

Spring 2002

“The first problem for all of us, men and women, is not to learn, but to unlearn.”
—Gloria Steinem

Making Your School A Better Place To Be

It is unfortunately true that sometimes students needs are not met because of gender-based expectations about their interests, abilities, and skills. While it is also true that children are exposed to sexism and gender-role stereotyping from an early age, and that these images are reinforced strongly outside of school, the influence of the school environment *cannot* be underestimated. The *Equity News* strives to provide assistance to the many educators who have asked for ways to help students and teachers overcome limiting stereotypes, bias and even discrimination based on gender and gender roles. The *Equity News* also strives to show that homophobia and sexism are directly related. Proactive measures that confront the homophobia and sexism inherent in gender stereotyping are the only way to strive for full equality in education. Gender equity encourages all students to explore their interests free from bias and harassment and examines the culture (or behavior) that contributes to an environment of limited possibilities. The time to make your school the best it can be is now.

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Strong Show of Support for Addressing Anti-Gay Harassment in Schools

Despite recent news stories which have depicted public and political opposition to including discussions of homosexuality in schools and

"No student or group of students should suffer the indignities of harassment..." including the creation of anti-gay harassment policies in schools, recent surveys and recommendations from all levels of education have encouraged the adoption of inclusive anti-harassment policies by our schools. State administrators, teachers and parents have all indicated that they are committed to creating

respectful learning environments in which all students can reach their academic potential free from discrimination and harassment.

STATE ADMINISTRATORS

In a circular letter dated January 8, 2002, the commissioner of Education, Theodore Sergi issued a statement on "Taking Action to Make Schools Free From Discrimination and Harm."

The letter included the following statement:

'Each school and school district should review programs, services and activities to ensure that they are conducted in a manner that is free of bias, prejudice and discrimination. In addition, each staff member carries the responsibility to stop and prevent future occurrences of teasing, taunting, bullying, harassment and harm of any kind based on race, color, sex, religion, national origin or sexual orientation—whether the actions are initiated by students or adults. The development and enforcement of appropriate student and staff behavior and disciplinary policies is an important place to begin and/or update our work.

It is often the ill-conceived humor and language of people that can be the most hurtful. If teachers and administrators observe this behavior and do not address it immediately as unacceptable, not just inappropriate, then all of those participating and observing perceive it as 'okay'. Failing to stop the harmful action immediately teaches one person that it is okay to be hurtful and the other that he or she will not be protected against discriminatory statements or behaviors.

No student or group of students should suffer the indignities of harassment, which jeopardizes their right to a free public education. Our message to all students and staff members should be one of respect for all people, as each of us would like to be respected by others. Tolerance, while important, is not equal to respect.'

TEACHERS

On Friday, February 8, the National Education Association's (NEA) Board of Directors adopted a series of task force recommendations that among other things will encourage the adoption of anti-harassment policies which include anti-gay harassment and abuse and the development of factual materials for classroom and community discussion on these issues.

PARENTS

Last summer, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) tapped noted political pollster Celinda Lake to conduct its first national public opinion research project. Aimed at helping the organization better understand parents' attitudes toward Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) issues in schools, the project included focus groups and a nationally representative telephone poll of 1000 parents. The findings showed parents to be a tolerant bunch. The overwhelming majority support

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Strong Show of Support cont.

expanding or putting in place nondiscrimination policies to protect LGBT students (83%). Similar levels support teacher sensitivity trainings that include LGBT issues (80%). At the same time most parents are unaware of the levels of harassment directed against LGBT students, and the systemic failure of schools to address this abuse.

“This poll sends a powerful message to school boards that training teachers and implementing inclusive nondiscrimination policies have broad-based support among America’s parents,” said MK Cullen, Public Policy Director. “It’s not only right to protect all students from abuse at school, it’s right by America’s parents for school boards and administrators to act.” The findings will be used by GLSEN to educate these and other important stakeholders about the urgent need to address anti-LGBT abuse in schools.

To contact the GLSEN representative in Connecticut for training information or for help coordinating and developing your policy please call (203) 232-1480 or visit their website, www.glsen.org. To arrange to have someone speak to your class about homophobia call the Stonewall Speaker’s Bureau at (860) 289-3871.

GLSEN, *Respect: Chronicling The Fight To End Anti-Gay Bias In America’s Schools*. Issue 8, Winter 2001.

Women’s History

March was Women’s History Month but the need to provide female role models for students continues all year.

The importance of providing role models and mentors within the classroom cannot be underestimated. By including role models/mentors in the curriculum, the class activities are tangibly linked to careers. The presence of female role models/mentors is imperative both to supporting the girls in the nontraditional classroom and in breaking down the perception of gender roles and occupation in all of the classrooms. Ultimately, both male and female students are limited by stereotyping in career information. By providing ongoing career information through role models and mentoring, students can make informed academic and career choices and connections between the classroom and the working world.

The Institute for Women in the Trades (IWITTS) sponsors the website www.womentechworld.org which contains dozens of biographies of women in technical fields. This site also offers resources, references, an e-mentoring link, and clip art featuring women in the trades.

ACTIVITY

A Brief Women’s History Quiz

Can your students name 15 women who have contributed to American History? World History? Education? Science? Politics?

Some resources to send them to if they can not:

- ☞ National Women’s History Project: www.nwhp
- ☞ Women’s Equity Resource Center: <http://www.edc.org/WomensEquity/women.htm>

Now we are expected to be as wise men who have had generations of all the help there is, and we scarcely anything. Louisa May Alcott

The Economic Impact of Occupational Gender Segregation In Connecticut

Nearly two-thirds of all women workers in Connecticut work in only two occupational categories, “technical/sales and administrative” and “service”.

