

# NATIONAL SAFE SCHOOLS ROUNDTABLE

## STATEMENT OF ANTI-RACIST FRAMEWORK

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### VALUES STATEMENT

All youth have the right to an education free of fear and discrimination. The safety and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, allied, and associated (LGBTQA)<sup>1</sup> youth are inextricably tied to the safety and well-being of all people in the school community, including youth, parents, staff, teachers, and administrators.

Schools cannot be truly safe unless *everyone* is safe and free from bullying, harassment, discrimination, and violence. As long as any youth – including those marginalized by sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, immigration status, class, age, religion, or disability – face bullying, harassment, discrimination, and violence, all youth are unsafe. We recognize that schools exist within a larger social system and that racism, classism, and prejudice in our society affect how schools are funded, organized, and operated. We also recognize that all kinds of oppression, including racism, homophobia, and transphobia, work together to create and maintain systems of oppression. We acknowledge that regardless of good intentions, we perpetuate racism, classism, and other forms of oppression unless we act intentionally to address these issues in our LGBTQA safe schools work.

We recognize that LGBTQA youth and educators of color, and the issues that concern them, have not historically been adequately included in the safe schools movement, and we are committed to making the movement relevant and welcoming to these important constituencies. We recognize that many LGBTQA people experience other forms of oppression in addition to homophobia and transphobia. In order to make safe schools work relevant and welcoming to everyone, we must be responsive to all of these issues. We affirm our commitment to welcoming people of color in all aspects of the movement, including strategy development and decision-making. We also commit to moving toward a deeper anti-racist framework in ongoing safe schools efforts and toward an overall goal of creating a more racially just society.

### **Examples of how racism affects our work include:**

- Encouraging parents with the financial means to do so to leave public schools to avoid homophobic and transphobic environments rather than working to improve their public school communities undermines our efforts to improve school safety for LGBTQA youth who cannot afford to attend private school.
- Zero tolerance discipline policies are disproportionately used against youth of color and poor youth because these policies exist in the larger system that is racist and classist. Supporting these policies perpetuates a system of punishment that harms youth of color and perpetuates racism.
- Comparing racism and homophobia or transphobia by elevating one form of oppression over the other undermines work to address racism. For instance, saying that “if these were racial slurs, the schools would be doing something about it” implies that racism in schools is adequately dealt with.
- Focusing *only* on increasing the numbers of youth of color in our movement can be counterproductive. A truly diverse movement cannot be achieved or maintained unless we ensure that we are addressing the substantive issues relevant to youth of color and are creating safe spaces for youth of color (e.g. location, staff, willingness to confront oppression as it arises).
- Assuming that educators of color and students of color will be less open to topics related to sexual orientation and gender. When we make these assumptions we risk excluding individuals as well as entire schools and school districts.
- Supporting the nomination of a person of color to an organization’s board of directors simply because that person adds “diversity” to the group can be tokenizing. Diversity

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<sup>1</sup> This acronym includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning (LGBTQ) youth; youth with LGBTQ parents or guardians; allies; and other youth associated with LGBTQ people.

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without intention does not adequately address and may perpetuate institutionalized racism. At the same time, fear of tokenism should not serve as a rationale for the failure to diversify decision-making bodies. Organizations must work consciously and conscientiously to integrate all board members, staff, and volunteers into their hiring, advancement, leadership, retention, and professional development practices.

## **Examples of how we can take steps to work toward a racially just and anti-racist movement and be welcoming to people of color in all aspects of safe schools work, include:**

- Ensuring that our meeting spaces are accessible and welcoming to people of color.
- Ensuring that we advertise our events and meetings in ways likely to reach communities of color.
- Collaborating with organizations and groups that employ and work with people of color, which is particularly important for organizations that are not themselves racially diverse.
- Openly supporting the work of groups working against racism and/or on behalf of youth and communities of color (e.g., signing on to petitions, attending events, co-sponsoring events).
- Including people of color in all aspects of our work.
- Actively valuing multiple perspectives in our discussions and decision-making.
- Educating ourselves and our colleagues about oppression and privilege in a systemic way through staff development and ongoing conversations.
- Reviewing our organizations' mission and vision statements and goals to determine if there are ways that our organizations can more directly address racism.
- Seeking input from groups focused on serving communities of color on strategy development.
- Ensuring that we frame safe schools work broadly enough that it embraces the efforts of the many groups that work against discrimination and on behalf of LGBTQA youth, including LGBTQA youth of color, whether this work is called "safe schools" work or something else.
- Seeking and supporting the leadership of people of color as staff and volunteers in your organization.

## **STATEMENT OF ANTI-RACIST FRAMEWORK:**

### **The National Safe Schools Roundtable and its participants who work toward the safety and wellbeing of LGBTQA youth in schools choose to adopt an anti-racist framework by:**

- Acknowledging the ways racism, oppression, and privilege perpetuate homophobia and transphobia in systems of education;
- Ensuring that the strategies, actions, and policies that we support and employ do not undermine efforts to combat racism;
- Organizing a movement that is mindful of how the issues of racism affect school safety for all of the school community;
- Developing and implementing antiracist strategies that are specific to the safe schools movement, including, without limitation:
  - practicing and modeling respectful behavior,
  - employing anti-racist language and group dynamics,
  - examining every situation to understand how the dynamics of racism and white privilege work in that situation;
- Challenging all aspects of white privilege—individual, cultural, political, and organizational—inherent in the safe schools movement; and
- Engaging in ongoing self-assessment and recognizing that doing work with an anti-racist lens is an ongoing process.

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## WORKING DEFINITIONS OF TERMS:

**Oppression** is systemic inequality that gives power and privilege to members of one group of people by disadvantaging and exploiting another group of people.

**Racism** is oppression that gives white people power and privilege by disadvantaging and exploiting people of color.

**White Privilege** is a system of exclusive advantages or benefits afforded to white people, based on their group identity or status, that are largely unearned and often invisible to the people enjoying them.

We, the undersigned members, adopt this statement as guiding values and principles for the National Safe Schools Roundtable:

Alabama Safe Schools Coalition  
Ally Action  
aMaze  
COLAGE  
Family Equality Council  
Gay-Straight Alliance Network  
Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network  
Gender Spectrum  
The GLBT Community Center of Colorado  
GroundSpark/The Respect For All Project  
GSA for Safe Schools  
Human Rights Campaign Foundation/Welcoming Schools  
Illinois Safe Schools Alliance  
Iowa Pride Network  
Iowa Safe Schools  
The Massachusetts Commission on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth  
Mississippi Safe Schools Coalition  
National Center for Lesbian Rights  
National Coalition Building Institute-Missoula & Montana Safe Schools Coalition  
National Youth Advocacy Coalition  
New Mexico Gay Straight Alliance Network  
Our Family Coalition  
Out Youth & Texas GSA Network  
Outright Vermont  
Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) National  
Safe Schools Coalition  
Safe Schools South Florida  
TransActive Education & Advocacy  
*(last updated October 2010)*