

PRESS RELEASE: Embargo until Thursday, June 6, 2013.

LYRIC's daring new approach to safer schools eliminates harm to LGBTQQ students by educating all students, all teachers, and all families.

SAN FRANCISCO, June 6, 2013 – Despite advances in school-based efforts to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQQ) youth, approximately 1,000 of the over 3,000 LGBTQQ-identified San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) students attempt suicide annually. For transgender students alone, that number jumps to 1 youth out of every 2. Underlying these grim statistics is a school climate without the safety LGBTQQ youth need to succeed, resulting in truancy rates for LGBTQQ students that are dramatically higher than those of their heterosexual peers, which in turn leads to poor academic performance. The lack of well-being of LGBTQQ students is at a crisis level, requiring a bold, new approach in making schools more inclusive for LGBTQQ youth and their allies.

Spearheading the necessary new, bold approach, the Lavender Youth Recreation and Information Center (LYRIC) launched an innovative pilot School-Based Initiative in 2011 to transform San Francisco middle and high schools into safe, welcoming communities for LGBTQQ students. Steadfast and engaged student, school staff, and family allies are the most critical components required to build school communities where bullying is curbed, thereby allowing LGBTQQ students to truly thrive. LYRIC brings 25 years of expertise in LGBTQQ youth leadership development, policy advocacy, and allyship education to its work in San Francisco schools. LYRIC's School-Based Initiative comprehensively nurtures leadership and allyship through: (1) a year-long gender/sexuality-emphasized social justice course taught during the school day; (2) a professional development track for every school staff member; and (3) discussion circles and support groups for families.

According to *A New Approach to School Climate Transformation*, an evaluation brief prepared by Education, Training, and Research Associates, "LYRIC has demonstrated excellent performance and implementation...and has shown promising evidence of positive outcomes among participating students and teachers." On surveying student ratings of youth development assets in the school environment, students who participated in LYRIC's school-day course recorded 12 points higher than the average SFUSD middle school student, and double that of the average SFUSD high school student.

LYRIC's School-Based Initiative ties school transformation – and the true social change happening deep inside classrooms, schoolyards, and homes across San Francisco – to entire community transformation. By strengthening LYRIC's partnerships with city policy makers, the SFUSD, and other community-based organizations, San Francisco will prioritize LGBTQQ youth like never before. This alliance means San Francisco can build supportive school environments for all students and reestablish itself as the LGBT movement's boldest leader.

In support of LYRIC's School-Based Initiative, San Francisco Superintendent of Schools Richard Carranza, stated, "We are deeply committed to creating safe and supportive schools for LGBTQ youth. Our city is fortunate to have so many agencies that partner with our schools and district to serve our students and families."

Both San Francisco District 8 Supervisor Scott Wiener and District 9 Supervisor David Campos also recognize the urgent need for LYRIC and its School-Based Initiative. "Youth-serving organizations like LYRIC that serve LGBTQQ youth are critical to the fabric of the Castro," said Wiener. "By creating innovative programs that build the leadership and capacity of the many LGBTQQ and ally youth in the neighborhood, [LYRIC is] helping today's youth and building tomorrow's leaders." Campos emphasized LYRIC's work across communities: "Empowering our students to have thoughtful conversations about gender and sexuality doesn't stop with our youth, nor does it stop with a single community. We – as people invested in how our schools nurture diversity and acceptance – must deliberately join those conversations."

LYRIC will continue to deepen its work within SFUSD entering the 2013-2014 school year. Principal Richard Curci of Everett Middle School, where LYRIC successfully piloted the School-Based Initiative model, noted, "LYRIC is giving us a common language, giving us strategies to make a difference. And it will make a difference in the lives of the students, as well as the lives of the adults who are part of our students' lives."

##



PRESS CONTACT

Jodi L. Schwartz  
LYRIC Executive Director  
415.793.3220, [jodi@lyric.org](mailto:jodi@lyric.org)