what are **you** going to do to end the Silence?

**DAY of SILENCE**

[www.dayofsilence.org](http://www.dayofsilence.org)

> K-12 Students: Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN), 121 West 27th Street, Suite 804
> New York, NY 10001 > phone 212-727-0135 fax 212-727-0254 info@dayofsilence.org

> Colleges & Universities: United States Students Association, 1413 K Street NW, 9th Floor,
> lgbt@usstudents.org

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A new year brings a new and (we hope) improved look and feel for Respect. As GLSEN prepares to celebrate its ten-year anniversary this spring, we’ve chosen to devote this issue to the people who take our message and deliver it to the world: GLSEN Ambassadors. The Ambassadors we profile all work in various ways to bring GLSEN’s vision to their communities. Their individual journeys are inspiring and affirming of our diverse constituency.

As always, we take a look at the amazing work of our student leaders and a local chapter: Allison Bland gives us a first hand account of her triumphs and challenges in her Virginia school and our own Myles Gideon profiles the great strides of GLSEN Grand Rapids for this issue’s Chapter Spotlight.

GLSEN’s busy fall season gets a re-cap with highlights from the Back 2 School event in Los Angeles, a report from the Midwest Summit and an overview of the Days of Action.

Visit us at www.glsen.org for up to the minute GLSEN news and events, and don’t hesitate to support our work with a secure online gift. As always, we look forward to your feedback at respect@glsen.org.

Joshua Lamont
Executive Editor
I am currently a senior in high school. Last year, when I was a junior, I was introduced to the idea of a Gay Straight Alliance. Being gay myself, I decided that this would be a good idea to do at my school. Keep in mind that I live in a small, rural conservative town. Upon doing my research, I discovered that three high schools around my area have GSAs. My research continued throughout the year. Towards the end of the year, I was set—I even had an advisor! Initially, I expected seven people to join, tops. On the first day, 19 people showed up...

However, my conservative town apparently wasn’t ready for a GSA. The local newspaper ran a condemning front-page story on us, which was read by everyone and caused some major setbacks for the club. The day after the article ran, there were posters placed around the school informing students of a “Straight” club called SAFE (Students Against Faggots Everywhere). The administration quickly tore down these offensive flyers but they were just put back up. All over school that week, people were planning on attending our GSA meeting just to sabotage it. Although that didn’t happen, the prospect of further discrimination remains a real concern.

Despite everything that’s happened, there has been a lot of praise for our GSA. Many students told me that they wanted to attend but they feared that their parents would disown them even if they were straight. Thankfully, I’ve helped to change so many kids’ lives by starting this club and hopefully the work will last.

Name: Robert
State: MI
Age: 18

That first meeting was like a dream to me, I was finally around people I could be myself with. I didn’t have to put on the “Straight face” (as my friends would say when I pretended to be straight). Eventually CTA’s members and sponsors helped me realize that by hiding who I was from my family, I was only making things worse for myself and all of my friends. One day, with the support of my CTA friends and sponsors, I sat down and had the “I’m gay chat” with my mother. I felt so liberated after that conversation. I never would have been able to come out to my friends and family without the support and help of my fellow CTA members and sponsors. I thank god everyday that I found that sign and found the courage to go to that meeting. If CTA hadn’t existed at my school, I would be living a lie today. I only wish other students struggling with their sexuality would have access to a GSA or find the courage to become involved with one.

Name: Sidney
State: FL
Age: 16

For complete poll results, visit www.glsen.org

By the numbers...

This fall, GLSEN commissioned Widmeyer Research and Polling to conduct a national poll of 9th-12th graders across the country to study attitudes about sexual orientation, name-calling, and general attitudes toward lesbian and gay people in schools.

The poll found that 5% of America’s high school students identify as lesbian or gay, 16% have a lesbian or gay family member and 72% know someone who is lesbian or gay. Other key findings include:

- Anti-gay language is rampant: 66% of students report using homophobic language, such as “that’s so gay” to describe something negative, while 81% report hearing homophobic language frequently or often in their schools.
- Parents, friends and family influence students’ attitudes most: 65% of students identify their personal experiences with gay people as an important influence in their attitudes about gay people; 58% note the important role their parents play while 28% acknowledge the role of television with gay characters.
- Teachers and peers are key: 79% of students were somewhat or very likely to listen to a respected teacher about why anti-gay language is harmful and inappropriate; 69% said that knowing a gay classmate is likely to make students more tolerant.

