LGBTQ Laws Training Module Creation

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Abstract

When a student enters a school environment it is crucial that they feel safe and included. Currently there is a subsect of students that do not feel this way. Students that identify as members of the LGBTQ community often feel discriminated against by their peers and even by their teachers. When facing discrimination from peers it is usually due to the cruel nature of children. However, when facing discrimination form teachers, it is often due to a failure on the teacher’s part of understanding of how to address students that are members of the LGBTQ community. While it seems like a matter of common sense, there are some teachers that fail to recognize that by law the rights of LGBTQ students that protected and that a failure to address these students properly may result in a lawsuit. Aside from a lawsuit, this inadvertent discrimination by school staff due to a lack of understanding damages the school districts’ relationship not just with the student but the families we serve. My colleague, Jason Kissoon and I noticed this crucial issue and proposed the creation of a mock professional development that would be used to educate Richmond Public School teachers on the rights of LGBTQ students in school and the proper terminology to use when addressing students of the LGBTQ community. As part of this mock professional development, Mr. Kissoon and I will educate teachers of critical school laws that pertain to the protections offers to students that are part of the LGBTQ community, the proper terms to use when addressing students that are members of the LGBTQ community and provide an overview of a newly written RPS policy that focuses on LGBTQ students.

Keywords: LGBTQ, LGBTQ Community School Laws governing LGBTQ, Written Policy, School laws concerning LGBTQ, Gender Identity, Expression, Sexual Orientation

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# Purpose

The purpose of the project is to develop model for a professional development that will provide teachers in Richmond Public School an understanding of the laws which address the treatment of the LGBTQ student, the proper terminology that is used when addressing LGBTQ students, and a newly written policy that pertains to LGBTQ students.

## How did it come about?

While working with my colleague, Jason Kissoon, we noticed that students who identified as LGBTQ were not always being addressed in a manner that allowed them to feel included or respected. While many teachers are aware that all students should be treated fairly and feel comfortable in the school environment, most do not know that there are direct laws that address how students who identify as LGBTQ are to be treated at school. To make matters even more complicated many staff members in RPS do not have a proper understanding of the different terminology and how they apply to different member of the LGBTQ community, this not explicitly written in any of the current policy in Richmond Public Schools. . We are aware that this is a hot button topic for many people including teachers, students, and other members of the school community. When a student comes to school, they have the right an environment the provides safety and inclusion regardless of their gender identity, expression, or sexual orientation.

Due to the things that we noticed, Jason Kissoon and I explored Richmond Public Schools’ district guideline and policies. During our research we discovered that currently there is not an explicitly written district guideline or policie for Richmond Public Schools that address the subject of LGBTQ students. Failure to clearly list and define LGBTQ rights can have detrimental impact on relationships at school between the staff and the students. A failure to provide training and understanding on this subject matter may result in possible lawsuits against staff members. When discussing this lack of policy with our superiors we met a great deal of “red tape”. This is due to the sensitive nature of this topic and the fact that we could not force all staff member to be part of this professional development. Because of this we were advised to approach this project as a mock or model professional development.

## How does the topic relate to law or policy?

It is very relevant to all schools that receive federal funds. Because there are several federal laws that govern the fair treatment of students who identify as LGBTQ all RPS staff should be aware of them and the possible repercussions for failing to abide by said laws. There are four laws that directly address matters of LGBTQ students. The first is Title IX, the second is The Equal Access Act, the third law is The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and the last law is The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

# Research Design

My colleague, Jason Kissoon and I decided to first interview various administrators across RPS to gain insight on this subject matter from the view point of an active administrator in RPS. While we obtained the interviews, every administrator that we spoke with asked to be anonymous due to the sensitivity of the subject matter. Aside from interviews we also looked at the current RPS policies and guideline, the policies and guidelines for school districts in different parts of Virginia, and finally the school policies and guideline in the states of Massachusetts, California, and New Jersey. We also researched the different terminology pertaining to LGBTQ.

