

4-7-06 GLBT Editorial Submission to Cambridge Chronicle

Newly Formed Cambridge GLBT Commission Helps Create a Safer High School for GLBT Youth

Cambridge School Committee increases support and protection for GLBT Youth:

It was a small shift in the budget and a huge gain for Cambridge Rindge and Latin School (CRLS) youth when Superintendent Fowler-Finn, encouraged by School Committee Chair, Mayor Ken Reeves, and School Committee Member Luc Schuster, decided to provide a small amount of funding to increase the number of hours for the Project 10 East Coordinator position. Project 10 East is the student support office at CRLS that provides a safe space for GLBT youth, a form of gay-straight alliance for students, and provides system wide education for students, faculty, and administration around issues of tolerance, homophobia, bullying, name calling, etc.

Students at CRLS have benefited greatly this past year by the hiring of a part-time Project 10 East Coordinator, following a period of time when it had been difficult to keep the position staffed with the same person - leaving students without a space to meet, an adult advisor, and a designated ally within the system. With the support of the newly established Cambridge GLBT Commission, the Cambridge School Department aggressively recruited and interviewed candidates last fall, filling the Project 10 East coordinator position again for this past school year. Unfortunately, the position was funded at 15 hours per week, not nearly enough to cover the requirements of the job description and understandably making it difficult for the qualified professional hired into the role to commit to the position long term. Based on information provided directly by CRLS students in the 2004 Teen Health Survey, it was clear that a large number of students, who did not identify as heterosexual, felt enough fear and intimidation to potentially impede their ability to excel in the school environment. The importance of maintaining a Project 10 East coordinator and making strides toward creating a GLBT inclusive environment clearly hinged on providing more work hours and benefits for the Project 10 East Coordinator.

The Cambridge School Committee and the Superintendent have sent a solid message, not only that they value ALL of their students and intend to provide the highest quality academic environment possible by securing a safe and welcoming learning culture, they also understand the importance of teaching tolerance for diversity. Cambridge has long been a national leader in creating a culture that welcomes GLBT families and individuals into its diverse family. We took the lead, in establishing domestic partnerships and including non-discrimination against sexual orientation in city ordinances, we were proud to be the first in the state to celebrate and welcome gay marriage, our City Councilors voted for the establishment of a GLBT Commission, and we are now sending a clear message that we are committed to our mission of being a national leader in the educational arena as Cambridge Public Schools evolves increasingly toward being a system that represents the needs of a unique community.

It continues to be a pleasure for the Cambridge GLBT Commission to work with The Cambridge Public Schools and the City of Cambridge Departments in securing that Cambridge continues to be a model of inclusion, diversity, and excellence.

Colby S. Berger
Stephen Crowe
Beth Damsky
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Seth Lee, Co-Chair
Ian Lemieux
Robert Parlin
Rev. Lesley Rebecca Phillips
Adrienne Thomas
Michael Shaps
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