

Dear BAHS Staff,

for the past three years it has been my experience that our school and much of its staff and students, as is common in the surrounding community, are uncomfortable with the subject of homosexuality. Approximately ten percent of our student body will turn out to be gay or lesbian, and half that many know it already. This means that we have up to sixty students who quite possibly feel isolated, unwelcome, invisible, or emotionally hurt due to our school environment. Gay and lesbian people may be a minority, but we are as normal as lefties or redheads.

Derogatory slurs like “faggot,” “homo,” and “that’s so gay” are all too frequently spoken in BAHS hallways, often without any corrective reaction from staff or other students. Gay students need to see themselves reflected positively in conversations and in the curriculum in order to know that they are valued or even acknowledged. How to do that is described below.

More than anyone else at school, educators have a responsibility as important role models to students and clearly have a major impact on their lives. It is therefore imperative that all BAHS staff make a sincere effort to be inclusive of gays and lesbians in the classroom if we are to establish BAHS as a safe space for everyone. This means not being afraid of openly discussing the subject of homosexuality as a normal variety of experience, as well as always making some corrective response when any person makes a derogatory remark. In addition, staff can provide emotional support to gay and lesbian students and try to refrain from straight bias, much the way educators are mindful to avoid racial and gender bias. If everyone works together we can fulfill the goal of making BAHS a safe and supportive space for everyone, including gays and lesbians.

I have included the URLs to some web pages that address this issue and go into more detail as to what teachers and school administrators can do to help gay and lesbian students coping with discrimination at school. I hope you will all consider reading this information. Additionally, I have provided examples of some of my own personal experiences with antigay discrimination at the end of this letter. This is for the purpose of supporting my above statements with examples and is not meant to slander anyone or represent every staff as the same. Some staff have in fact been trying

the best they can (under our resistant administration) to change the negative stereotypes associated with homosexuality.

I thank-you for acknowledging this letter and hope that you will do your best to curve the negativity toward homosexuals at Belfast Area High School.

Sincerely,
Adam Flanders

TEACHER RESOURCE SITES

<http://www.schools-out.org.uk/resources/teaching/contents.htm> or
www.glsen.org

Some examples of discrimination and/or straight bias I have personally felt while at BAHS:

- Our principal and vice principal suspending me for five days for wearing a gay pride t-shirt after six students and two teachers said it was offensive and inappropriate. He (the principal) also told me he could forcefully remove me from the classroom and said that he could have the classroom evacuated and the police brought in to arrest me.
- Teachers avoiding the subject of homosexuality in history, present day, or finding it inappropriate when a student brings up the subject in class, like gay marriage.
- Common derogatory slurs like “fag,” and “homo” and staff not doing anything about it.
- BAHS vice principal telling me that it’s my fault I have lost so many friends and that if I hadn’t started doing this whole “gay thing” then people might still like me. If a Jewish student were making an issue of anti-semitism at school would people tell him to be less Jewish?
- Our vice principal not allowing me to post pro-gay posters from the gay-straight alliance that say, “It’s Okay to Be Gay,” and “BAHS Respects Gays and Lesbians.”
- Many students dissociate themselves from me because of fear of being grounded by parents if they are friends with me or a fear that people will think they are gay if they befriend me.
- A human relations exam that stated, “Love needs can be met only by people of the opposite sex.”
- Compatibility tests targeted only toward heterosexual students.