



*Sarah Schriber, Alliance Policy Director, leading GSA Advisor workshop.*



**The mission of the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance (the Alliance) is to promote safety, support and healthy development for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth, in Illinois schools and communities, through advocacy, education, youth organizing and research.**

## **Words from the Executive Director Inaugural Newsletter Welcome**

Welcome to the first installment of the Alliance's new quarterly newsletter! We are excited to bring you these regular updates on our work along with the opportunity to hear directly from youth leaders all over the state. We've structured this newsletter to include highlights from our work alongside more in-depth information about how we work to transform schools. We are also eager to hear back from you regarding what would be the most useful information to include – please share your thoughts with me at [shannon@illinoisafeschools.org](mailto:shannon@illinoisafeschools.org).

We've had another exciting and eventful start of the school year at the Alliance. Our work continues to grow and, thanks to all of you, our capacity has expanded as well to try to meet the needs of schools all over the state. To share just a few recent highlights, the Alliance has:

- Provided professional development and technical assistance to 5 elementary and middle schools over the past 2 months working with transgender students and their families
- Partnered with the Health & Medicine Policy Research Group to provide training to all Illinois Youth Centers (youth prisons) on working with LGBTQ youth
- Cemented an ongoing relationship with the new Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Administration with the goals of revising the student code of conduct to be less reliant on punitive school discipline, conducting an awareness campaign that students are protected based on sexual orientation and gender identity and how to report

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a violation, and providing professional development on sexual orientation and gender identity to all CPS personnel

- Presented our 2011 Alliance Brunch where, thanks to many of you, we hosted over 250 guests and honored Kraft Foods, Governor Quinn, and youth leader Emma M. from Evanston Township High School
- Hosted our Fall Youth Leadership Summit at Powerhouse High School on the west side of Chicago featuring all sessions facilitated by our youth leaders and reaching 109 youth and 35 adults participating in the GSA Advisors track
- Worked closely with Representative Kelly Cassidy on language to amend our current anti-bullying bill that is in line with the recommendations of the Illinois Schools Bullying Prevention Task Force
- Hired Iman Crutcher, our full-time Youth Organizer, to more fully realize the leadership of youth in every aspect of the Alliance's work and vision

And folks are also taking notice of this important work. From the *Windy City Times*, to the Associated Press to Chicago Public Radio, the Alliance's work and youth leaders have been featured in stories ranging from data collection on the needs of LGBTQ youth to how the Chicago Public Schools should realize its vision of fully implementing restorative discipline and comprehensive sexuality education. If you're interested in reading or listening to these stories, please visit our website at <http://www.illinoisafeschools.org/alliance-in-the-news/>.

At the Alliance, we envision a world in which youth develop to their fullest potential, learning in safe and nurturing schools, living in communities that accept and honor differences, where everyone has the freedom to express their sexual orientation and gender identity. Thank you for your partnership as we work toward this vision.

Sincerely,

Shannon Sullivan

#### Upcoming Events

11/16 - 18 Annual Convening of the National Safe Schools Roundtable

11/ 30 @ 10a – PSVI Meeting

12/ 5 @ Noon – Communications Committee call

12/9 from 6-9 p.m. GSA Networking Event [Youth Committee]

12/14 @ 10a – PSVI Meeting

1/ 13 – Professional Development in Urbana Dist 116

1/ 9 @ 5:30p – Communications Committee @ Alliance

2/ 6 @ Noon – Communications Committee call



#### Youth Committee Mission:

We educate youth on issues that affect them so that they can become leaders, take action, and make long term change. The Youth Committee is brilliant, intelligent, fierce and queer.

### Annual Fall Youth Leadership Summit

Henry Ford Academy: Power House High School  
(931 S. Homan Ave Chicago, IL 60624)  
November 12, 2011 from 8:30am- 4:30pm

This year we had an exciting new addition to the summit, a workshop track just for GSA Advisors and other adult supporters of GSAs, sponsored in part by OfficeMax. Total transformation of the school climate is key to our mission to make schools safer, and this Fall Youth Summit was our Youth Committee's contribution to the greater cause.