For complete poll results, visit www.glsen.org
In November, The Student Organizing Department and GLSEN Chicago staged the Midwest Regional Summit in the windy city. Eleven Jump-Start student organizers from the region converged on the city to participate in and help facilitate workshops at GLSEN Chicago’s Youth Leadership Summit, which was attended by over 100 participants. The weekend’s agenda focused on action planning, coalition building, communication, team building and workshop facilitation.

The student organizers also expanded upon their past experiences and skills to gear up for upcoming Days of Action, with an emphasis on Transgender Day of Remembrance and Dr. MLK, Jr. Organizing Weekend all building toward the Day of Silence on April 13, 2005. After an inspiring weekend of workshops, networking, eating great food and having fun, the student organizers left with comprehensive action plans and a clear set of goals for future projects.
Days of Action

This year GLSEN’s Student Organizing Department began a new chapter in its work by supporting quarterly days of action, each with a specific focus towards building the capacity of students and student clubs to organize and create campaigns that ensure safer schools for all.

GLSEN’s Voter Registration Week was a weeklong action mobilizing students and student clubs to get involved in the political process. From students registering to vote themselves to getting others registered to vote, the student organizers took the opportunity to have their voices heard!

GLSEN also observed and supported the Transgender Day of Remembrance during the week of November 15-19, encouraging students and student clubs to remember and educate communities about ending violence based on gender identity/expression.

In the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., GLSEN launched the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Organizing Weekend to help encourage the importance of building relationships with other groups to better understand the roots of organizing in social justice. Students and student clubs examined the dynamics of co-organizing activities about and trainings on coalition building, networking, organizing and social justice.

And coming in April...

The Day of Silence, a project of the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) in collaboration with the United States Student Association (USSA), is a student-led day of action where those who support making anti-LGBT bias unacceptable in schools take a day-long vow of silence to recognize and protest the discrimination and harassment — in effect the silencing — experienced by LGBT students and their allies. Across the country last year an estimated 450,000 students in over 3,000 K-12 schools and over 600 colleges took part in the Day of Silence.

For more info, visit www.dayofsilence.org.
GLSEN held its annual Back 2 School Party in September at the Los Angeles home of Jeff Quinn and Randy Fishburn. The star-filled event laid the groundwork for GLSEN’s upcoming LA Respect Awards, with presentations by student speakers Thalia Stein and De ‘Vallion Linzy, live and silent auctions conducted by actress Jennifer Tilly, and lots of dining and dancing.

The event brought out Hollywood’s best and brightest including Amazing Racer Chip Arnt, MTV president Brian Graden, actress Sharon Lawrence, pro tennis star Anne White and producer Craig Zadan. GLSEN ‘stars’ such as Executive Director Kevin Jennings and Board President Christie Vianson were also on the scene to celebrate and present.

A special thanks goes out to Quinn and Fishburn, who have hosted the event for the last seven years. Also, thanks to VH1, Jaeger-Le Coultre/Anne White and Steve Sandoval for all the exciting live auction items. MTV, Perrier, Smirnoff and The California Federation of Teachers also lent their gracious support.

GLSEN’s education department unveiled the much anticipated Lunchbox 2 in November. Following on the heels of the innovative original Lunchbox, the second generation version expands in scope by framing LGBT issues in a broader context of diversity and human rights. It provides more activities for specific audiences as well as more participant-directed initiatives that offer concrete and tangible strategies that can be applied directly in schools.

To order a lunchbox, visit the education section at www.glsen.org

Kirk Bell, GLSEN’s former Educational Training Coordinator, was instrumental in creating both Lunchboxes. His ten years of service with GLSEN have been an inspiration for all and we wish him the best in his future endeavors.
Over the last two years I have proudly served as chair of the GLSEN Phoenix chapter because when I look across my university classroom in my mind’s eye I see empty seats — seats that should be filled by LGBTQ students who were silenced, marginalized, harassed, and assaulted in school. Local K-12 schools have taught these missing students that their contributions are neither wanted nor valuable. My work with GLSEN centers on returning those students to their rightful place in my classroom. In my efforts to do so, I bring my intellectual and activist curiosity to the table and draw directly on my anthropological background in any number of ways: 1) to unravel or deconstruct how the meaning of differences such as sexual orientation or gender identity/expression get constructed and vary over time and across cultural contexts; 2) to listen carefully to the LGBTQ student movement’s call for justice and translate it into terms that school counselors, or public library staff or suicide prevention hotline volunteers can “get;” and, 3) to combine theories of social change with substantive knowledge about LGBTQ youth in order to network and organize my community.

