

Respecting Differences

continued ▲ from front

education, and, Wallace said, school districts could lose state funding if there is no an anti-bullying policy in place.

Portland Public Schools recently stepped up its anti-bullying efforts which focus on prevention to create a safe and welcoming climate where students are not worrying about how they will be treated by their peers.

But with 201 school districts in the state, the coalition has a big challenge ahead of them in trying to see that the legislation is enforced across the board.

The Safe Schools Act is especially important now, as awareness of bullying among teens has increased in recent months, escalated after the reports of at least five young men who committed suicide as a result of peer harassment. This prompted "Savage Love" columnist Dan Savage and his partner to start the It Gets Better campaign, which involves celebrities, politicians, and citizens telling their stories of being bullied when school-aged, and how their lives are better now.

According to the 2009 National School Climate Survey, a 10-year study documenting the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students, nearly 9 out of 10 LGBT students experienced harassment at school in the past year and nearly two-thirds felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation.

Released in September, the study found that 84.6 percent of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed, 40.1 percent reported being physically harassed and 18.8 percent reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation.



Joy Wallace stands up to bullying in schools during a visit to the Q Center, a community facility for gay, lesbian, and transsexual youth on North Mississippi Avenue; and as the chair of the Oregon Safe Schools and Communities Coalition.

PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

According to the survey: Nearly two-thirds of students reported that they felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation, and more than a third felt unsafe because of their gender expression.

Twenty-nine percent of LGBT students missed a class at least once, and 30 percent missed at least one day of school in the past month because of safety concerns; compared to only 8 percent and 6.7 percent, respectively, of other secondary school students.

The grade point average of students who were more frequently harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression was almost half a grade lower than for students who were less often harassed (2.7 versus 3.1 percent).

Increased levels of victimization were related to increased levels of depression and anxiety and decreased levels of self-esteem.

Though Portland is the first major city in the nation to elect a gay mayor, Oregon as a whole is not as

accepting of gay minorities, as was evidenced by the anti gay marriage passage of Measure 36 in 2004.

Gay rights activists point to Washington's safe school efforts and California's Gay-Straight Alliance Network as national models of ways to provide safe and secure communities for youth that are free from harassment, violence, and discrimination of any kind.

The Oregon Safe Schools and Communities Coalition has modeled its mission on the two organizations and has recruited affiliations with Portland Public Schools, the Portland Association of Teachers, the Portland Council Parent Teachers Association, the Oregon chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, the Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center, and dozens of other groups to work toward ending prejudice and hate-motivated violence, while creating safe schools and communities for

families, teachers, and students alike.

To learn more about the safe schools coalition, visit its website, oregonsafeschools.org.

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Prayer Meeting & Seminar: Monday - Friday 12:00 Noon



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Worship Service 12:00 Noon
Evangelistic Service 7:00 P.M.

In Loving Memory

James Lee Combs Sr.

Funeral services for James Lee Combs Sr., who died Dec. 12, 2010, were scheduled Wednesday, Dec. 29 at 11 a.m. at Emmanuel Temple Church, 1033 N. Summer. Committal services will follow at Skyline Memorial Gardens.

He was born June 25, 1942 in DeSoto Parish, La. He worked as a maintenance supervisor for the Housing Authority of Portland. He was a volunteer manager, coach and board member for the Riverside Little League.

Survivors include his wife, Vera



Combs and two sons; Kenneth Combs Sr. and James Combs.

Arrangements by Caldwell's, Hennessey, Goetsch and McGee Funeral Home.

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