he attracted more boys to the group than Ms. Love does with Club Rainbow. I have no knowledge of that, only speculation. I will say, however, that the ninth grade “clique” is mostly comprised of ‘out’ boys. Perhaps as the times evolve, more young boys will become more comfortable being themselves at school. I recommend possibly fostering mentorships with ‘out’ adult male school personnel to support these students. It is especially important that we support gay males

because they are especially at high risk for sexual health issues. Further research on how to best support teen gay males is necessary. I recommend:

- Further research to gather appropriate resources to best support gay boys
- Continued outreach through existing support programs and practices to improve the climate so that boys do feel safer to come out
- Mentors for gay boys
- Identify a male staff member as an additional support to Club Rainbow

Added Support for the Ninth Grade Campus

The ninth -grade campus needs to continue to work toward creating its own identity with the Safe Schools work; however it needs support to do this. The Safe Schools poster is visible throughout the school in every classroom and office stating “you are safe to be who you are.” However, as stated before, a lot of what happens in ninth grade –bullying and name calling – is largely due to the age of the students. The younger students need clear rules and structures. Additionally, the staff that works with these 14 year olds needs to be clear and consistent with the message, that we are not a school that tolerates that type of behavior.

I believe that ninth graders would benefit too from having older students spend more time on the campus as mentors and role models demonstrating expected and appropriate behavior. The example of when the football team came over to the campus along with Club Rainbow for National Coming Out day, and how signing the pledge almost instantaneously became cool, demonstrates the impact that older role models have

on younger students. One of the ninth grade teachers is starting a GSA on the ninth-grade campus to provide a place for interested LGBTQ students at lunch time. She reports that she has about seven to ten students that meet there on a regular basis and they have already begun some activities.

I also think that ninth graders would benefit from assemblies or programs that address the issues of LGBTQ bullying with speakers whom they might relate to. From my experience with students this age, if it doesn't seem real to them, it doesn't seem to matter to them. I recommend:

- Clear, communicated, enforced rules and expectations for students
- Consistent follow through by staff
- Bridge the gap between ninth- grade campus and main campus through
 - Mentorships with older students
 - Support for the GSA and its sponsor on ninth-grade campus

Summary

San Leandro Unified School District and San Leandro High School have done, in my opinion, an outstanding job at creating a Safe Schools support system where students who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Questioning, as well as parents and staff who identify the same way, feel as valued as any heterosexual students or families in the district. Some may say that these policies, programs, and practices only exist in San Leandro because of the Debro lawsuit, and they are probably correct;

however, the lawsuit is what began the work, but the belief in what it does and what it stands for has helped it endure, evolve and continue to evolve.

Who would have predicted such changes? Ten years ago there was picketing at board meetings by community and religious organizations; the superintendent was verbally attacked in the national media for “forcing” teachers to put up gay friendly posters in their classrooms; teachers at SLHS refused to post the gay friendly “Safe Space” posters and then when put up by administration tore them down; teachers were against teachers, and students were against students over this issue. Currently SLUSD is a school district where there is a task force consisting of teachers, counselors and administrators from across the district who come together to strengthen support for LGBTQ students; the “Safe Space” poster is posted in every classroom, workspace, and office in the entire district; alliances have been created with the San Leandro LGBTQ community and the schools; the district marched in the San Francisco 2011 pride parade along with the mayor; and where the LGBTQ students I talked to feel safe and supported? This is amazing. But, of course, there is still work to be done.

How does this study inform the research question, How is the Safe Schools work at San Leandro High School shaping the climate for students who identify as LGBTQ? The Safe Schools work is shaping the climate in a positive way for students who identify as LGBTQ. The students report feeling accepted, safe and supported; the majority of those feel comfortable enough to be ‘out’ at school; and they have good relationships with their peers as well as with most adults. They talked about some room for

improvement in the Safe Schools work and the hope that “maybe one day we won’t even need to have stuff like that...everybody will just accept it.” However, in the meantime, they think that it is a good place to be.