At the Youth Summit the participants created their own Make It Better videos, using creativity to show how they, as youth activists, are making it better for LGBTQ youth and their allies. The Make It Better Project is a campaign launched by the GSA Network to provide tools to students, parents, teachers, and other adult allies to take action to stop bullying and harassment in schools based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, and to create safe, welcoming school environments that actively support LGBT youth and prevent suicide.

After a full day of workshops on trans-inclusion, safer sex, educational justice, direct action organizing, LGBTQ terminology, and intra-community oppression, our youth gained the tools that they need to step out and step up in the work to make schools safer.



**Alliance Youth Committee rallies before event.**

#### **Words from our own Youth Committee:**

"The Youth Committee (YC) offered a place for me to sharpen my leadership skills while being creating friendships. The YC has helped me gain strength and do things that I never imagined I would do. It has helped me learn a lot about the queer community, most notably inter community oppression. I can clearly identify adultism and have come to realize the privileges I hold being a young adult and as a person who is not of color."

~ Anna Rangos

**109 Youth  
and 35 GSA  
Advisors  
participated  
in the Fall  
Leadership  
Summit.**

#### **How can you get more involved?**

##### **Contribute your time:**

Volunteers are essential to the work! You can choose your level of involvement, from a one-time event to ongoing committee work. For more info or to join us visit <http://illinoissafeschools.org/committees/>

##### **Become a Sustaining Donor:**

Help ensure safe schools in Illinois for every student! For example, a gift of \$25/month can help send a local GSA to one of the Youth Committee Summits. Visit [www.illinoissafeschools.org](http://www.illinoissafeschools.org) and click the Donate Now button.

##### **Host a House Party:**

Give the opportunity for your friends, family, or business associates to ally with you in making Illinois schools and communities safe and respectful places for all young people! For more info, please contact Loren Linder, Development Director at [loren@illinoissafeschools.org](mailto:loren@illinoissafeschools.org).

## The Policy Front Lines

### Policy Advocacy

At the Alliance, our policy work continues to be busy, exciting and, most important, moving forward. Our two biggest current initiatives:

#### Illinois Youth Survey

Just over a year ago, Prevent School Violence Illinois (PSVI), a broad-based coalition of partners led by the Alliance, successfully advocated for the passage of the Prevent School Violence Act (PSVA). The PSVA defined bullying for the first time in Illinois law, enumerated the characteristics of the students against whom bullying is prohibited – including sexual orientation and gender-related identity and expression – and expanded the reach of the legal requirement for schools to have a bullying policy to private, non-sectarian schools.

In addition, the Illinois School Bullying Prevention Task Force, mandated by the PSVA, got to work developing recommendations for effectively preventing and addressing bullying. Based on research demonstrating that “stand alone” or “pre-packaged” bullying programs show little to no efficacy when divorced from efforts to address the unique climate and culture of each school community, the Task Force recommended that school communities engage in overall school transformation to create optimal conditions for learning and development. Transformation requires a series of coordinated efforts to address the unique climate and social context of each school community, including data collection and data-driven decision making. How does it feel to be a teacher in the school? A parent? A student? One of the Task Force’s specific recommendations to schools for collecting data about their climate was for PSVI to partner with the IL Department of Human Services to develop questions uncovering students’ experiences with bias-based bullying to be included in the Illinois Youth Survey (IYS) administered to students in hundreds of Illinois schools every two years.

Since August, PSVI has been working with DHS, the University of Illinois’ Center for Prevention Research and Development, and M.Ed. students in the Youth Development Program at University of Illinois at Chicago, to develop two questions that will be a part of the core survey that students in 6th, 8th, 10th and 12th grade will take beginning in 2012. In addition, the group has been working to develop an optional battery of questions to dig deeper into the experiences of students with bias-based bullying from the perspectives of the target, the student engaged in bullying behavior, and the bystander. The questions are also designed to elicit students’ perceptions of the value of interventions and what motivates intervention or failure to intervene. Now, PSVI is conducting focus groups with youth leaders across the Chicagoland area to elicit feedback about clarity and relevance.

