

because of a history of queer faculty being fired. Teachers also worry that they will become ineffective if they are out to their students.

For the past three years, Love Makes a Family has conducted an anti-bullying program called the Middle School Transitions project, which is geared at educating junior high students. The presentations initially focused only on sexual minority issues, but the program faced less resistance when the workshops were broadened to address all kinds of bullying.

With regards to the state's progress Tinker notes, "We've just begun to scratch the surface and are still getting major resistance." A middle school outside Portland invited the program in to do an anti-bullying workshop for all sixth-graders. When administrators found out that it would include queer issues, they canceled the entire program.

The Middle School Transitions project is on hold because AmeriCorps, a federally run agency, did not renew funding.

Words do hurt

The anti-bullying credo used to be the familiar saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me." Recent studies prove that to be untrue—words can hurt, and queer students in particular are affected. A survey sponsored by the National Mental Health Association revealed that "Nine out of 10 teens (93 percent) hear other kids at school or in their neighborhood use words like 'fag,' 'homo,' 'dyke,' 'queer' or 'gay' at least once in a while, with 51 percent hearing them every day."

In addition, a National School Climate Survey conducted by GLSEN in 2003 revealed that

more than 84 percent of gay, lesbian, bi and trans students reported being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation. More than 90 percent regularly hear anti-queer comments at school. In some cases, verbal abuse escalates to a physical level. Almost 40 percent of gay, lesbian, and bi students and 55 percent of trans students who participated in the school climate survey reported being physically harassed.

Queers are not the only students who are affected by homophobic attitudes in school. Kids with queer parents often need the most support because they are called gay themselves. Those who are straight tend to overcompensate by behaving in extreme, stereotypically heterosexual ways.

Bullying can have a lasting impact. It affects students' ability to focus on their education and can make school unbearable. The National Mental Health Association reports that queer



"There is a tremendous confusion between sexual activity and sexual identity"

—Joyce Liljeholm

Oregon's report card in GLSEN's *State of the States 2004* assessment. The left column indicates the number of points possible; the right column shows Oregon's points per category.

students, compared to their peers, are more likely to skip school because of fear of harassment and that 28 percent will drop out of school—a number that is three times higher than for heterosexual students.

The Portland-based Equity Foundation reports, "In 1999, an estimated 20,000 7-12 grade students in Oregon reported that they had been targeted with anti-gay harassment at school or traveling to and from school."

Even more sobering, the National Mental Health Association estimates that "gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts."

Creating safe schools

To combat those statistics, Joyce Liljeholm, who worked as a school counselor for 32 years, helped start the Oregon Safe Schools and Communities Coalition. The all-volunteer group's mission is to "create safe schools and communities where every family can belong, every educator can teach and every child can learn regardless of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity."

"Ultimately," says Liljeholm, "I'd like to see state legislation embrace sexual orientation and gender identity as categories where students are protected."

Continued on Page 25

GRADE

F

GENERAL EDUCATION	(20): 11
Student/Teacher Ratio	(5): 1
Teacher Salary	(5): 4
Per-pupil Expenditure	(5): 4
Graduation Rate	(5): 2
STATE SAFE SCHOOLS LAW	(30): 0
Sexual Orientation Inclusive	(24): 0
Transgender Inclusive	(6): 0
STATE NON-DISCRIMINATION LAW	(20): 0
Sexual Orientation Inclusive	(16): 0
Transgender Inclusive	(4): 0
SEXUALITY EDUCATION	(15): 5
Statewide Requirement to Teach HIV/STD Education	(5): 5
Statewide Requirement to Teach Sexuality Education	(10): 0
LOCAL SAFE SCHOOLS POLICIES	(15): 12
Sexual Orientation Inclusive	(12): 12
Transgender Inclusive	(3): 0
SCHOOLS LAW THAT STIGMATIZES LGBT PEOPLE	(-10): 0
TOTAL:	28

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