When I walk out onto the “quad” during lunchtime on the main campus, I see students—all students—getting along. I can easily spot the “wanna be gangsters,” the “jocks,” the “skaters,” the “musicians,” and, yes, the “gay kids.” They’re all in their little cliques – co-existing, and co-existing without conflict. I know that San Leandro High School is not a utopia, but I also know that it is not like schools that I read about in the literature—far from it. Progress has been made, and progress will continue to be made. Continued development of the policies, programs and practices can only make things better for these kids. But it takes all of us, school wide and system wide, to make this thing work. Teacher 2 said it better than I can:

I believe it (Safe Schools work) does work, and actually it has a lot of potential to do well. At this time it’s a work in progress, and I just keep on hearing from District Administrator 1, it’s a mandate. And when something’s mandated, you know, so we have to do it because we have to do it, so I think if we just actually as a staff just actually take a moment and say whatever our belief is—I’m not going to stand for discrimination. I’m not going to stand for homophobia—it’s just because it’s not right; just simply believing that something is not right. And we take that approach to teaching any kind of curriculum, and then I think we’re going to create the change. But if we’re just doing it because we’re mandated and

told, 'you have to do it. You have to have this poster up there.' Let's look beyond the poster. What is it for? What does it stand for? Because if it's a Safe School, you know, it's not only a safe school for LGBTQ students, but it's a safe school for African-American students, for Latino students, for Asian students, for any kind of person. And not only a safe school for students but for staff as well. And I think we need to move on from its mandated to this is what's actually right. This is how we are. This is what we stand for. This is what we don't stand for. This is what's acceptable. This is what's not acceptable here. At your home, I have no influence, but here, this is who we are.

Limitations to the Study

The first limitation to the study was that of the focus groups. I'm not sure how representative the groups are of the student body. The students who participated in the LGBTQ group self-selected; they chose to be members of club Rainbow, and they elected to join a focus group that was taking place at the same time as a club Rainbow meeting. These were students who felt most comfortable talking. I was not able to obtain the views of LGBTQ students who do not participate in Club Rainbow, and who, therefore are most likely not comfortable sharing their perspectives about their school experiences. The straight student focus group consisted of students in the Leadership class. These are some of the most outgoing, positive thinking students on campus. I was not able to hear from students who might not be so "*homo-friendly*." Also, staff members were purposively selected. Perhaps if there had been an open call to staff members to

participate, I may have heard more personal opinions that again might not have been so “*homo-friendly*.”

A second limitation to the study was that ninth grade students were underrepresented. In the LGBTQ group, there was only one ninth grader. In the straight student focus group there were three, but they were not very vocal.

A third limitation to the study was the differences between what was written (survey responses) and what was spoken (interview responses). Again, this is perhaps due to not being able to reach a more representative sample of students for my focus groups.

A fourth limitation to the study was that I personally conducted the focus groups. Being an administrator on both campuses, although primarily on the ninth- grade campus, I wonder what effect, if any, my role had on the responses that were provided to me by students as well as staff. I would hope that both felt that they could be honest and truthful, but you never know. I thought of having an outsider conduct the interviews; however, that may have resulted in a diminished level of comfort to speak truthfully with that person as well.

A fifth limitation to the study was that I did not have another reader of the focus group transcripts. Thus, there was no opportunity to consider alternative interpretations of the data, such as counter-examples that another reader may have highlighted.

Implications for Practice

Schools without Safe Schools Programs

For schools and or school districts that do not have policies, practices or programs in place to support LGBTQ students, there are four components that are necessary. These are: 1) board policy, 2) professional development for staff, 3) inclusive curriculum, and 4) student support groups. However, before a district or site can implement any of this, it needs to assess its school climate to determine what and where the issues are. If it is a California school and uses only the California Healthy Kids Survey, there is a lot of information that will be missed. Ask the question, how will the school community as well as the community-at-large react to this type of work? This is a very controversial topic and needs to be handled delicately, but it does need to be handled, because I assure there are gay students at your school. I guarantee it. A list of resources has been provided in Appendix C to provide support through the process.