However, my ambassadorship with GLSEN works in both directions — I try to connect the university to the LGBTQ K-12 student movement, and I also incorporate what I have learned from young people in the LGBTQ K-12 student movement into higher education. The GLSEN Lunchbox materials, for example, and my participation as a GLSEN trainer have both influenced not just what I teach but how I teach in my university classroom.

During a time period and in a place where public education is underfunded, critiqued and devalued, the work I do with GLSEN inspires me, reminds me that education matters — be it in K-12 schools, in the community, or on a university campus.
As an Ambassador for GLSEN, I have learned the great importance of networking. This fall, I attended a local workshop held by a leader of my local PFLAG chapter in North Carolina, and am now on a committee to help with their organization. I have built relationships with several of the adults who lead PFLAG, and I feel like I have their support with my GSA and our activities.

I’ve also worked to incorporate GLSEN’s Days of Action into our GSA’s events for this year such as Voter Registration Week where we sold baked goods at a “Powder Puff” football game, and helped register students old enough to vote. For Transgender Day of Remembrance, we had a GSA meeting to educate the group on genderqueer issues, and the club mounted a poster campaign about various genderqueer people who have been murdered simply because they expressed themselves. For Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Organizing Weekend, we did another poster campaign with a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and information about the significance of the Day.

GLSEN has helped me to realize my potential in student organizing for a better and safer environment in my school and community. I feel my work with the school stands out because I’m a student working with an organization on a national level. I hope to do other types of organizing after high school and continue working for GLSEN in my senior year, because it’s really opened my eyes to the world of activism.

When my gay son, Robbie Kirkland, committed suicide during his freshman year of high school in 1997, I was immediately inspired to activism. Robbie couldn’t find peace with his sexuality because of the many accumulated years of pain and harassment he experienced in schools which offered him no safety from the continued abuse.

For eight years, I have been sharing Robbie’s story (www.robbiekirkland.com) in the hopes of preventing harm from coming to other youth and making schools safe. During and throughout this time, GLSEN has equipped me with the resources and information to use in my numerous speeches and interviews for newspaper, magazine, television and radio. Being a GLSEN ambassador means telling my own story, and also framing it in a larger context of the struggle for safe and inclusive schools for all students. Central in my message is my role as a mom. I know the impact my words have, especially on the young, and I intend to continue traveling as far as it is necessary to get out my story and GLSEN’s message.

Being a GLSEN ambassador also includes daily prayer for the safety and equal rights of all GLBTQ people, especially youth, and for strength and guidance in my next step of activism.
GLSEN’s Education Program, where we engage and empower educators to enable every student to fully participate in school life, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression, is so important to Dwight that he’s been supporting GLSEN as an Ambassador Donor since our founding in 1995. Through our monthly giving program, Dwight’s donation is automatically charged to his credit card each month, giving GLSEN a steady and reliable source of support for all our programs.

By giving to GLSEN at a minimum of $35 per year, either through monthly giving or as an annual gift, you will become an important Ambassador in our work to make anti-LGBT bullying, harassment and discrimination unacceptable in schools. In addition to our work with educators, you will be supporting the students impacted by our work, which totals more than 4 million during the last ten years, and our advocacy efforts in the 41 states that do NOT protect LGBT students from bullying and harassment.

Ambassador Donors annually receive three editions of Respect, GLSEN’s newsmagazine, which chronicles the fight against anti-LGBT bias in America’s schools. They can also register for our Safe School Action Network in order to take appropriate supportive action in their own communities.

“Out of all the great work GLSEN does, the work they do with educators is most important to me,” says long-time donor Dwight Foley of Charleston, West Virginia. “High School is already such a confusing time for students growing into young adulthood. For LGBT students dealing with their sexual orientation, it can be even worse. To know that there is a visibly supportive teacher at school who they can trust is so important for students.”