In 1997, women in Connecticut earned approximately 74 cents for every dollar earned by men, or an average of \$179 less per week or \$9,308 per year.

According to a study conducted by the Women’s Institute for a Secure Retirement, jobs held predominantly by women were paid between 17-20% less than those comparable jobs held predominantly by men. Nontraditional occupations tend to offer higher wages than many of the occupations where women are the majority.

Traditional Occupations for Women	Salary
Medical Assistants	\$24,040
Dental Assistants	\$26,620
Receptionists/ Information Clerks	\$22,530
Food Preparation Workers	\$16,800
Home Health Aides	\$20,060
Hairdresser/Hairstylist	\$20,260
Human Service Worker	\$24,810
Child Care Worker	\$18,630
Cashiers	\$16,000
Bank Teller	\$19,870

Nontraditional Occupations for Women	Salary
Police Officers	\$43,710
Electricians	\$37,640
Telephone & Cable TV Repair Technicians	\$39,230
Sales Representative: Nonscientific Products	\$45,230
Sales Representative: Scientific Products	\$53,330
Painters/Wall Paperhangers	\$31,340
Machine Tool Operators, Numerical Control	\$33,110
Aircraft Mechanic	\$40,620
Landscaper/Groundskeeper	\$21,960
Data Processing Equipment Repair Technicians	\$35,660

Sources: The CT Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, Facts about the Status of Women in Connecticut: Special Edition on Equal Pay, January 2001

Connecticut Occupational Employment and Wages, Connecticut Department of Labor based on 1999-2000 estimates at www.ctdol.state.ct.us/lmi.

Sexism and Medical Careers

Women have worked in the medical profession primarily as nurses and midwives and despite advances over the last several decades, women are still largely segregated into low-level medical positions, which receive less pay and fewer chances for advancement. Further, this work has been stereotyped as “women’s work” as evidenced by the current nationwide statistics with men making up only 5.4% of registered nurses, 20% of health aides (except nursing) and 12% of nursing aides, orderlies and attendants. Given this, it is not surprising that male students in Connecticut high schools make up such a small percentage of enrollment in medical career programs.

These numbers are troubling in that they reveal a continued social bias against males taking courses or being involved in nursing or health-care professions. Because of their lack of involvement and the subsequent gender stereotyping, wages in these areas continue to remain low and when males do participate in these jobs they are paid 7-14% more than their female counterparts. Despite the fact that male workers are needed to help address the shortage of workers in these areas, these careers continue to contain a disproportionate number of females in the classroom and ultimately in the work force.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor - Wages by Area and Occupation

ACTIVITY

Exploring Gender Perceptions In Your Classroom

Almost two decades ago, researchers at the Institute for Equality in Education at the University of Colorado asked 2,000 students “*how their life would be different if they woke up the next day as the opposite sex.*”

The answers were sad and shocking. The results revealed not that boys and girls thought that there were benefits and disadvantages to being either sex, but that there was a fundamental contempt for females—held by both sexes. Both sexes thought that it was “better” to be a male.

Using this exercise in your classroom can help to establish a foundation for the work that needs to be done around gender equity in your school.

Follow-up the initial question by asking:

- *How would people’s/your peers’ expectation of your appearance change?*
- *How would people’s/your peer’s/your teachers’/school administrators’ expectation of your behavior change?*

- *Do you think people/peers/teachers/school administrators would treat you the same?*
- *Do you think you would/could participate in the same activities as you do now?*
- *Can you think of a career that you would not want to go into if you were the opposite sex? Why or why not?*

Exploring these questions and allowing the students to invent specific scenarios and question one another can reveal underlying attitudes about gender-roles (and homophobia) that students may be unwilling to admit and/or unaware that they maintain, thus creating a forum in which students can explore the ways in which sexism manifests. Both boys and girls need to explore the negative impact of sexism since stereotypes limit both sexes. A dialogue is the first step toward understanding what forces are at work within your school for both you and your students.

Source: Tarvis, Carol and Dr. Alice Baumgartner. “*How would your life be different?*”, Redbook Magazine, February 1983.

The **Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)** is now offering **Gender Equity** trainings to Guidance, Educators and Administrators, in addition to other school based trainings which include **Homophobia** and **Sexual Harassment in Schools**.

The Gender Equity Training includes the following topics:

- ✓ Understanding the definition of gender equity and gender bias
- ✓ Understanding how bias manifests in economic independence, self-esteem, job opportunities etc.
- ✓ Identifying gender-biased behavior in teaching
- ✓ Identifying strategies for addressing gender bias in the classroom including:
 - ◆ Language
 - ◆ Teaching/Learning Styles
 - ◆ Environment
 - ◆ Behavior Management
 - ◆ Student Interactions
 - ◆ Curriculum
 - ◆ Career Connections
 - ◆ Student Assignment/Recruitment

For more information on having a Gender Equity Training at your school, please call CWEALF at (860) 247-6090 and ask for Krystin Horrocks.

Equity News, formerly entitled *Shop Talk*, is a publication of the Vocational Equity Research, Training and Evaluation Center (VERTEC). VERTEC is a project of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) and is funded through a grant from the State Department of Education through the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act. For more information about VERTEC call Krystin Horrocks at (860) 247-6090.