



## WELCOMING SCHOOLS PILOT AND EVALUATION RESULTS

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*“This school has always been accepting of diverse backgrounds, but now there is a bit more accountability and awareness of expectations on the part of faculty.”*

– Teacher from a pilot site

Evaluation is a critical component of any educational initiative. That’s why *Welcoming Schools* was piloted and evaluated in diverse school districts in three different states. We wanted to measure the experiences of different school communities that have implemented aspects of *Welcoming Schools*. We are happy to share with you the results of the first year of the pilot and the evaluation.

Twelve schools in five districts located in California, Massachusetts and Minnesota are participating in a three-year, mixed-method evaluation incorporating both an in-depth process evaluation (with qualitative components) and a traditional outcome evaluation (with quantitative components.) The majority of the participating schools are urban and have student populations that are diverse in terms of race, economics and family structure.

There are many ways to implement *Welcoming Schools*. The pilot criteria did not specify a certain scope or sequence of elements that each pilot school would use. Rather, each pilot school agreed to take part in implementing some key, core components of *Welcoming Schools*.

These included formation of a *Welcoming Schools* Task Force composed of parents, educators and administrators; training for all school personnel; public meetings for parents and guardians; and use of several *Welcoming Schools* lesson plans. Each school or school district made decisions about how to use the *Welcoming Schools Approach* in a manner that met their own needs and linked with academic standards and emotional and social learning initiatives such as Second Step.

### KEY SIGNIFICANT OUTCOMES

Pre- and post-pilot surveys of administrators and educators found:

Positive improvement in school diversity climate. Almost 60 percent of the educators indicated that their school’s climate around diversity was different in May than it was in the prior September

Reduction in teachers’ concerns regarding their own lack of training or resources from 54 percent to 30 percent

Reduction in teachers’ fears of parental dissatisfaction from 52 percent to 28 percent

Positive difference in believing that children of every age could benefit from discussing gender roles and expression and families with LGBT parents

Growth in positive intentions to address topics of diversity including families with LGBT parents and gender roles/expression in their classrooms and schools

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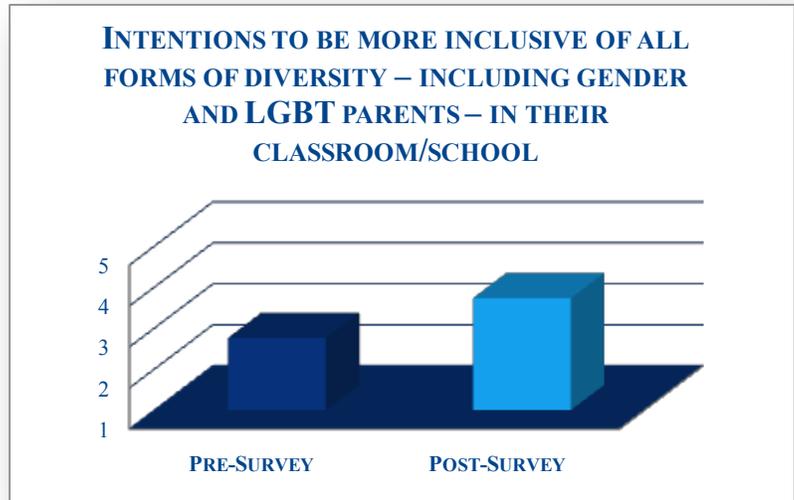
## WHAT STUDENTS ARE PREPARED TO LEARN

*“I’m very pleased with even the informal lessons I’ve seen in the classrooms. I’ve seen teachers discussing the three main parts of the program...and I can honestly say that I do believe the kids here do understand these three components...”*

– School Administrator from a pilot site

Every school reported a positive difference in believing that students of every age could benefit from classroom discussions about gender roles and expression and families with LGBT parents, with a range of 2.49 – 3.94 on a 5-point scale where 1 means “no benefit at all” and 5 means “great deal of benefit.”

In interviews and focus groups, educators recognized the importance of answering students’ questions, such as the teacher who noted, *“Kids like to have discussions and be able to voice their opinions to adults because this could clear up any misconceptions children bring out.”*



In addition, the *Welcoming Schools* lesson plans were seen as a positive way of preparing students for middle school. As one educator explained, *“If you are not explicit, you will not prepare (the students) for middle school (where) victimization, raging hormones, and bigger kids all come into play and kids can get seriously hurt, whether physical or emotions (sic)”*.

