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For NYC GSAs, in unity there is strength

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While I was in New York this past December, I had a chance to host a meeting with a group of activists and youth organizers from across New York City that were working with GSA activists in NYC schools doing amazing GSA and safe schools organizing.

The ?New York City Consortium GSA Network? gathered with the hopes of coming up with ways to support existing organizing efforts as well as a more coordinated approach to GSA organizing in New York City's high schools. Represented were groups that were youth-of-color serving organizations in the Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn, such as Sistas and Brothas United [1], Desis Rising Up and Moving [2], and Make the Road New York [3], as well as the NYC LGBT Center?s Youth Program [4] and Gay-Straight Alliance Network. Other groups who will be joining the effort in 2013 include FIERCE [5], Audre Lorde Project [6], and the Brooklyn and Staten Island LGBT Community Centers. While all of these groups are doing various forms of amazing youth work, this is the first time there will be a coordinated effort with a true sense of unity amongst the New York City GSA clubs.

Safe Schools Campaign [7] from LGBTQ Justice Project @ MRNY [8] on Vimeo [9].

?The NYC GSA Network will help the youth in Brooklyn and Queens by letting them know that they are not alone in the amazing work they are carrying out in their schools. More specifically, LGBTQ youth of color will be able to speak about the issues that are affecting their schools and communities,? says Make the Road NY LGBTQ youth organizer Ivan Luevanos.

Olin Winn-Ritzenberg, youth coordinator of the LGBT Center?s YES program, says: ?Our efforts to organize a larger network of NYC GSAs could have a powerful impact on student leaders who are ready to turn the invaluable work they do within their schools into a city-wide campaign for safe and inclusive schools for LGBTQ youth.?

In New York City, racial and gender profiling has resulted in massive numbers of LGBTQ youth of color being stopped and frisked by the police. The issues facing LGBTQ youth in New York City are in many ways a prime example of the intersections of queer, racial and economic justice that GSA Network is currently trying to address around school pushout and access to relevant, quality

education for LGBTQ youth.

?Too many LGBTQ students withdraw from and are systematically pushed out of school. Our NYC GSA organizing efforts can address this cycle and move more LGBTQ youth through high school and on to college,? said Olin Winn-Ritzenberg when asked about some of the major issues facing LGBTQ youth in New York City schools today.

?Through the NYC GSA Network we hope to curtail the various push out methods like suspensions that have led LGBTQ youth to not receive the education that they deserve,? adds Ivan Luevanos.

In our role supporting the NYC effort, GSA Network is excited about the potential for LGBTQ youth in New York City through this powerful collaboration of LGBTQ and community organizing groups.

?I hope that the NYC GSA organizing effort can result in a student-led movement to enforce those protective structures that already exist in our schools and to respond to student needs that are not being met,? says Olin.

And Ivan who has been doing GSA organizing in Brooklyn and Queens over the last year, hopes ?that the NYC GSA organizing effort will educate and empower LGBTQ youth by showing them that in unity there is strength. They will not only be able to gain a safe space in their school but demand that all NYC respect and acknowledge the importance of LGBTQ youth reforming schools.?

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Links:
[1] http://www.sistasandbrothasunited.org/
[2] http://www.drumnyc.org/
[3] http://www.maketheroad.org/
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