

**CESO SAMHSA Grant
2003-2005
Project Evaluation**

Executive summary

In 2003, the Coalition for Sexual Orientation (CESO) was awarded a grant (\$300,000 over 2 years) from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The purpose of the grant was to work with three to four schools/school districts within the state of Illinois to reduce anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) violence and victimization through comprehensive staff development training, networking with local community organizations, and advocacy on behalf of self-identified LGBT youth and staff within each school community. The work was to take place over a two-year time frame beginning in the summer/fall of 2003 and ending in the spring/summer of 2005. This document is a report of the evaluation component of the project that was conducted by Dr. Stacey Horn, University of Illinois at Chicago and Lee Gregory, an independent consultant.

Key Findings Regarding Intervention Efficacy

Overall, a number of themes emerged from the survey assessing changes in school personnel's knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes about LGBT youth and creating safe schools for all students regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.

- 1. CESO's standard training program, "Safety for All: Addressing Anti-LGBT Bias in Schools" was most effective in increasing participants' knowledge regarding issues related to LGBT students, as well as in increasing awareness of the climate for LGBT youth within the individuals' own social context.**

- 2. The training also had a significant effect on participants' beliefs about homosexuality (whether or not it is wrong).** After the intervention occurred fewer individuals reported that they believed homosexuality was completely wrong.

- 3. Overall, the training seemed more effective in changing attitudes regarding LGBT students' rights to protection than attitudes about LGBT students' rights to self-determination.** For example, after the training almost all of the individuals surveyed felt that students should be protected from harassment, discrimination and violence and that school policies should specifically include regulations regarding harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Conversely, individuals seemed less enthusiastic regarding other kinds of institutional supports (e.g., library resources, gay-straight alliance) for students identified as LGBT or questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity.

- 4. The results of the survey also strongly suggest that after the training occurred an overwhelming majority of individuals within the school believed that they had an obligation to create a safe environment for LGBT youth regardless of their personal beliefs about homosexuality** and that a majority of individuals felt they would intervene in circumstances of discrimination or violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Individuals also reported more mixed feelings about intervening around students' use of anti-LGBT language. While a majority of participants felt they should intervene in these situations, a

number of them also discussed that the frequency with which this occurs makes it impossible to intervene in every case.

Recommendations

1. Whenever possible, local information should be incorporated into the training (e.g., if the school has a policy, procedures for handling complaints).
2. In framing and conducting trainings, priority emphasis should be placed on the obligation (professional, legal, and moral) that schools and school personnel have in creating safe learning environments for all students. Within this overall framing, acknowledging the diversity of views regarding sexual orientation in our society seems to lessen the resistance toward the issues and creates a space in which individuals can negotiate how they are going to coordinate their individual personal beliefs with their role as an educational professional.
3. Training curriculum should continue to be informed by the most up-to-date research on LGBT youth, youth development, and the safe schools movement in its training, using local data whenever possible.