TALKING WITH THE MEDIA

- We want to respect and welcome all students and all families in [our] community to ensure that our students thrive. Our families are diverse and include people who are mixed race, single parents, adoptive parents, gay and lesbian parents, immigrants, foster parents, and grandparents.

- Schools must be a place where children can learn and grow without hurtful bullying or name-calling. This program will help to ensure that our students reach their fullest potential in an environment free of bullying and gender stereotyping.

- This program is one more way that our schools are embracing and encouraging the active participation of caretakers and parents. When they're involved, included and welcomed, so are their children.

- This program helps improve staff’s cultural responsibility and commitment. When staff work together to create a welcoming climate students benefit.

Core messages developed by administrators in a school district piloting Welcoming Schools that helped them to talk about why their district/school planned to do welcoming schools work

- Be clear that you are using the Welcoming Schools Guide so that adults can take responsibility for student safety and create a welcoming school environment where all students have the opportunity to thrive.

- Develop core messages on why Welcoming Schools is important for your schools. Use these core messages to help you talk with the media and others. Formulate two or three key messages or phrases and do not hesitate to use them repeatedly in conversation with the press. (See Why Discuss Family Diversity, Teasing, Name-Calling and Gender? for ideas.)

- If you can only get one sentence in when talking with the press, talk about your values and why Welcoming Schools work is important for children.

- This work is about family, respect, and safety. Be clear that at the elementary school level this work is not about sex or sexuality. You do not need to repeat these perceptions if asked about them. Even if a reporter keeps pressing you, just keep repeating what the work is really about.

- It is best to avoid repeating inflammatory words. Even if the media or others call Welcoming Schools “controversial” or use negative words to describe it, just keep talking about it in the positive and keep saying what good it will do. Emphasize the concept of “welcoming.”
• People can get overwhelmed by a lot of facts. Use facts sparingly. People connect more with the values behind this work and people’s stories about the need for or the effectiveness of creating welcoming schools.

• Explain why you and the audience are on the same side. Remember the “audience” when talking to the press is not the reporter but the people watching news or reading the paper.

• Think about the types of questions you might be asked. Develop responses. Think about why this work is important in your school or school district. Think about what prompted you to work towards a more welcoming school.

• Practice responding to the media. Practice giving concise responses. Practice using your core messages to respond to controversial questions. Practice staying positive.

• Ensure that the public is informed of the depth of community support for Welcoming Schools.

• Connect the goals of Welcoming Schools with school mission statements, strategic goals, and initiatives related to social and emotional learning – for example, anti-bullying initiatives, Second Step, or Open Circle.

• Connect Welcoming Schools to values that many people share — such as the opportunity for children to learn in a safe environment, the opportunity for all children to reach their fullest potential, the responsibility we share in creating a safe school environment for all students, the responsibility to create a school where all students can thrive.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Talking with the media and community members about a school initiative that might be controversial is a skill that most school administrators have developed. To help them speak about Welcoming Schools remind them of what they have learned from past controversies and ensure that they are:

• Well versed in how the goals of the Welcoming Schools work links to the school’s mission and academic goals

• Prepared for specific types of concerns that may be raised

• Aware of the support for Welcoming Schools work in the community

THE POWER OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Welcoming Schools was developed because parents and teachers saw ways in which children were hurt by name-calling and the invisibility of certain families in schools.

• In community forums or media coverage it is critical that the voices of local families be included. Work with a diverse group of parents that represents a wide variety of families including some combination of LGBT and non-LGBT parents, single parents, adoptive parents etc.
Hearing from a family whose children have struggled to feel safe about being open about their family or who have felt excluded from classroom lessons can be very powerful.

Hearing how devastating name-calling and bullying related to bias and stereotypes is also powerful.

Include some examples of when your school has handled situations well. For example, if hurtful name-calling was stopped or a child and their family were accepted, describe these situations and praise the people involved.

Sometimes groups of parents with concerns work with media to create controversy related to LGBT parents or topics in schools. If this happens:

- Invite these parents to speak with administration about the welcoming schools work and invite them to review the materials.
- Listen carefully to their concerns. Look for opportunities to foster dialogue in a respectful manner.
- Stick with the positive. Even if others try to label the work as controversial or negative, focus on the ways that this work helps ensure safety, respect and a welcoming school where all children can learn.
- See Responding to Concerns about Being LGBT-Inclusive for more ideas on how to respond to questions.

Concerned parents may refer to materials that are not a part of Welcoming Schools, materials that may be more controversial. Ensure that materials shown the media, School Boards or the school administration really are Welcoming School material. (Also note that the materials in Welcoming Schools were developed for use in many different communities. It helps to be clear where you will start with in your community.)

**RESOURCES IN WELCOMING SCHOOLS**

- Why Discuss Family Diversity, Teasing, Name-Calling and Gender?
- Responding to Concerns about Being LGBT Inclusive
- Creating Welcoming Schools: Getting Started
- Inclusive Schools and Communities: Relevant Research
- Support for Welcoming Schools: Laws, Curriculum Standards, Professional Support