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LGBT Students Give Secretary Duncan Homework

While many students sign yearbooks and trade digits and Twitter handles as school closes, Secretary Arne Duncan began June on assignment: using student input to expand Department efforts to help eliminate bullying against the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) student community.

June is LGBT Pride Month, and to kick off the month, and as part of ED?s Student Voices Sessions, the Secretary met with eight students from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and the Gay-Straight Alliance Network to hear directly from the students about their experiences and to discuss bullying and possible solutions.

Students shared examples of their school?s environment and the steps they?re taking to improve the climate for LGBT students. Each student mentioned the need for teachers to have sensitivity training, because many have not encountered discrimination against LGBT students and do not know how to address it. One student approached the problem by holding a session on a teacher professional development day with the support of the principal. The student said this approach was wildly successful, and the teachers started showing their support for LGBT students by wearing ?I support? pins. ?We are no longer ?those students,? he said. ?Teachers see us as their students along with everyone else.?

The students were emphatic about the need for comprehensive data to prove the widespread bullying and harassment of LGBT youth. They urged Secretary Duncan to start collecting information about behavior toward the LGBT community through the Civil Rights Data Collection. By identifying the severity and scope of LGBT bullying and harassment across the country, schools, students and families will be informed and advocates will be able to communicate concerns to schools and communities, as well as to policymakers. Knowing the nature and breadth of problems will help everyone create comprehensive solutions that work for both schools and students.

ED has helped fuel the national dialogue around bullying through two national bullying summits over the past two years, which brought together federal officials from several agencies, nonprofit leaders, researchers, parents, and youth to begin a national discussion around the issue and identify areas that need additional guidance and clarification to support bullying prevention

efforts. A third summit will be held later this year. Later this week, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Russlynn Ali will testify in a Senate hearing on bullying in schools held by Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) in, Des Moines, Iowa.

Read more from our Student Voices Sessions, which are designed to engage young Americans with policy issues so that ED can learn from their perspectives to connect policies with student needs.

Jun. 8, 2012
News Article
http://www.ed.gov/blog/2012/06/lgbt-students-give-secretary-... [1]
Homeroom Blog of Department of Education
Samuel Ryan

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