PSVI’s battery of questions about bias-based bullying may be the first survey of its kind – a student survey that collects data about school bullying motivated by or involving a broad range of personal characteristics. With this level of detailed information, schools will be able to more effectively develop relevant curricula and lesson plans, plan for professional development and student programming, and apply for new grant funding. Be sure that PSVI will be right there to support schools in taking on this

Ground breaking research has begun to confirm what those of us who advocate for LGBTQ youth have long known:

- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender non-conforming youth are particularly hard hit by bias and discrimination in youth-serving systems.
- These circumstances lead LGBTQ youth out of schools and into prisons.
- Illinois students are bullied on account of sexual orientation and gender identity (expression) significantly more often than other personal characteristics including race and religion [see GLSEN and CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey].

important work and making schools safer and more hospitable to learning and development.

**Words from our own Youth Committee:**

"Often in school people would assume my sexuality and it was just plain irritating, I wasn't bothering them. In one case, someone threw rocks at me and my friend because of our assumed sexualities. I am passionate about safe school's work because I want to make schools a place to learn, not to feel unsafe. Everyone deserves an opportunity to learn, regardless of sexual orientation."

~ Grace Gonia

Illinois Court Involved LGBTQ Youth Task Force

The Alliance has a well developed expertise working to address these "school-to-prison" issues from the perspective of students in K-12 and school communities and has joined a unique collaboration with Health & Medicine Policy Research Group (HMPRG) to address the issues from the perspective of LGBT youth in the juvenile justice system in Illinois. In partnership with Cook County Juvenile Probation, the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC), and others, the Alliance and HMPRG have convened the Illinois Court Involved LGBTQ Youth Task Force to adapt model policies and trainings addressing the needs of the population within the larger cultural climate and context of the system.

In the past year, the Task Force has developed draft policies for probation and the JTDC, which should be adopted by the spring. Task Force partners have also developed an "Court Involved LGBTQ Youth 101" training curriculum to be used with line staff and others. Sarah Schriber and Mykel Selph, Director of the Office of Girls and Gender at the JTDC have delivered the training numerous times to line staff and administrators in detention, as well as to the inaugural class of Aftercare Specialists at the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). Recently, DJJ requested that the Task Force deliver the training to staff in all eight Illinois Youth Centers across the state.

The groundbreaking work of the Task Force is being recognized nationwide as a model for other jurisdictions widely lacking such programs. We are eager to continue the work until we are no longer the model but just one of many, many systems that support and celebrate all LGBTQ youth.

## In the Schools

### Training the Trainers

**For every 5 students bullied on the basis of sexual orientation, 4 of them are straight.**

*(National Mental Health Association, 2002)*

For most students in school today, hearing "that's so gay" in the hallway is as common as the passing period bell. Sexual orientation is the second-

(continued)

- LGB youth are more likely to be expelled from school, arrested, or stopped by the police than their peers, even though they were less likely to engage in violence and other serious misdeeds [Kathryn Himmelstein and Hannah Brueckner, Yale University,].
- Girls who self-identified as lesbian or bisexual appeared to be at highest risk for punishment.
- At least 15 percent of youth in juvenile detention are LGBT youth [Angela Irvine, Associate Director of the National Commission on Crime and Delinquency].

most common reason that students in Illinois are bullied. Anti-LGBTQ bullying and harassment affects ALL students: those who are bullied, those who bully, and those who stand by and do nothing.

Despite the urgency and ubiquitous nature of this problem, teachers, counselors and social workers are receiving little to no training on LGBTQ issues in their college courses, and support staff (security, janitorial staff, cafeteria staff) generally receive none. With homophobic language and anti-LGBTQ harassment and bullying so prevalent, how can we ask our school staff to intervene without the education and tools to do so?

This is why the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance prioritizes professional development for school personnel across the state. We believe that school staff play a major role in creating the culture and climate within a school community, and thus they need education to truly provide safe and respectful environments for all students.