Existing Safe Schools Programs

Schools and school districts that already have programs and practices in place to support LGBTQ students cannot rest on their laurels. Even if all of the components are in place, just as in the case of San Leandro, there must be ongoing evaluation to assess the impact of the policies, programs and practices. But first ask the questions – what do you want to know and how can you learn about it? This study utilized focus groups and surveys of staff and students to gather the data that was wanted. Utilize the instrument(s) that would be most beneficial to you.

Implications for Further Research

I was often told throughout this process that “this is not your life’s work” and “the best dissertation is a done dissertation.” So now that I’m done, I have begun to think about the questions that are still unanswered. If I continue to study in this area, which I will, what would I do next and what needs to be done next by others? There are several areas of interest for me that I believe need more exploring:

- Evaluations of existing Safe Schools programs
- Homophobic behavior—discipline or education?
- What are the varying experiences of boys vs girls and how can we support boys better through the “coming out” process?
- How does race or ethnicity impact LGBTQ teens’ identities?
- How does socioeconomic status impact LGBTQ teens’ identities?
- A 9th grade only campus and the “differentness” it perpetuates in bullying or homophobic behavior
- Relationships between LGBTQ students and school staff

These are areas of research that I believe are worth exploring to better inform school personnel in order to continue to work toward strengthening our support for LGBTQ students.

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LIST OF RESOURCES

- The Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network is a national network devoted to school issues. www.GLSEN.org
- The Safe Schools coalition works to reduce bias-based bullying and violence in schools and to help schools better meet the needs of sexual minority youth and children with sexual minority parents/guardians. www.Safeschoolscoalition.org
- Just the Facts provides information and resources for principals, educators, and school personnel who confront sensitive issues involving gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/just-the-facts.aspx
- Gay Straight Alliance network www.gsanetwork.org
- NASP Work Group on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues:
www.nasponline.org/advocacy/glb.html
- Outproud! The National Coalition for GLBT youth: www.outproud.org
- Parents and Families of Gays and Lesbians (PFLAG): www.pflag.org
- Project 10: On-Site Educational Support Services for GLBTQ Youth:
www.project10.org



Local School Climate Survey

School-Based Version

Section A

This first set of questions is about homophobic remarks you may have heard at our school. Please circle the answer that best describes your experience at our school.

1. How often do you hear the expression "That's so gay," or "You're so gay" in school?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
2. How often have you heard other homophobic remarks used in school (such as "faggot," "dyke," "queer," etc.)?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
3. How often do you hear these homophobic remarks from other students?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
4. Would you say that homophobic remarks are made by:	Most of the students	Some of the students	A few of the students		
5. How often do you hear these homophobic remarks from teachers or school staff?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
6. How often do you hear homophobic remarks in:					
a) Classes	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
b) Hallways	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
c) Bathrooms	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
d) Locker Rooms	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
e) Buses	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
f) Athletic Field/Gym	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
g) Schoolyard or School Grounds	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
h) Cafeteria	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
7. When you hear homophobic remarks, how often has a teacher or other school staff person been present?	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never	
8. When homophobic remarks are made and a teacher or other school staff person is present, how often does the teacher or staff person intervene?	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never	
9. When you hear homophobic remarks, how often does another student intervene?	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never	

Section B

This next set of questions is about racist remarks you may have heard at our school. Please circle the answer that best describes your experience at our school.

1. How often have you heard racist remarks used in school (such as “nigger,” “kike,” “spic,” “gook,” etc.)?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
2. How often do you hear racist remarks from other students?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
3. Would you say that racist remarks are made by:	Most of the students	Some of the students	A few of the students		
4. How often do you hear racist remarks from teachers or school staff?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
5. How often do you hear racist remarks in:					
a) Classes	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
b) Hallways	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
c) Bathrooms	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
d) Locker Rooms	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
e) Buses	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
f) Athletic Field/Gym	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
g) Schoolyard or School Grounds	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
h) Cafeteria	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
6. When you hear racist remarks, how often has a teacher or other school staff person been present?	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never	
7. When racist remarks are made and a teacher or other school staff person is present, how often does the teacher or staff person intervene?	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never	
8. When you hear racist remarks, how often does another student intervene?	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never	

Section C

This set of questions is about sexist remarks you may have heard at our school. Please circle the answer that best describes your experience at our school.

