



A Silent Crisis: Creating Safe Schools for Sexual Minority Youth

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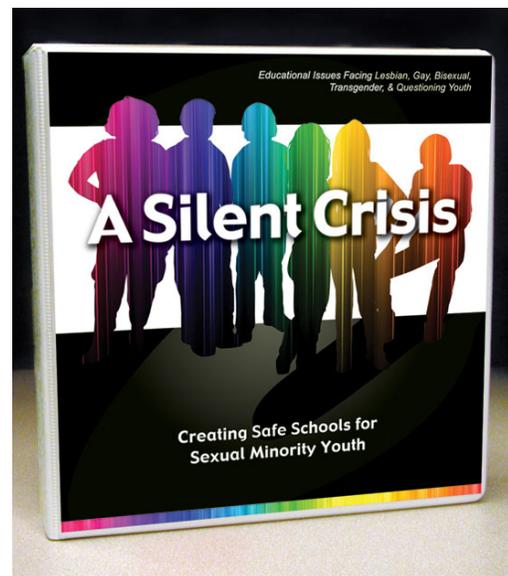
Meeting a Need

Many educators and administrators in school districts throughout Michigan have requested information and technical assistance to help them create school environments that are physically and emotionally safe for all students including sexual minority students (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning). Schools throughout Michigan and the nation have struggled to develop policies and train staff and students to support safe and “bully-free” environments that are conducive to students learning. This project was initiated as a direct response to school district requests.

Sexual minority youth often face harassment, abuse, and violence from classmates in school settings that put them at greater risk for serious problems such as substance abuse, HIV, and suicide, as well as school failure and dropout. The Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior (MA YRBS) surveys from 1997 to 2007 documented that sexual minority students are four times more likely to attempt suicide and over three times more likely to be threatened or injured with a weapon at school. For more information from the MA YRBS, go to: www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/hprograms/yrbs. The long-term effects of the harassment and violence have been documented in numerous national, state, and local reports.

The Resource Guide

The *A Silent Crisis: Creating Safe Schools for Sexual Minority Youth* resource guide includes a wealth of information for teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, and other professionals who want to learn more about issues related to safe schools for sexual minority youth. The guide was produced and compiled by Calhoun Intermediate School District, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), and Detroit Public Schools, with feedback from educators and youth advocates throughout Michigan and the nation. Now in its 5th printing, the guide is distributed by the Educational Materials Center (EMC), Central Michigan University. To date, more than 2603 copies of the guide have been disseminated across Michigan and 31 other states plus the District of Columbia. Those who participate in *A Silent Crisis* trainings receive the resource guide as part of the workshop. Additional copies of the resource guide can be purchased from the EMC for \$48.00 plus shipping. To request a copy, call 800-214-8961, email the EMC at emc@cmich.edu, or visit the website at <http://www.emc.cmich.edu/products/SilentCrisis.htm>.



Workshops for School Personnel

Overview. The MDE has supported regional *A Silent Crisis: Creating Safe Schools for Sexual Minority Youth* trainings for school personnel who want to learn more about issues related to this population and strategies for creating safer schools. To date, 34 regional trainings have been implemented in intermediate school districts, reaching 1181 participants from 222 school districts.

As a result of participating in trainings, participants have initiated support groups for GLBTO youth, conducted in-services for staff, reviewed in revised policies, posted literature to indicate accessibility, established or re-established gay-straight student alliances (GSAs), revised their sex education curriculum to include language more inclusive of LGBTQ youth, and developed a list of appropriate referrals.

Workshop Summary. The workshop is designed to help educators understand, assess, and improve school climate and safety for all youth, especially those who identify as gay lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning. Research consistently finds sexual minority youth to be at higher risk of homelessness, alcohol and substance abuse, harassment, assaults, suicide, school failure/dropout, and truancy.

Audience. School administrators, board members, counselors, social workers, psychologists, teachers, school nurses, youth serving agencies, parents, and all caring adults

Outcomes. Workshop Participants will:

- Gain working knowledge of major health and educational risks facing sexual minority youth
- Identify and discuss current terminology related to sexual orientation and gender identity
- Assess current school safety and climate
- Identify and analyze legal and policy implications affecting sexual minority youth
- Practice skills for responding to students, staff and the broader school community
- Develop a commitment and confidence to address school safety and climate issues
- Formulate an action plan to address safety and climate issues for sexual minority youth

What Education and Community Leaders Say About the Project

*As school leaders, superintendents bear the responsibility to ensure that our classrooms, hallways, and schools are safe for all of our students. Anything less poses a significant barrier to learning. The **A Silent Crisis** training and resource guide provide useful tools and strategies for providing safe, respectful and supportive learning environments for each of our students.*

Christopher A. Wigent, Superintendent
Wayne Regional Educational Service Agency

*As parents, one of our biggest fears is that our children might be harmed in some way. The Michigan Department of Education is to be commended for their pro-active approach in helping school personnel create an environment that is safe and shows respect for all youth and in particular our most vulnerable youth...those who are or perceived to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning. The **A Silent Crisis** training and resource guide paves the way for school personnel to create an environment where students can not only achieve academically, but equally important, witness the fair and respectful treatment of all who enter the doors of public education.*

Barbara Flis, Founder
Parent Action for Healthy Kids

*As a district administrator in Michigan's largest school district, I think the **A Silent Crisis** trainings and resource guide are critical for all school personnel from the bus driver, to the classroom teacher, to the social worker, principal, and parents. Sexual orientation and gender identity are often not talked about openly in our schools, and there are many students who struggle because they have no allies. The training raised my own consciousness about these issues and my commitment to educate others.*

Dr. Arlene Richardson, Program Associate Health Education
Detroit Public Schools

For More Information

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