## Timeline and process.

Over the course of four months my colleague, Jason and I decided to meet between two to three time. During our meetings we would research and dissect the current policies of RPS. During this process we found that there were no written policies which directly addressed interactions with LGBTQ students. During our research we also observed an increase of students identifying as LGBTQ at the elementary level of education. Because of the sensitivity of the subject many administrators and teachers did not know how to directly address LGBTQ students ensure that they are not being treated differently because of their gender identity, expression, or sexual orientation. Currently, there are no written district guidelines or policies in place which ensure that the rights of LGBTQ students are being protected.

After conducting the interviews and researching RPS policies, we began to research the LGBTQ student policies for the other school districts in Virginia, Boston, California, and New Jersey. Once our research was completed, we began the creation of our mock/ model professional development.

**Results**

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| **Date** | **Time In** | **Time Out** | **Contact Hours** | **Setting** | **Description of Activities** |
| 9/6/2018 | 5:00 PM | 8:00 PM | 3:00 | Linwood Holton Elementary School | PBL Law: Met with Jason Kissoon to discuss potential topics for our PBL Law. We discussed focusing on educating staff teachers about policies and school laws which govern fair LGBTQ students. |
| 9/7/2018 | 3:30 PM | 4:15 PM | 0:45 | Office of Exceptional Education | PBL Law: Met with Crystal Foxx to review law proposal. Due to the sensitive nature of the proposed PBL, Ms. Foxx signed the proposal pending approval from higher administration. During this proposal, the plan was to create an actual professional development with actual teachers at Linwood Holton Elementary School. |
| 9/7/2018 | 5:00 PM | 6:30 PM | 1:30 | Linwood Holton Elementary School | PBL Law: Met with principal (Dr. Hurt) and assistant principal (Ms. Jefferson) of Linwood Holton. They both thought the idea was relevant to the current students in public school. However, due to the sensitive nature of the proposal, she wanted to get clearance from her supervisor. We also contacted Dr. Chen during this time to express our concerns about the sensitivity of our proposal based on our supervisor's feedback. She advised us that if we were truly passionate about this topic, that we should create a training model for the purpose of our class that we would not actually share with staff (besides our site supervisors) unless we got permission from upper administration to facilitate an actual professional development. |
| 9/11/2018 | 3:00 PM | 4:00 PM | 1:00 | Office of Exceptional Education | PBL Leadership & PBL Law: I met with Crystal Foxx to share updates on both PBL. I informed Ms. Foxx, that with PBL Law, after speaking to our professor, Dr. Chen, Jason Kissoon and I would create a training model for the purpose of our class that we would not actually share with staff (besides our site supervisors) unless we got permission from upper administration to facilitate an actual professional development. |
| 9/12/2018 | 5:00 PM | 8:00 PM | 3:00 | Panera Bread | PBL Law: I met with Jason Kissoon at Panera Bread to discuss and plan our PBL law proposal. Together we researched some key elements: Definition of LGBTQ, laws protecting the rights of LGBTQ students and teachers, other LQBTQ policies in public schools in Virginia, Massachusetts and California. While we didn’t find a policy that addresses the rights of LGBTQ students in our district, we felt it necessary to create a training model that could be the foundation for building such a policy in RPS. |
| 9/19/2018 | 5:00 PM | 7:00 PM | 2:00 | Linwood Holton Elementary School | PBL Law: I met with Jason Kissoon at Linwood Holton Elementary School. After speaking to our site supervisors, we decided to expand the training model to elementary, middle and high school. We believe that creating a training module can possibly be reviewed by the RPS Cabinet as a starting point for creating an actual LGBTQ policy that protects the rights of students who identify as LGBTQ. Such a policy is relevant to current students at elementary, middle and high schools can help staff throughout the district to me more mindful to the rights of LGBTQ students regardless of their personal views. |
| 10/4/2018 | 5:00 PM | 7:30 PM | 2:30 | Linwood Holton Elementary School/ Starbucks | PBL Law: Met with Jason Kissoon at Linwood Holton Elementary School. After deciding to expand the training model to elementary, middle and high school we wanted to create a training model that could be utilized by our school district. We further researched the topic. There is not a clearly defined policy that govern LGBTQ students. We researched what other schools districts in VA were doing for their LQBTQ students. Fairfax County Public School Board recently approve with a 10-0 margin a more LGBT-inclusive sex education curriculum. The new curriculum for Family Life Education Curriculum for eighth, ninth and 10th graders removes “biological gender” and replaces it with “sex assigned at the birth.” This new curriculum is inclusive of gender identity such as transgender and sexual orientation such as heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual. Jason Kissoon and I also looked at policies from Loudoun County in Northern Virginia. |
| 10/9/2018 | 5:00 PM | 8:00 PM | 3:00 | Linwood Holton Elementary School/ Starbucks | PBL Law: Today I met with Jason Kissoon at Linwood Holton Elementary School. After deciding to expand the training model to elementary, middle and high school we wanted to create a training model that could be utilized by our school district. We further researched the topic. There is not a clearly defined policy that govern LGBTQ students. We researched what other schools districts in other parts of the country are doing. Boston Public Schools recently updated their mission at the district to create a safe and welcoming learning environments where all students, including transgender and gender-nonconforming students, are respected and can flourish. Jason Kissoon and I can look at Boston as one possible school district which can help us model our training model. |
| 10/13/18 | 5:00 PM | 8:00 PM | 3:00 | Linwood Holton Elementary School/ Starbucks | PBL Law: Today I met with Jason Kissoon at Linwood Holton Elementary School. After deciding to expand the training model to elementary, middle and high school we wanted to create a training model that could be utilized by our school district. We found a lack of a clearly defined policy that coversLGBTQ students. We researched other school districts in the country. The Los Angeles Unified School District was one of the other districts we looked at. Jason Kissoon and I looked at California as another possible school district which can help us model our training model. |
| 10/18/18 | 5:00 PM | 8:30 PM | 3:30 | Linwood Holton Elementary School/ Starbucks | PBL Law: Today I met with Jason Kissoon at Linwood Holton Elementary School. We were able to look at a few policies in Virginia, California, Boston, and New Jersey. We then selected 4 policies that seems most relevant to the demographic here in Richmond. Jason Kissoon and I started modelling our training module based on the information we gathered from the policies we researched. |

