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Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools get failing grade on GLBT issues

by David Stout and Brian M. Myer
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE—On September 10, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), the nation's largest organization addressing anti-gay bias in schools, released its second annual "Report Card" grading school's efforts to provide a safe and supportive environment for GLBT students.

The average grade among the 42 public school districts surveyed was a "D," only slightly better than Charlotte-Mecklenburg — the only Carolinas school district included — which received an "F"

The findings represent the experiences of nearly six million students in the assessed districts — chosen based on size of student

population and geographic diversity. While there are 15,995 school districts in the country, the majority of them have less than 2500

students. The smallest district included in GLSEN's "Back To School Campaign" has over 20,000 students. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg system has approximately 99,000 students, according to Janice Rucker, the district's Public Information Supervisor.

Surveyed districts were asked to submit evidence of six points of compliance for grading purposes: 1) a written policy protecting students from discrimination based on sexual orientation; 2) a written policy protecting staff from discrimination based on sexual orientation 3) a written policy protecting students and staff from harassment based on their real or perceived sexual orientation; 4) training for staff on issues facing GLBT youth; 5) support for curricula that recognize the lives and contributions of GLBT people; and 6) support for extracurricular student activities and clubs that challenge homophobia and

heterosexism.

School systems that met all six criteria were given an "A." Those that met five received an "A-," four a "B," three a "C," two a "D" and one or none an "F." The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public School district met none of GLSEN's criteria.

Rucker challenged Charlotte-Mecklenburg's failing grade, although she acknowledged that the district had no written policies dealing with sexual orientation. "We don't have a policy that specifically addresses gay and lesbian students, but our policies protect all students."

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Assistant Superintendent for Student, Family and Community Services, Barb Pellin, also disputed GLSEN's findings. She contended that the policies covering sex discrimination apply to sexual orientation, as well. "In that [policy] context, 'sex' and 'sexual orienta-

tion' are the same thing."

Charlotte attorney Connie Vetter was unaware of any policies that would cover sexual orientation. "To my knowledge, there is not a Charlotte-Mecklenburg policy in place — and more importantly, enforced — that deals with sexual orientation. If there is, I'm very excited to hear about it and look forward to seeing it enforced."

Based on data from Youth Risk Behavior surveys conducted by the states of Massachusetts and Vermont and Seattle's Safe Schools Coalition, it is documented that the typical high school student hears as many as 26 anti-gay slurs each day. When this occurs, faculty intervene only 3 percent of the time. As a result of this lack of

intervention, 19 percent of GLBT students suffer physical attacks associated with their sexual See *SCHOOL* on page 22

Report Card		
on making schools safe for all students		
Name of School/District: Charlotte-Mecklenburg	Grade: F	
City/State: Charlotte, NC		
Subject	Yes	No
1. The district protects students from discrimination based on sexual orientation		✓
2. The district protects staff from discrimination based on sexual orientation		✓
3. The district protects students and staff from harassment based on sexual orientation		✓
4. The district supports training for staff on issues facing GLBT youth		✓
5. The district supports curriculum that is inclusive of the lives and contributions of GLBT people		✓
6. Gay/Straight Alliances are recognized in a random sampling of the district's list of official clubs		✓

Honor Roll

Dade County Public Schools	A
Los Angeles School District	A
Philadelphia Public Schools	A
San Diego School District	A
San Francisco School District	A
Boston Public Schools	A-
Seattle Public Schools	A-

Dishonor Roll

Charlotte-Mecklenburg	F
Chicago Public Schools	F
Indianapolis Public Schools	F
Memphis City School District	F
Houston Independent School District	F
Cleveland Public Schools	F

ACLU ad decries anti-gay bigotry

by Emily Whitfield
Special to Q-Notes

NEW YORK—As political and religious conservatives increase public attacks on gays and lesbians, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is asking Americans to consider the morality of bigotry.

In the sixth installment of its year-long public policy advertising campaign running on the op-ed page of the *New York Times* and *The New Republic*, the ACLU pointed out that morality was once used as a justification for widespread discrimination against African Americans.

"Belief in the innate immorality of black people, buttressed by selected scriptural references, formed the basis for slavery, segregation and lynchings," the September 1 advertisement noted.

The advertising campaign, a first-ever effort for the 78-year-old organization, runs on the *Times* op-ed page once a month through December 1998. Each ad contains a briefly-worded message from ACLU Executive Director Ira Glasser on topical subjects ranging from the war on drugs to religious freedom to government intrusions in the bedroom.

Linking the campaign theme of public vs. private morality to the ad, Glasser points out that claims of moral inferiority have been used throughout American history as a justification for denying civil rights to disenfranchised groups.

"We were once told that it would be immoral for women to work or vote. Jews, Irish, Italians — virtually every immigrant group in fact — were once said to be morally inferior," he stated. "Any time we hear discrimination justified by claims that its victims are immoral, we should remember this regrettable part of our history."