Christie’s experience as a school board member inspired her to become more involved in supporting GLSEN, eventually joining the national board and becoming board president. In addition to the work Christie does in that role, she is also a member of the Honor Society, the group of donors who make an annual major gift to GLSEN of $1,200 or more. The Honor Society is a major source of support for GLSEN’s work to end anti-LGBT bias in America’s Schools.

“In addition to all the benefits of Ambassador donors, Honor Society donors receive special invitations to events with Founder and Executive Director Kevin Jennings and/or other notable leaders in GLSEN’s work, mention in our annual report, a commemorative pin with the GLSEN logo and more.”

“To me, being an ambassador to GLSEN means more than just writing a check,” says Jeff Quinn, GLSEN board member and long time host of GLSEN’s Graduation & Back to School fundraisers in Los Angeles. “It’s about introducing other people to the great work GLSEN does and letting them know how they can support that work. It’s my experience that most people want to help change the world, they just need to know how. When I introduce them to GLSEN, I’m showing them how.”

Another great way to support GLSEN’s work is by asking your corporation to become a sponsor of one of our events. A current listing of sponsorship opportunities is available on our website. You can find out more about event sponsorship or being on a benefit committee by contacting our Events Manager at (212) 727-0135 ext. 130 or events@glsen.org.

Donate online at www.glsen.org.
After attending TRA, I used all of my training to advocate for safer schools, specifically focusing on my own interest in the college admissions process as a rising senior, to personally survey over 70 Historically Black Colleges and Universities. My questions to the schools ranged from whether or not resources and support were available for students on an individual basis, to if there was a general harassment policy that encompassed sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

Soon I was asked to be a Southern Regional Co-Chair for the Jump-Start Leadership Team. By being asked to be “A leader to the leaders,” I realized how supported I was by GLSEN, and in turn, the experiences I have gained from the Days of Action have been tremendous.

I have registered voters in the West Hollywood neighborhood in Los Angeles, and taught canvassing techniques back in my hometown of Virginia Beach, VA. I even wrote an article for the local newspaper on my experiences.

I was exposed to Transgender Day of Remembrance for the first time, and inspired to give my senior speech in front of my entire student body on the topic of gender identity/expression—no one had ever gone “there” before.

In January, I attended and helped to facilitate the Students of Color Organizing retreat in Minneapolis for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Organizing weekend.

Finally, in April, I will push once again for my independent school to observe the national Day of Silence. Although my student club’s attempts were unsuccessful last year, I hope to use my status as student council association president this year to more easily meet with the administration and to communicate the need for the day to happen in our school.

I feel very lucky to be involved with GLSEN, and though I’m graduating this year, I hope this is a community I can be a part of for years.
During that time, GLSEN Grand Rapids has established itself within the Western Michigan community as an organization truly committed to creating safe schools for all, and has helped ensure that LGBT and allied students get the support and respect they deserve. On a programmatic level, their work has focused on three major projects: Actively building alliances with local organizations; Continuing to support student clubs, commonly known as gay-straight alliances (GSAs); and working on a matching funds program for getting LGBT-related media resources in local high schools.

Joanne Simmons, GLSEN Grand Rapids’ Education and Outreach Chairperson, cited the “symbiotic energy” that the chapter has focused on creating with LGBT-related and social justice groups, around overlapping missions and goals. The Chapter is a part of the GLBT Coalition of Western Michigan, along with organizations like PFLAG Grand Rapids and Windfire, a local youth support group. In the past year, the chapter joined a number of groups from the Coalition to organize a host of successful initiatives including a dessert auction to raise funds for LGBT youth programs, a community building event featuring GLSEN’s Executive Director, Kevin Jennings, and a social-justice grant award program for area schools.

GLSEN Grand Rapids’ leaders also focus on creating and maintaining connections with students clubs in the area. The chapter has co-hosted a number of local GSA summits, always in partnership with one of approximately twelve local student clubs and its advisors. Simmons describes the summits as spaces for “networking and news,” and adds that they are beginning to focus more on components of teaching leadership and providing a space for GSA members and leaders to truly learn from one another.