## WHAT ARE EDUCATORS PREPARED TO TEACH

*“The staff taught more diversity lessons during the families program than in the past years. The lessons have had a positive effect on students' attitudes.”*

– School administrator from a pilot site

All schools reported a significant change in positive intentions to address all forms of diversity — including gender and LGBT parents — with students. One school went from a 1.90 before the training to a 4.98 on a 5-point scale where 1 means “never will address and 5 means “will address in every way possible.

Administrator support and comfort with the program reflected not only their assessment of its potential contribution to building a positive school climate, but also their view of its substance and quality. In particular, they viewed the program as strong in its conceptual, developmentally based foundation; its flexibility in allowing for teacher judgment and application of teachable moments; and the ease with which it could be integrated with ongoing curriculum and standards. In essence, they felt that it was a program that respected teachers’ professionalism.

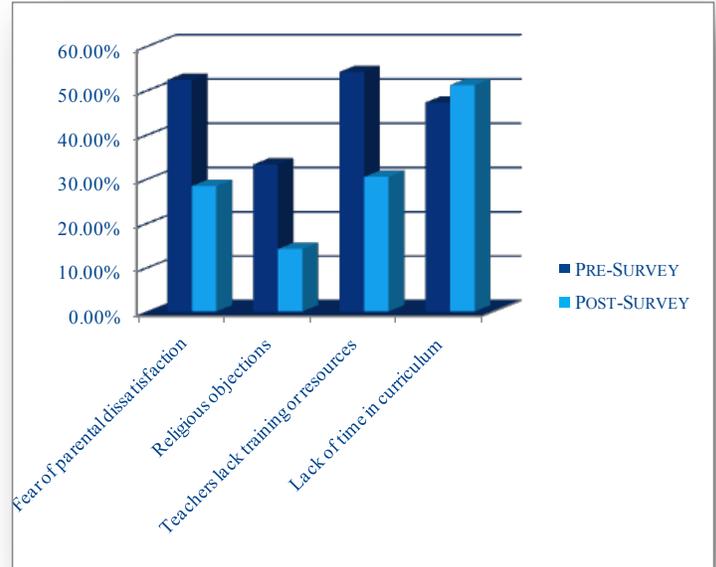
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## OBSTACLES TO ADDRESSING LGBT TOPICS IN SCHOOL

Prior to the *Welcoming Schools*' implementation, more than half of school personnel indicated that the primary obstacles in addressing sexual orientation in their schools was a fear of parental dissatisfaction (52.3 percent) and their personal lack in training and resources (54.1 percent).

After implementation — which involved, importantly, not only training for the school faculty and staff, but also community meetings with parents and community leaders — less than a third of the teachers still feared parental dissatisfaction (28.3 percent) or were concerned about their own lack in training or resources (30.4 percent).

The *Welcoming Schools* community meetings with parents, teachers and school staff, local clergy and other interested parties contributed greatly in establishing or deepening the mutual trust between the parents and the schools, thus reducing the fear of parental dissatisfaction and objections based on religious teachings when dealing with topics related to sexual orientation. In addition, the in-service training for faculty and staff further addressed these concerns.



## LESSONS FOR FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION

As we move forward, we can draw on many important lessons from this first pilot year evaluation. To be successful, the pre-existing climate of a school affects the implementation at every level of its process, and should be assessed carefully when beginning this work. Second, parents and other community members need to be involved in understanding and learning about *Welcoming Schools* and its core messages of respect and inclusivity. Third, even with several trainings and meetings about *Welcoming Schools*, keeping all members of the school community engaged is an ongoing task. And finally, educators need support to address topics that might be unfamiliar to them or that create concerns about controversy.

## BENEFITS OF THE *WELCOMING SCHOOLS* EVALUATION

While this summary only covers the first year of the evaluation, there are many benefits that have already been realized. The evaluation, as a whole, documents educators' and communities' perceived need in their schools. It also presents differences in school climates and school personnel's comfort in addressing all aspects of diversity with all school members.

Ultimately, the evaluation provides compelling evidence that *Welcoming Schools* is making a difference in children's lives and the lives of their families and communities.

*Dr. Laura Szalacha from the University of Illinois at Chicago coordinated the evaluation and conducted the quantitative components. Qualitative evaluation was conducted by a team headed by Dr. Peter Goldblum at the Pacific Graduate School of Psychology; a team headed by Dr. Suzanne Pasch from Wheelock College; and Sheila Moriarty, M.A*