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Contact: Cathy Renna
Renna Communications
(917) 757-6123
cathy@rennacomunications.com

Study Finds Half of Principals Deem Bullying a Serious Problem at Their School, Yet Appear to Underestimate Extent of Problem for Gay Students

Nearly a Third Say Teachers Ill-Equipped to Handle Bullying Based on Sexual Orientation

NEW YORK, May 12, 2008 – A new study of public school principals released today by GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, in collaboration with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) finds that half of principals view bullying as a serious problem at their schools, yet they appear to underestimate the extent of harassment that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students experience.

The study, *The Principal's Perspective: School Safety, Bullying and Harassment*, conducted by Harris Interactive® on behalf of GLSEN, surveyed 1,580 K-12 public school principals between June 15 and August 3, 2007.

While a majority of secondary school principals report that students at their schools have been harassed because of their gender expression (how masculine or feminine they are) (95%) or because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation (92%), few principals believe this to be a frequent (very often/often) occurrence (12% and 9%, respectively). However, previous GLSEN studies of both students and teachers have shown that LGBT-identified students and those perceived to be LGBT are harassed at much higher rates than their non-LGBT peers. GLSEN's *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America* reports

that 90% of LGBT teens have been harassed or assaulted in the past year vs. 62% of non-LGBT teens.

"As we have seen in past reports from teachers and students, anti-LGBT bullying in schools is commonplace," said GLSEN Executive Director Kevin Jennings. "This report illustrates that school leaders must show a commitment to all students to truly make their schools safe for everyone. As principals are critical players in ensuring safe learning environment for all students, it is imperative that they understand the hostile climate oftentimes faced by LGBT students."

Principals also report that while nearly all (96%) of their schools have anti-bullying policies, less than half specifically mention sexual orientation (46%) or gender identity or expression (39%). Yet GLSEN's 2005 *National School Climate Survey* shows that the best policy to protect LGBT students from bullying and harassment is one that specifically mentions these categories.

Additionally, principals indicate that there is a need for professional development for teachers and staff in order to reduce bullying of LGBT students. Three in ten principals (29%) rate their teachers and staff as fair or poor at being able to effectively deal with a student being bullied or harassed because they are or are perceived to be lesbian, gay or bisexual. Furthermore, only 4% of principals report that their school or district provided professional development for their staff on LGBT issues during the past year.

"This study indicates that school leaders are concerned about the welfare of their students; yet safety issues related to sexual orientation and gender expression don't seem to rise to the same level of urgency," said NASSP Executive Director Dr. Gerald N. Tirozzi. "We know from the research field that safety issues greatly affect student academic performance. These findings, therefore, suggest a deliberate course of action for school leaders who want to establish and maintain safe school environments where teaching and learning can take place: education and open discussions with teachers and students, protection of students who are victimized for whatever reason, including their sexual identity, and school-based professional development around these issues."

Methodology

The Principal's Perspective: School Safety, Bullying and Harassment survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of GLSEN between June 15 and August 3, 2007 among 1,580 K-12 public school principals. Results were weighted as needed for school type, school region, school location, school socio-economic status, principal gender and principal race/ethnicity. An additional variable was included in the weighting algorithm to account for possible self-selection biases arising from the use of

sample from two membership-based national education organizations to adjust for any attitudinal or behavioral differences between members of the organizations and the general population of public school principals.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from three sources: a list from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), and lists from two membership-based national education organizations. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the population of public school principals. Because some of the sample sources were self-selected, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

About GLSEN

GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students. Established nationally in 1995, GLSEN envisions a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. For more information on our educator resources, research, public policy agenda, student organizing programs or development initiatives, visit www.glsen.org.

About the National Association of Secondary School Principals

The National Association of Secondary School Principals – the preeminent organization and the national voice for middle level and high school principals, assistant principals and aspiring school leaders – provides its members with the professional resources to serve as visionary leaders. NASSP promotes the intellectual growth, academic achievement, character development, leadership development, and physical well-being of youth through its programs and student leadership services. NASSP sponsors the National Honor Society™, the National Junior Honor Society™, the National Elementary Honor Society™, and the National Association of Student Councils™. For more information on NASSP, NHS, NJHS, NEHS or NASC, visit www.principals.org.

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