The latest round of attacks on lesbians and gay men come in the wake of recent legal and legislative civil rights victories. Just last month, the House overwhelmingly rejected an anti-gay measure that would have permitted discrimination against gay men and lesbians employed by the federal government. And in a landmark 1996 decision, the Supreme Court for the first time ruled that the government may not treat

"Sure, they can try to hide behind morality, but we all know a bigot when we see one."

lesbians and gay men differently simply out of hostility and fear.

Political operatives and religious extremists are now determined to take back those victories, the ACLU said. Leading the fight is Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-MS), who in a recent television interview equated homosexuality with "sins" like "kleptomania" and "alcoholism." Backing him up, House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-TX) assured the public that "the Bible is very clear on this."

Saying that homosexuality is a matter of "lifestyle" choice, a coalition of Christian conservative groups have placed a series of full-page ads in major newspapers making the scientifically rejected claim that gays can be "converted." In a recent interview with the *Times*, one of the architects of the "conversion" ad campaign said the advertising ploy was intended to strike at the assumption that homosexuality is immutable and that gay people therefore need protection under anti-discrimination laws.

The ad campaign is clearly an attempt to set up a phony debate over whether gay men and lesbians can, in fact, change, Glasser said. The real issue, he observed, is whether loving someone of the same sex should condemn lesbians and gay men to random violence, harassment, job and housing discrimination and loss of rights as a parent.

In the ACLU ad, Glasser concludes: "Sure, they can try to hide behind morality, but we all know a bigot when we see one. Think about it."

To further stimulate public discussion, the ads have an interactive component through the ACLU's Freedom Network website at www.aclu.org/features/nytimesad090198.html. Visitors to the website can access background information on the subject of the current month's ad and are invited to post their own thoughts to an interactive message board. ▼

"Ex-gay" couple raises questions

by Wanda Pico
Special to Q-Notes

NEW YORK—In a forgotten *Wall Street Journal* interview from several years ago, John Paulk, one-half of the nation's most prominent "ex-gay" couple, admitted that he was not 100 percent "cured" of his homosexuality. Now, *Time* magazine has published an article questioning whether Anne Paulk was ever a lesbian at all. In light of these discrepancies, some are beginning to wonder if the Paulk's "ex-gay" house of cards is starting to crumble down around them.

On April 21, 1993, John Paulk — who recently appeared on the cover of *Newsweek* magazine with his "ex-lesbian" wife Anne — told the *Wall Street Journal* that his new-found heterosexual orientation was not as intense as that of the "average man on the street." He also stated that he was unsure if he would ever have the "intensity for sex with women" that most straight men have.

In the interview, he also put cold water on

the notion that he and his wife were actually "cured" of their gay orientations: "To say that we've arrived at this place of total heterosexuality — that we're totally healed — is misleading," Paulk admitted.

Time further clouded the Paulk's claims when it reported that writers couldn't find even one past girlfriend of the supposedly former-lesbian Anne. She refused to offer the name of a single lesbian lover, but "conceded that her ties to women in college were 'more emotional than sexual.'"

Gay and lesbian activists immediately challenged the Paulks' standing as conversion icons within the "ex-gay" movement. "We don't know if he's still gay or whether she was ever really a lesbian," said John Aravosis, an online activist who has been monitoring the situation. "A lot of people are wondering whether the Paulks are 'ex-gays' after all."

He concluded, "If the Paulks are the best the radical right has to offer, it's not clear there are any 'ex-gays' out there at all." ▼

Sheriff pleads guilty to wiretapping

by Dan Van Mourik
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE, NC—Mitchell County Sheriff Vernon Bishop, 37, pleaded guilty in federal court to illegal wiretapping, a felony that will end his law enforcement career in NC.

Bishop admitted that he intentionally intercepted and recorded a local high school football coach's cordless telephone conversation in an attempt to get the coach, who he suspected of being gay, fired.

Bishop was indicted June 1 by a federal grand jury after an investigation by the State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The first count of the indictment charged Bishop with getting a sheriff's deputy to record a conversation Leland Riddle had on a cordless phone at his house in January 1995. The second and third counts charged him with disclosing the contents of the illegal recording to the local school officials.

Bishop pleaded guilty to the first count and prosecutors agreed to drop the other two. They also agreed to recommend that Bishop be sentenced to home detention or probation. No sen-

tencing date has been set.

As a condition of the plea agreement, Bishop will pay more than \$15,300 to Riddle as compensation for lost wages.

"It is especially troubling when those who are charged with protecting the public abuse their positions of power and violate the public trust," said US Attorney Mark Calloway.

In September 1997, Bishop apologized for the incident, ending a three-day hearing that was held after a local district attorney petitioned Mitchell Superior Court to remove Bishop from office. District Attorney Tom Rusher dropped the petition in exchange for the apology. Bishop also agreed to forfeit a half-month's salary or about \$1590 as part of the deal.

An SBI agent testified during last year's hearing that the sheriff lied to agents, telling them an anonymous person left a tape of the conversation on his desk. Bishop acknowledged that he asked deputies to record conversations they might pick up on their police scanners. He said it was part of an investigation into whether Riddle was conspiring to commit sodomy.

Riddle resigned in February 1996. ▼