1.	How often have you heard sexist remarks used in school (such as someone being called a “bitch” or comments about girls’ bodies or talk of girls being inferior to boys)?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
2.	How often do you hear sexist remarks from other students?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
3.	Would you say that sexist remarks are made by:	Most of the students	Some of the students	A few of the students		
4.	How often do you hear sexist remarks from teachers or school staff?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
5.	How often do you hear sexist remarks in:					
	a) Classes	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	b) Hallways	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	c) Bathrooms	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	d) Locker Rooms	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	e) Buses	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	f) Athletic Field/Gym	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	g) Schoolyard or School Grounds	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	h) Cafeteria	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
6.	When you hear sexist remarks, how often has a teacher or other school staff person been present?	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never	
7.	When sexist remarks are made and a teacher or other school staff person is present, how often does the teacher or staff person intervene?	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never	
8.	When you hear sexist remarks, how often does another student intervene?	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never	

Section D

This set of questions is about negative remarks you may have heard at our school related to people's gender expression. Please circle the answer that best describes your experience at our school.

1.	How often have you heard comments about students not acting "masculine" enough?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
2.	How often have you heard comments about students not acting "feminine" enough?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
3.	How often do you hear these kinds of remarks from other students?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
4.	Would you say that these kinds of remarks are made by:	Most of the students	Some of the students	A few of the students		
5.	How often do you hear these remarks from teachers or school staff?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
6.	How often do you hear these kinds of remarks in:					
	a) Classes	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	b) Hallways	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	c) Bathrooms	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	d) Locker Rooms	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	e) Buses	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	f) Athletic Field/Gym	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	g) Schoolyard or School Grounds	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	h) Cafeteria	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
7.	When you hear these remarks, how often has a teacher or other school staff person been present?	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never	
8.	When these remarks are made and a teacher or other school staff person is present, how often does the teacher or staff person intervene?	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never	
9.	When you hear these kinds of remarks, how often does another student intervene?	Always	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never	

Section E

This set of questions is about harassment or fights that you may have encountered at our school. For each question, please circle or check the answer that best describes your experience at our school.

1. In the past month, how many times have you skipped a class because you felt uncomfortable or unsafe in that class?	0 times	1 time	2 or 3 times	4 or 5 times	6 or more times
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2. In the past month, how many days did you not go to school because you felt unsafe at school or on your way to school?	0 times	1 day	2 or 3 days	4 or 5 days	6 or more days
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3. Do you feel unsafe at our school because of... (check all that apply)

your sexual orientation

your race or ethnicity

your gender

how you express your gender (how traditionally “masculine” or “feminine” you are in your appearance, or in how you act)

your religion

because of a disability or because people think you have a disability

4. In the past year, how often have you been verbally harassed (name calling, threats, etc.) at our school because of...					
a) your sexual orientation?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
b) your gender?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
c) how you express your gender?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
d) your race or ethnicity?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
e) your religion?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
f) because of a disability or because people think you have a disability?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never

Section E (continued)

5. In the past year, how often have you been physically harassed (shoved, pushed, etc.) at our school because of...					
a) your sexual orientation?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
b) your gender?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
c) how you express your gender?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
d) your race or ethnicity?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
e) your religion?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
f) because of a disability or because people think you have a disability?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
6. In the past year, how often have you been physically assaulted (punched, kicked, injured with a weapon) at our school because of...					
a) your sexual orientation?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
b) your gender?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
c) how you express your gender?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
d) your race or ethnicity?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
e) your religion?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
f) because of a disability or because people think you have a disability?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
7. How often have you been sexually harassed at our school, such as sexual remarks made toward you or someone touching your body inappropriately?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
8. How often have you had mean rumors or lies spread about you in school?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
9. How often have you had your property stolen or deliberately damaged, such as your car, clothing or books?	Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never

Section F

This last section is about some of your personal characteristics.