In keeping with our statewide mission, the Alliance has made a commitment to organizing new providers of professional development across the state through dedicated volunteers, school staff, and partner organizations.

In September, we partnered with organizations in the Sauk Valley area to provide a training-of-trainers to volunteers with our partner organizations, PFLAG Sauk Valley and Youth Outlook.

Our goal: to expand our network of trainers to ensure that there are members of the community who can actively advocate for professional development in their area schools, and work to develop a sustainable relationship with those schools to ensure that they remain pro-active in providing professional development to their staff.

**Training teachers on issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity is the single most effective strategy for creating a safe school climate.**

*(Szalacha, 2003. American Journal of Education)*



**Alliance Youth Committee raising public awareness.**

**Our Alliances**

**LGBT Community Fund presents a Needs Assessment Survey**

In October the LGBT Community Fund—an initiative of The Chicago Community Trust whose mission is to encourage philanthropy among members of the LGBT community, corporate entities, and private individuals, as well as to support nonprofit organizations and programs that better the lives of LGBT individuals and families in the Chicago area—kicked off its new Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Needs Assessment. The intent of the assessment is to gather information on the needs and issues facing the Chicagoland LGBT community in order to allocate funding to effectively meet those needs and address those issues. To support the Fund in its Community Needs Assessment, the Alliance encourages you take the online survey (available in both English and Spanish) and add your voice to those being gathered from our community. For more information and to take the survey, please visit <http://lgbtfund.org>.

**Words from our own Youth Committee:**

"I hope that, because of the Alliance, students will be less afraid to be who they are, and worry less about bullying because of it. I also hope that kids will feel more comfortable helping others who are going through struggles they've been through. And lastly, I hope that there will be a greater number of resources available to students who are figuring out their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. "

~Zackery Fraum

## The Alliance Brunch | ZED451

### A Celebration



**Stacey Horn, Board Member (L) & Emma Milliken,  
Activist of the Year (R)**

If you were one of the lucky people to attend the Alliance Brunch on Sunday, October 2, 2011, at ZED451 in River North (Chicago), you shared in our celebration of our good work and community building. In the tradition of years' past, the Alliance had the distinguished pleasure of presenting awards that honor the work of allies and activists who have exemplified key leadership and partnership in the Illinois LGBTQ safe schools movement. This year's recipients included: *Ally of the Year*, Kraft Foods; *Activist of the Year*, Emma Milliken, Senior at Evanston Township High School; and *Advocate of the Year*, Governor Pat Quinn.

The Alliance is especially grateful to all those who made this year's event such a huge success! The leadership of Event Chairs John & Char Cepek, Rocco Claps, and Sherrine Eckersley; the amazing Host Committee who tirelessly spread the word of this year's event and drew 250 attendees and countless new donors to the organization; and those who gave so much of their time and energy by serving on this year's Brunch Committee get a lot of the credit. This year's Honorary Committee was comprised of twenty-five federal, state and local officials who represent both sides of the political aisle!

**The Alliance Brunch 2011:**

*Ally of the Year,*  
Kraft Foods

*Activist of the Year,*  
Emma Milliken, Senior at  
Evanston Township High  
School

*Advocate of the Year,*  
Governor Pat Quinn



**Brunch Chairs (L-R): Sherrine Eckersley, Rocco Claps,  
and John & Char Cepek**

The success of the Brunch depended on all those who purchased tickets, made contributions in lieu of attending, donated silent auction items, provided sponsorships, and made additional donations at the event, and all of us at the Alliance thank you. Most notably we extend special appreciation to each of this year's generous corporate sponsors: Development Specialists, Inc., Northern Trust, Verizon, Abbott, BP, Ernst & Young, Kraft Foods, AT&T, and the Honorable Carol Ronen. Generosity like this empowers the Alliance to promote the safety, support and healthy development of LGBTQ young people across the state of Illinois.

Please visit our website at [www.illinoissafeschools.org](http://www.illinoissafeschools.org).  
Donate to the Alliance by clicking on the Donate Now button on the Alliance homepage.  
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