
Rainbow Flag in School District 61 on National Day Against Homophobia

Members of School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria) Gay Straight Alliance Advisory Committee are visiting District Schools on May 14, 2008 with a Rainbow Flag Kit containing materials to help schools plan for National Day Against Homophobia activities on May 14, 2008.

"The Board sees the promotion of human rights and equality of opportunity for all students as fundamental to a positive school culture," said Tom Ferris, Board of Education Chair.

"All students, staff and parents are entitled to a safe learning environment," said Trustee Charley Beresford, Chair of the District Gay Straight Alliance Advisory Committee. "We are inviting everyone to show their support for diversity and to actively make our schools safer by taking pro-active steps against homophobia" said Beresford.

"Specifically, we are asking everyone to challenge the use of the phrase "That's so Gay" and other homophobic slurs. "That's So Gay" is often used to tease others and to show disapproval of something or someone. Whether intended or not, this phrase sends a homophobic message about people who are gay," explained Beresford.

Murray Harris, a teacher in the Greater Victoria School District who also has two sons at middle school, is proud of the activities planned at their school in recognition of the day. "My sons are not teased at school for having two dads because of events such as Anti-Homophobia Day. My sons are safe and happy and my husband and I feel welcome at the school. That is important," Harris stated.

All Victoria schools will be receiving a kit that includes posters, suggestions for activities and rainbow flag tattoos. The rainbow flag is a symbol indicating a gay friendly and safe environment. It is representative of diversity in the gay community.

With the changes in Canadian law regarding gays and lesbians in recent years one might wonder if such events are still necessary. A 2006 McCreary study on teen suicide in British Columbia found that young women who are lesbian are five times more likely to attempt suicide than other teens. Young men who are gay are twice as likely to attempt suicide. An earlier study showed that 37 percent of gay and lesbian youth feel like outsiders at school and nearly two-thirds hear homophobic remarks made by other students.

The Greater Victoria School District was the first District in British Columbia to establish a comprehensive policy and action plan to support sexual minority students, staff, and parents. The National Day Against Homophobia offers an opportunity to build on the District's work to challenge homophobia and make schools safer for everyone.

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