-
1. Below is a list of terms that people often use to describe their sexuality or sexual orientation. Please check all those terms that apply to you.

Gay Lesbian Bisexual Straight/
Heterosexual Questioning

If none of these terms apply to you, please tell us how you describe your sexuality or sexual orientation: _____

-
2. Below is a list of terms that people often use to describe their gender. Please check all those terms that apply to you.

Male Female Transgender Transgender
Male-to-Female Transgender
Female-to-Male

If none of these terms apply to you, please tell us how you describe your gender: _____

-
3. What is your race or ethnicity? Please check all those terms that apply to you.

White or African American Hispanic or Asian or Native
European American or Black Latino/Latina Pacific Islander American

Other (please tell us what is your race/ethnicity) _____

-
4. How old are you? _____

-
5. What grade are you in? _____

Thank you for completing the survey!

Teacher Survey

Local School Climate Survey (Staff Version)

The following questions are to assess the school climate from an adult perspective. Please select the answer that best describes your experience at our school.

1. How often do you hear the expression "That's so gay," "You're so gay," or other homophobic remarks made by students in school?

- Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never

2. Would you say that homophobic remarks are made by:

- Most of the students Some of the students A few of the students

3. How often do you hear these homophobic remarks from teachers or school staff?

- Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never

4. When you hear homophobic remarks, how often do you intervene?

- Always Most of the time Some of the time Never

5. When you hear homophobic remarks, how often have you seen other staff intervene?

- Always Most of the time Some of the time Never

6. How often have you heard racist remarks used in school (such as "nigger," "kike," "spic," "gook," etc.)?

- Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never

7. Would you say that racist remarks are made by:

- Most of the students Some of the students A few of the students

8. How often do you hear racist remarks from teachers or school staff?

- Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never

9. When you hear racist remarks, how often do you intervene?

- Always Most of the time Some of the time Never

10. When you hear racist remarks, how often have you seen other staff intervene?

- Always Most of the time Some of the time Never

Teacher Survey

11. How often do you hear sexist remarks from students?

- Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never

12. Would you say that sexist remarks are made by

- Most of the students Some of the students A few of the students

13. When you hear sexist remarks, how often do you intervene?

- Always Most of the time Some of the time Never

14. When you hear sexist remarks, how often have you seen other staff intervene?

- Always Most of the time Some of the time Never

15. How often have you heard comments about students or staff not acting "masculine" or "feminine" enough?

- Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never

16. How often do you hear these remarks from teachers or school staff?

- Frequently Often Sometimes Rarely Never

17. When you hear these kinds of remarks, how often do you intervene?

- Always Most of the time Some of the time Never

18. When you hear these remarks, how often have you seen other adults intervene?

- Always Most of the time Some of the time Never

19. In the past month, how many days have you not come to this school because you felt unfomfortable or unsafe?

- 0 days 1 day 2 or 3 days 4 or 5 days 6 or more days

20. Do you feel unsafe at our school because of...(check all that apply)

- your sexual orientation
- your race or ethnicity
- your gender
- how you express your gender
- your religion
- because of a disability

Teacher Survey

21. Below is a list of terms that people often use to describe their sexuality or sexual orientation. Please check all those terms that apply to you.

- Gay Lesbian Bisexual Straight/Heterosexual Questioning

If none of the terms apply to you, please tell us how you describe your sexuality or sexual orientation:

22. Below is a list of terms that people often use to describe their gender. Please check all those terms that apply to you.

- Male
 Female
 Transgender
 Transgender Male-to-Female
 Transgender Female-to-Male

If none of these terms apply to you, please tell us how you describe your gender:

23. What is your race or ethnicity? Please check all those terms that apply to you.

- White or European American
 African American or Black
 Hispanic or Latino/Latina
 Asian or Pacific Islander
 Native American

Other (please tell us what is your race/ethnicity)

24. How many years have you been teaching?

- 0-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21 or more

25. How many years have you taught at San Leandro High School?

- 0-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21 or more