The chapter has also pioneered a matching-funds endeavor to get LGBT-related resources into area high schools. They actively work with school administrators to increase the availability of LGBT-related resources in student and staff media centers, and offer to match the funds earmarked by the school with funds raised by the chapter. Through this project, more high school students and staff will have access to relevant and important information about LGBT issues and people, and the relationships between GLSEN Grand Rapids and local high school administrators will ideally be enhanced.

Congratulations, GLSEN Grand Rapids, for many jobs well done, and best of luck in the coming years!

Please visit www.glsengr.org for more chapter information.
S purred on by continuing attacks from opponents and questions from educators and school administrators, GLSEN and a consortium of national organizations, with leadership from the National School Boards Association (NSBA), published a resource document to help schools address legal issues surrounding students’ sexual orientation and gender identity.

The brochure, “Dealing with Legal Matters Surrounding Students’ Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity” was mailed to every high school principal and school board in the country. It provides practical guidance for policy makers and administrators on schools’ legal rights and responsibilities with respect to students, school programs, and curriculum. Using a Q&A format, it addresses such questions as: What are your legal responsibilities as a school leader when it comes to student-sponsored clubs such as a Gay-Straight Alliance? What should you do if you learn students are being harassed because of their sexual orientation? Also included are resources for additional information on LGBT issues.

“A good deal of misinformation and concern currently surround lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues in the schools,” said Julie Underwood, NSBA general counsel and principal author of the publication. “By providing clear information on schools’ legal rights and responsibilities, we want to help educators respond to questions that may arise. Most important, we hope to help improve the educational climate for all our nation’s students.”

To view the resource, visit the Resource Library at www.glsen.org.

overheard...

“We need folks who are teaching to represent our values”
- Congressman Jim DeMint (R-SC), speaking at a senatorial debate in Charleston

“Lesbianism is so rampant in some the schools in southeastern Oklahoma that they’ll only let one girl go into the bathroom at a time... How is it that that's happened to us?”
- Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK), on the campaign trail

“I think some of the militants in the gay community are asking for this fight because... they want to be confrontational."
- Radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh, in an on-air response to a high school English teacher concerned about the treatment of LGBT students in her school.
As I am sure many of you are, I am feeling more than a little down today. I watched the election returns with growing dismay as candidates who stood for greater inclusion of LGBT people went down to (in some cases apparent) defeat and discriminatory ballot measures won, often by outrageous margins.

I would be less than honest if I did not admit to feeling a bit deflated today. As an educator and activist who has devoted nearly 20 years of my life to ensuring safe schools for all students, particularly those who are or are perceived to be LGBT, I am concerned for not only what this may mean for these students but what this could mean for our education system over the next four years.

According to the 2003 National School Climate Survey, 1 out of 3 LGBT students report skipping school at least once in the last month because they were afraid to go.

These are difficult times for our youth. But now is not the time to lose hope.

Those in whose footsteps we follow faced far darker days in their struggles for justice – struggles in which they inevitably prevailed.

Think of African-Americans who in the 1880s saw their civil and voting rights stripped away as they were disenfranchised after the false morning of Reconstruction.

Think of the Progressives and LGBT people of the 1950s who lived in constant fear of the hysterical witch-hunts of the McCarthy era.

And many of us know first-hand the devastating effect of our government’s callous response to the deaths of thousands of Americans, predominantly gay men, to AIDS in the 1980s. Whatever we are feeling today, our forbearers felt it ten-fold in the dark days of their struggles.

I remain hopeful because, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “The moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” Indeed the events of the 2004 elections seem to have lengthened the arc of our struggle, but inevitably, justice will prevail.

At GLSEN we continue to press toward our vision of a future in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

And we are encouraged by the firm belief that Americans understand that violence, bullying and harassment of any kind is wrong. The same faith that made me believe the Red Sox could win the World Series, an event over eight decades in the making, keeps me strong.

I am sure our victory will come a little faster than that. Now, we simply get back to the important work we still have to do.

Sincerely,
Kevin Jennings
GLSEN’s Executive Director
NO STICKS. NO STONES. NO DISSING

NO NAME-CALLING WEEK

[www.nonamecallingweek.org]
YOU’RE NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO’S PROUD