**Final product presented**

**Model Professional Development**

Our professional development consists of two physical document that would be provided to staff members and a power point that accompanies a presentation please see the attached documents.

**Conclusion**

**What did you learn from this project?**

During the process of this project, Jason Kissoon and I learned that RPS lacks policy that includes LGBTQ verbiage. This lack of policy as well as training for the staff leaves the school system open to different forms of litigation and lawsuits. We also learned that while many of the staff members of Richmond Public schools are not aware of the different terminology the pertains to the LGBTQ community and this lack of understanding inadvertently places them in compromising positions. We were reminded to the touchy nature of this subject matter and learned of the various hurdles that had to be over come to even attempt to create a professional development for this subject matter.

**What are some potential next steps based on what you have learned?**

The first step is to present our research to the administrative team of Linwood Holton Elementary as well as central office so that they can review it. Based on their review we may be able to present this professional development at on RPS school and gauge the staff reaction to the professional development as well as the proposed policy pertaining to LGBTQ students in RPS.

**Reflection**

During the process of writing this paper I was on the phone with Jason to ensure that I was writing the paper correctly. When coming up with how to write the paper I created a draft and confirmed a lot of the mutual information with my partner. In my haste to complete the paper I did not properly review my paper and later realized that major portions of my paper were similar to my partner’s. Dr. Chen in her directions made it clear that we were to write separate papers and while I understood that I made a mistake in how I interoperated the message. To prevent a mistake as serious as this from repeating itself in the future, I will first type my paper without conferencing with my partner during the writing process. This will ensure that his writing style does not blend into mine while I am in the process of writing. The second thing I will do is properly review my paper by comparing it to his to ensure that there is no possibility of plagiarism. I understand that while we maybe have the same results and information, it is important that there are very little similarities in our papers.

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I, Francis Johnson, having a clear understanding of the basis and spirit of the Honor Code created and accepted by the student body of Longwood University, shall at all times govern my university life according to its standards and actively work to support its principles, thereby thoughtfully accepting my responsibility for preserving the honor and integrity of all past, present and future members of the Longwood University community of scholars. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor tolerate those who do.

Francis Johnson

