

POLICY OPTIONS FOR SCHOOLS REGARDING GAY ISSUES

Below are four policy options/models for schools regarding the issue of homosexuality, and a brief assessment instrument useful in identifying and evaluating the predominant model in your school.

In addressing these issues, it is imperative to realize that all schools already *do* have an existing policy, even when there is no *formal* policy in effect. In the absence of a formal policy, the school merely tacitly invites the formal and informal policies and practices of the dominant culture into the confines of its buildings. (It is assumed that the dominant cultural view in contemporary American society is fundamentally heterosexist in nature; see definitions of heterosexism and homophobia below).

In reality, the policy in operation (formal and informal) within most schools is commonly a hybrid of the four models below. It is interesting to note the aspects of each model that are in place at any given point in time in the history of a particular school, and the ways in which the philosophy, norms, and practices of a particular school community may have evolved over time.

In assessing your particular school environment, decide which model best represents your school's philosophy, norms, and practices overall. If a hybrid model fits best, decide which model best describes your school's current **philosophy**, which most closely represents prevailing **community norms**, and which best approximates the current state of **practice**. Indicate as well the philosophy, norms, and practices that you believe would be the ideal for your school community.

A. Acquiescence to Dominant Cultural Attitudes (Acquiescence Model)

Philosophy: to avoid direct confrontation of the issues; advertently or inadvertently, to allow the dominant cultural attitudes and practices to persist within the school community, and thereby effectively silence other views

Community Norms: to permit heterosexism and anti-gay attitudes to remain the unchallenged community norm

Practice: *to permit, and thereby tacitly encourage, unchecked, negative speech and/or actions* targeted against individuals who are, or who are perceived as, gay or pro-gay.

B. Officially Sanctioned Heterosexism (Heterosexism Model)

Philosophy: to officially embrace an anti-lesbian and gay position for the entire school community; to decry the use of the term "homophobia", since it implies that anti-gay beliefs are irrational, misguided, psychologically pathological, and wrong

Community Norms: to define heterosexism as the only acceptable community norm; to foster the belief that homosexuality is evil, abnormal, perverted, unhealthy, and/or dangerous.

Practice: to directly encourage negative speech and/or actions targeted against individuals who are, or who are perceived as, gay or pro-gay, because their behavior is in fact seen as sick, unhealthy, or morally reprehensible.

C. Tolerance of Opposing Views (Tolerance Model)

Philosophy: to define the topic of homosexuality as a controversial issue within contemporary American society – with highly personal and often religious implications – about which the school must remain neutral

Community Norms: to define the topics of homosexuality and heterosexism, as well as relevant personal and religious belief systems, scientific findings, and political developments, as issues open to respectful debate within the school community

Practice: to prohibit speech and/or actions targeted at specific individuals or groups, regardless of their position on these issues, as a violation of the spirit of tolerance.

D. Affirmation of Full Equality and Equity (Equity Model)

Philosophy: to actively promote equal access to education, and an emotionally and physically safe environment for all students (as well as equal treatment for all faculty, staff, and parents), regardless of sexual orientation, as officially sanctioned school policy; to openly reject myths, prejudices, and stereotypes which fuel cultural and social homophobia and resulting discriminatory treatment.

Community Norms:

- to acknowledge that while the topic of homosexuality is a controversial issue within contemporary American society, schools are free – and in fact are morally obligated – to take a particular position on controversial issues which significantly affect the practice of education or the health and welfare of students;
- to protect the right to dissent and to enforce the spirit of tolerance for dissenting views regarding school policy, whether personal or religious;
- to protect the right and responsibility of school officials to base policy on proven factual knowledge, shared community values, perceived student need, and sound educational principle, not beliefs particular to any one individual or religious group, no matter how strongly held or voiced.

Practice: to eliminate all forms of institutional heterosexism within the school community; to actively combat myths, prejudices, and stereotypes which fuel cultural and social homophobia; to provide clearly identified supports for lesbian and gay youths and adults in an effort to address and redress the effects of anti-gay prejudice and discrimination sanctioned in the larger culture

POLICY OPTION ASSESSMENT TOOL

1. Please indicate the particular model – **Acquiescence, Heterosexism, Tolerance, Equity** – which best describes your school environment at the present time.

Philosophy: _____

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Norms: _____

Practice: _____

2. Please indicate the particular model – **Acquiescence, Heterosexism, Tolerance, Equity** – which best describes what you would consider to be the ideal for your school community:

Philosophy: _____

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Norms: _____

Practice: _____

Adapted from: Roffman, DM. "A Model for Helping Schools Address Policy Options Regarding Gay and Lesbian Students." *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy*. Fall, 2000.