



CITY COUNCIL

Darryl Moore
Councilmember District 2

CONSENT CALENDAR
February 12, 2008

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Darryl Moore

Subject: Budget Referral: Our Family Coalition

RECOMMENDATION:

Refer the following to the midyear budget process: A one-time request for \$20,000 for Our Family Coalition to leverage other funding sources to implement their *Schools Program*.

BACKGROUND:

Our Family Coalition (OFC) promotes the civil rights and well being of Bay Area families with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) parents and prospective parents through education, advocacy, social networking, and grassroots community organizing. OFC is currently celebrating ten years of work with Berkeley families and institutions.

A critical component of our work with LGBTQ parents has been our *Schools Program*, which works with parents, educators, administrators, and district officials to create welcoming elementary school environments for children with LGBTQ parents by promoting tolerance and reducing bullying.

During Our Family Coalition's extensive 2005 strategic planning process, which included numerous one-on-one interviews and focus group meetings with diverse LGBTQ parents, they repeatedly cited the need for a comprehensive approach to creating a culture of acceptance at Bay Area elementary schools. Many parents shared their personal experience of incidents that occurred at their children's schools. While there is little documented information on elementary schools, research by the California Safe Schools Coalition has shown (in the 2004 *Safe Place to Learn* report and shorter research briefs) that harassment on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is a significant and widespread problem in California middle schools and high schools, with negative impact on young people's academic performance and well-being. Of special note, LGBTQ students of color face multiple layers of isolation, marginalization, and violence.

Fostering understanding and challenging anti-gay bias in elementary school can both support healthy school experiences for children of LGBTQ parents and lay the groundwork for safe and healthy learning environments in middle school and high school, when LGBTQ youth begin to come out. In working with parents and schools to address these situations, OFC has found that often schools are well intentioned, but have neither the language nor tools to make their schools more welcoming. In middle and high schools, it is essential to institutionalize inclusive curriculum with staff and provide opportunities for community building and leadership development among LGBTQ students.

OFC has developed effective mechanisms to support parents and elementary schools in countering bias and creating safe and healthy learning environments.

We have also made significant strides in engaging Berkeley parents and Berkeley school and district personnel in these efforts, particularly through our annual East Bay Elementary School Forum and through support and training for parent advocates. The East Bay Elementary School Forum, held for the past two years, has consistently drawn over 100 people, including parents, teachers, principals, and other representatives from many school districts.

At our 2006 forum, administrators from the Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD) and a number of Berkeley parents established the Family Diversity/LGBT Inclusion Task Force with the goal of addressing the need both for curriculum development related to family diversity, LGBT people and gender stereotyping, and for strategies to address anti-gay bias and bullying experienced by students and LGBT staff.

OFC has also met and worked with BUSD's Superintendent of Schools, Michele Lawrence, and the Associate Superintendent for Educational Services, Neil Smith, on a variety of projects:

- Developing a policy to explicitly encourage the inclusion of family diversity work in the classroom and to recognize the need to accommodate gender nonconforming individuals;
- Planning for a facilitated conversation with BUSD principals at one of their weekly meetings;
- Helping to design District-wide staff training;
- Initiating curriculum development on family diversity, anti-bullying, and LGBT inclusion materials;
- Reviewing District-wide of compliance with AB 537 – the state law protecting against discrimination and harassment of students based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

Based on our successful schools work to date, OFC has been chosen as a Welcoming Schools partner agency. Welcoming Schools is a new elementary school curriculum developed in Boston and distributed by Human Rights Campaign. Emerson Elementary School in the BUSD is a Leadership Site for the Welcoming Schools Curriculum, and OFC is engaged in ongoing staff development work at Emerson. In addition, OFC has worked for two years directly with Oxford School on curriculum and staff development,

and has been in conversation with staff at Thousand Oaks Elementary School. There is also interest at Le Conte and at Berkeley Arts Magnet Schools.

Through this extensive array of activities, OFC supports parent-led, grassroots efforts to create welcoming environments and address bullying in individual schools; supports teacher or administrator efforts to improve school climate; and engages parents and school district personnel in broader policy efforts to create safe and welcoming school environments. OFC works with others, including GroundSpark (formerly Women's Educational Media), Gay Straight Alliance Network, Ally Action, Pacific Center, the El Cerrito High's "Da Rainbow Clique" youth of color group and others to bring resources to schools.

A grant of \$60,000 would support our efforts to:

- Provide family diversity/welcoming environment staff development training for elementary schools in the Berkeley Unified School District;
- Provide age-appropriate books and videos illustrating family diversity for classroom and school library use;
- Continue to organize monthly parent-led parent advocacy meetings that build the capacity of approximately 20 parents, along with teachers and administrators to be effective advocates with their children's schools and support parents in working for positive change;
- Continue to sponsor an annual East Bay Elementary School Forum to bring together parents, school personnel, and district personnel, including BUSD parents, teachers, and administrators;
- Evaluate a new pilot curriculum for elementary schools and if successful, disseminate to the schools; and
- Develop a multi-cultural youth peer educator speakers' bureau at BHS to make presentations to middle and high school classrooms, staff and others.

While Our Family Coalition is requesting \$60,000 dollars to establish their *Schools Program*, \$20,000 contribution from the City could be used to leverage in-kind donations and funding from other sources. Our Family Coalition has already received in-kind support from the Berkeley Unified School District to provide family diversity/welcoming environment staff development training.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

\$20,000

CONTACT PERSON:

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