

Follow-up Qualitative Evaluations of Welcoming Schools Pilot Project

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A Report to Family Programs of the Human Rights Campaign

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Background: In 2008, the Center for LGBTQ Evidence-based Applied Research (CLEAR) prepared an evaluation report on the San Francisco Welcoming Schools Pilot Project (WS). This evaluation combined data from participant interviews (teachers, administrators, and parents), with classroom observations and results from school climate questionnaires conducted by Laura Szalacha, EdD. From that evaluation report,

“It is clear that the three schools met their goals of teaching the lessons of the Guide to their students. Furthermore, teachers gained skills and awareness through teacher trainings that were well attended and positively evaluated”

To determine the longer term impact of the Welcoming Schools Project on the pilot schools, CLEAR conducted a series of interviews with teachers and school administrators from 2009 to 2010. We interviewed three principals and three teachers from the three elementary schools that participated in the pilot study.

According to Kevin Gogin, Director of Support Services for LGBT Youth of the School Health Programs Department of the San Francisco Unified School District, "While we have not adopted the entire curriculum as a District, lessons, aspects, and some of the children's literature used within the Welcoming Schools Curriculum, is used by classroom teachers in conjunction with the adopted curriculum that can be found on our website at healthiersf.org/lgbt. This collaboration with HRC and the accompanying evaluation has been critical in improving our overall elementary program."

In 2009-2010, CLEAR continued to conduct classroom observations of current curriculum to determine the level of engagement of the students in both the newly adopted curriculum compared to classes taught by the same teachers of other health related classes.

Method:

Principals and Teachers were contacted by a member of the **Support Services for LGBT Youth of the School Health Programs Department of the San Francisco Unified School District** and asked to participate in a follow-up evaluation interview. The CLEAR team contacted those teachers and principals that agreed to participate and sent them an informed consent form. They then contacted and interviewed them by phone. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The contents of the interviews were reviewed for common themes and examples of statements that conveyed these themes.

Overall Themes from Principals:

- Welcoming Schools curriculum has been well received by principals and teachers and feedback is positive.
- Confidence and comfort in using the curriculum improved from year one to year two, however, more resources for continued use of material are needed.
- Children have been engaged with the material and the teachers have been willing to teach the material. Some principals stated that they wish materials used more multimedia formats, like blogging.
- All principals identified a need for consultation and peer networking with others using the WS curriculum. Consultation and resources for reactions from students, teachers, or parents is also a need.
- Several principals and teachers noted that more attention should be spent on integrating material into an overall diversity plan in order not to have “the flavor of the month.”
- The overall climate in all three schools has increased in sensitivity and acceptance of LGB families as a result of WS.
- The application of the WS curriculum is varied; some noted that teachers use the WS more or less as their primary source and follow closely plans outlined in the manuals; others tend to integrate them with other materials provided by the school district and their own creativity.

Example of Statements from Principals:

What impact did the intensive training have on teachers?

P: We had urgency in our school to advance the LGBT material because LGBT was so prevalent in our families. We had to honor it, appreciate and value it. So when WS came along we couldn't have been happier. Teachers really needed it; they were probably a little scared not having the proper materials. By piloting this and making it a school-wide priority, it empowered us. [It] left us with a sense of having the proper tools. It's so much easier now and it's part of everything we do.

Are the children responding to the lessons?

P: Absolutely ... I don't like the flavor of the month thing. Although we look at April as the month for family diversity celebration, we try to make it part of everything they do all year. It's wonderful. I have heard such a sense of pride in the children. There was this little girl from an LGBT family that was new to our school and she was very scared, so I took her by the hand and said, come on, we're going on a LGBT family scavenger hunt. And I walked all over the building and I pointed them out. I said, that little boy has two moms and that teacher has a partner. It was just nice that everyone was out. Everyone made it clear from the beginning that they all wanted to be out. That is the way it has to be. I'm proud of it.

What is the impact on the School Climate?

P: The WS curriculum gives the teachers and students a common language with which to discuss LGBTQ topics. The students have been responsive to topics, however, they are already acclimated to talking about diversity because of the area the school is located. The kids are now advocating for the gay community. The kids tell others, "That's not OK" when they hear gay slurs such as "that's so gay". And the kids are in tune with diverse families.

