

Commission Recommendation for FY09 ESE Safe Schools Funds

The mandate of the MA Commission on GLBT Youth is to examine every possible avenue to ensure the overall health and safety of GLBT youth in the Commonwealth. Youth in public schools comprise a majority of that population; therefore schools are a primary intervention point for GLBT youth health issues.

This recommendation is based on current available data and on information obtained from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE). It represents this Commission's *first* step in an on-going process to achieve measurable and lasting improvements in population health for GLBT youth. We recognize that the appropriation is limited to issues of safety, and can address such areas as achievement and drop-out rate only as they relate to student safety. No part of the recommendation has any necessary priority over another.

The ESE has been appropriated \$300,000 (State Budget Line Item 7010-0005) for the FY 2009 for "programming to ensure public schools' compliance with the board of elementary and secondary education's recommendations for the support and safety of gay and lesbian students and the implementation of related suicide- prevention and violence-prevention efforts." Funds appropriated in FY09 should be applied to achieve the objectives of the recommendations below. The Commission is committed to working closely with ESE leadership in fulfilling our mutual goals.

The Commission will incorporate this recommendation into its 2009 Annual Report, will publish the recommendation on its website, and will use it to evaluate programs and policies in FY2009. The Commission is guided by two major goals: to deliver maximum impact on GLBT youth populations; and to reduce the gap between GLBT youth and non-GLBT youth health outcomes. The Commission is committed to maintaining and strengthening the current infrastructure and services and seeking population-level changes by working across the prevention spectrum. Furthermore, although the Commission has historically focused on secondary schools, it is not our intent to exclude elementary and middle school from ESE's consideration.

INCLUSION OF BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

Background

Historically, the MA DOE officially referred to "gay and lesbian students," irrespective of the fact that bisexual and transgender students have always been a part of the sexual minority youth population.

Detail

In all mention of “gay and lesbian” by the ESE, including, but not limited to curricula, regulations, grant opportunities, and training documents, the terms “bisexual” and “transgender” must be added.

Funding Level:

No recommended level.

DATA-GATHERING

Background

The Commission recognizes that the Massachusetts DESE **has been a national leader in gathering and analyzing data related to GLBT students. Still, past and current** surveillance of GLBT youth populations is limited and limits effective public health policy. The ESE, working with the Commission, should make effective surveillance of GLBT youth populations a priority.

Although all GLBT youth are disproportionately at risk compared with their heterosexual peers, racial, ethnic and socioeconomic disparities within the GLBT youth population are alarming. Disparities for transgender youth remain unsurveyed to date, though anecdotally they are at critical levels. The past ten years of YRBS data has not been inclusive of transgender and gender questioning students.

The need to acknowledge and address health disparities within transgender and gender questioning youth populations is critical and is a primary goal of the Commission.

The ESE needs to capture transgender data, as well as better-detailed race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, and geographic data. ESE should consider supplementary assessment tools. For example, the DPH Youth Health Survey is currently being reworked, in collaboration with ESE YRBS specialists.

Details

- Ensure transgender student populations are measured;
- Ensure that 2007 YRBS data with subpopulations that include GLB students, is reported out fully, this year and in subsequent years, as in previous years;
- Ensure instruments provide information on ethnicity;
- Ensure instruments include socioeconomic status and geography.

Funding Level:

No recommended level.

SAFE SCHOOLS PROGRAM

Background

The Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Students has been in place since 1993, with a mandate to increase school safety and prevent suicide and violence related to gay and lesbian students. The Program's mission has been to assist public schools in implementing the 1993 Board of Education Recommendations on the Support and Safety of Gay and Lesbian Students, and in complying with the Massachusetts Student Anti-Discrimination Law (amended in 1993 to include sexual orientation). Since 1993, the safety of bisexual and transgender youth has been at issue in the state, necessitating a broader range of impact for both the Commission and the Safe Schools Program. The following recommendations address the current situation for GLBT youth in schools in Massachusetts.

Details

- **Program Coordinator:** ESE should hire a full-time coordinator for the Safe Schools Program by 9/30/08. The coordinator should create policy to improve program design and evaluation.
- **Focus on Needs of Underserved Populations:** ESE should develop the means for schools to address issues for students who identify as transgender, as well as GLBT Students of Color. This may include staff training, grants or other initiatives.
- **Evaluating/Targeting Programs and Grants:** ESE must generate information and evaluation to better identify and meet the needs of GLBT students.
 1. SES, racial/ethnic identity, urban/suburban, size of school must be included;
 2. The criteria by which ESE measures and evaluates outcomes of Safe Schools programs should be delineated.
 3. Assess compliance with the Student Anti-Discrimination Law Regulations.
- **GSAs.** The following issues must be addressed by the ESE:
 - Determine what populations are being served by GSAs and which populations are being left out in the GSA approach to GLBT student support;
 - Discover the reasons that some schools have historically not had GSAs;
 - Investigate the factors that contribute to GSA resilience/endurance or failure;
 - Ensure that GSA advisors are adequately trained and mentored;
 - Establish a reliable directory of GSAs and their advisors, as well as communications technology (i.e. listserv) to support their work.

Funding Level:

No recommended level.

COORDINATED SCHOOL HEALTH PROGRAM (CSHP)

Background

The Commission's approach is grounded in a public health model, reflected in the Coordinated School Health Program (CSHP). The purpose of the CSHP is to address school health through curriculum, professional development, community awareness, and family involvement. CSHP provides a framework into which GLBT student health logically fits. With primary focus on the MCAS and other testing, the Commission is concerned that health curriculum, for instance, is being weakened, thus putting GLBT students at greater risk.

Details

The Commission recommends active collaboration of the ESE with the Department of Public Health to achieve full implementation of the CSHP model within all Massachusetts school districts.

Funding Level:

No recommended level.

THE FOLLOWING ARE TO BE ACHIEVED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF EDUCATION:

CURRICULUM FRAMEWORKS

Background

ESE Regulations for the Student Anti-Discrimination Law stipulate that "all public school systems shall, through their curricula, encourage respect for the human and civil rights of all individuals regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin or sexual orientation." (603 CMR 26.00: M.G.L. c. 76, § 5.) In the recent past, the frameworks have included references to sexual orientation and GLBT-related content.

Detail

ESE should review the **MA Curriculum Frameworks and Vocational Technical Education Frameworks** in all subject areas to ensure adequate inclusion of GLBT-related content.

Funding Level: No recommended level.

TEACHER CERTIFICATION STANDARDS

Background

In 1994, the Board of Education reformed their certification standards. Equity competencies then required that a teacher master: "effective strategies within the classroom and other school settings to address discrimination based on each student's race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic class, or disability." (*Competencies for Certified Educators, 1995 Massachusetts Dept. of Education Certification Regulations, 7.11.*) They also stipulated that a qualified administrator "accepts and respects individual and group differences with regard to gender, language, race, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic background, and values".

Approved 10-20-08

Because of this language, sexual orientation could be interpolated into related certification provisions, regarding current equity issues for students and their equal treatment, freedom of expression, self-esteem, unique developmental and cultural needs, and family backgrounds.

The current equity competencies (603CMR7.08, Section 2d) have been considerably weakened (e.g., all mention of discrimination categories and developmental and cultural needs have been eliminated).

Detail

ESE should review certification standards (esp., 603 CMR 7.08, (c) Manages Classroom Climate and Operation and (d) Promotes Equity) to ensure that GLBT student welfare is explicitly and thoroughly addressed.

Funding Level: No recommended level