What are barriers to implementing the WS curriculum?

P: Principals and teachers move from school to school (especially in the current economic situation) and training new teachers to use the material should happen every year, so that everyone is on the same page.

Welcoming Schools Overall Themes from Teachers

- There is a need for continuous training. The original training provided to the teachers seems to have been received well, however, multiple interviewees stated that if the training was repeated each year that they believed the program would have more of an impact on the school/students/teachers.
- The interviewees stated that the program was well received by all involved, however, they also stated that their schools already had a base level of diversity training with the students. None of the teachers had concrete answers as to the level of involvement/acceptance of the parents.
- Time was reported as one of the barriers to further implementing the WS Guide, as was promotion of the Guide to colleagues. Further training and promotion of the Guide were recommended by interviewees.
- Multiple interviewees reported that the use of slurs was not highly present in their schools, but that through the training they noticed more colleagues addressing a student's use of slurs as they occurred.

- The material and resources from the WS Guide were reported by all interviewees to be both age appropriate and engaging for their students.
- Multiple teachers reported dialogue with their students regarding mutual respect and acceptance with their students after using WS Guide lessons.

Evaluators note: Not all teachers interviewed were equally familiar with Welcoming Schools. One teacher was not employed at her school during the time of the initial training program. She was given the Welcoming Schools materials, along with those from the San Francisco Support Services for LGBT Youth.

Example statements from Teachers interviews:

Do you notice any differences among students? And if so could you please be as specific as possible.

T: I did. I do notice a difference. Just, overall at the school. I've been at other schools and I feel like here I hear less use of derogatory terms, like the word "gay". At other schools it is just rampant. They call each other gay slurs because it is part of their daily language. And I feel at [school name] they know.....they have a little bit more information and they don't use it as often. And when they do use it, they use it as a play word-- that happened in a stressful class-- I make sure to make a point of it, but I do feel like it does help the school. That is one of the big reasons for the lesson.

Can you give any examples of students' responses' to the material?

T. I think overall they got from the lesson, one of the kids said exactly what I wanted them to learn. He said, "Everybody is different and we need to appreciate each other's differences." That for me was a key thing that that person said, and I hope other kids in the class got the same message because I think it is a very valuable lesson that will help you throughout your entire life.

How have your students responded to lessons based on the Welcoming Schools material—or material on this topic generated from the school district?

T: Well some of the children giggled and seemed surprised so they were definitely getting educated, and other children already seemed to be aware and already were very accepting. I think by the end everyone, because I am the teacher, saw that it was important to me that they be accepting of differences. And recognizing at the young age that they are, that they themselves may not know who they want in their family as a partner when they get older and have relationships

Have you noticed that the teaching of materials about family diversity and sexual/gender differences has had an impact beyond your classroom on overall school climate?

T: Definitely, like I said the climate at the school is wonderful when it comes to respect and just in comparison to other schools I've been to. The school climate, the teachers, everybody is on board, including the principal. And letting others know during the staff meetings that the lessons are there. Especially during our month to celebrate family diversity and all those issues. So I feel the school climate has really been effected and the parents, especially from my class. I was about to do a performance for the gay pride assembly and I thought the parents might have an issue, or it was just something in the back of my head, but it turned out not to be an issue. And I think it was as a result of the curriculum.

What barriers do you see to implementing information from the Welcoming Schools guide or other materials related to family diversity and tolerance for sexual and gender differences? Do you have any thoughts about how to reduce these barriers?

T: I don't know how you present it to schools but I think a barrier is having the teachers come on board with it. The barrier would be how involved teachers are with it. I feel like a big reason is that somebody carried the torch at our school. And is making sure that everybody knows that the curriculum is there and that they are using it. And that they are really always reminding everybody to use the curriculum and I could see that being a barrier at other schools if nobody was carrying the torch or making the teachers or the staff aware that the curriculum is there for everybody to use. And then if that happens it would just get put on a shelf and not used and not implemented.