

## LGBTQ+ OUTREACH OF PC- SCHOOL BOARD STATEMENT 2/24/22

We, the board of directors and community members of LGBTQ+ Outreach of Porter County, in keeping with our mission of promoting an affirming community to LGBTQ+ youth, show solidarity with Jasper Wisecarver in his lawsuit filed by the ACLU of Indiana. The acts of Valparaiso Community School Corporation in continuously denying Jasper appropriate and legitimate access to student bathrooms, and locker room facilities is an egregious violation of his rights. Not only is VCS not doing right by Jasper in their unwillingness to ensure his rights, but they are sending the wrong message to all LGBTQ+ students, students of color, and other underrepresented groups in our community. All of our students need and deserve the support of the adults in their lives. We come before the board today to ask that the district examine and revise its policies on bathroom and locker use by its students in line with their gender identity, according to protections under Title IX and the 14th Amendment. Second, we ask that moving forward the school board institutes mandatory annual diversity and inclusion training for all faculty and staff to address these patterns of discriminatory actions.

In response to the 2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health conducted by the Trevor Project with over 100,000 participants:

- 94% of LGBTQ youth reported that recent politics have negatively impacted their mental health.
- 27% of transgender youth indicated that they felt unsafe attending school within the past 30 days compared to 6% of their cisgender peers.
- In the same study, it was determined that many LGBTQ youth lack access to affirming spaces, with only half of LGBTQ youth reporting that their school is LGBTQ-affirming and only 1 in 3 saying that their home is LGBTQ-affirming.
- Additionally, 75% of LGBTQ youth report that they had experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity at least once in their lifetime, and more than half said they experienced this discrimination in the past year.

Reference:

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2021/>

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- 67% of LGBTQ youth of color reported discrimination based on their race/ethnicity in the past year.
- 48% of all LGBTQ students reported that they wanted counseling from a mental health professional in the past year, but were unable to access it, including 45% of white youth and 53% and 54% of black and latinx youth respectively.

National organizations such as the Trevor Project, the ACLU, GLAAD, and HRC help bring these types of statistics to light and fight on the national stage for matters of equality and discriminatory legislation. For reasons made clear from the results of this national study, there is work to be done to protect and support our underrepresented populations in our schools, and this is why we ask that moving forward the school board institutes mandatory annual diversity and inclusion training for all faculty and staff.

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PFLAG is the nation's largest family and ally organization. We advocate, educate & support the family, friends, allies and members of the LGBTQ+ community and show our solidarity with Jasper Wisecarver and the ACLU of Indiana:

Just as Valparaiso and NW Indiana are beginning to draw more and more new residents and businesses who desire the opportunities and offerings here in the area, a simultaneous and less visible flight is occurring. There is an ongoing exodus of a generation of creative, intelligent young adults who leave the region, with no intent to return, after their graduation from Valparaiso Community Schools. This has been going on for decades. Alumni who follow the local news of ongoing incidents of discrimination have two consistent reactions: dismay about the lack of change and outrage that students continue to experience the same adversity as they did in the 90s and 2000s when they left the area rather than coming out in such an oppressive environment. Those young people who did not and do not fit the prescribed mold or agree that "It's Better in Valpo" for them, choose to leave due to the ongoing culture of intolerance and discrimination that they experience. This leads to a void of 20-somethings who would otherwise return and contribute to the community in which they were raised. We ask that you, as the representatives of our schools, stand on the side of doing right by ALL your students. Acknowledge that not all of your students feel safe in school, and

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implement change. Reconsider your efforts at becoming a visibly inclusive and diverse school system by acknowledging mistakes of the past and move forward with a goal of making it “better in Valpo”.

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LGBTQ+ Outreach of Porter County has the primary goals of empowerment, advocacy, and support of LGBTQ+ people in our local community and beyond compels us to speak out on this specific and recurring issue in Valparaiso. We ask that regardless of the ongoing litigation, in the meantime, school staff and administration do their parts in empowering all Indiana youth facing discrimination to feel seen and heard, understood and supported, respected and treated with equality. Every student has the right to learn and thrive in a welcoming and inclusive environment that nourishes and encourages the whole student, and VCS must do right by Jasper. We ask that you immediately revise your bathroom and locker room policies and look to enact diversity and inclusion training at a district wide level.

We end with this reminder, in Trevor Project’s 2021 national study, when asked what brings LGBTQ+ students joy and strength, their answers included: having supportive and accepting friends, affirming parents, art & creative expression, having a pet, connections to other LGBTQ people, faith & spirituality, seeing rainbow flags & stickers in public settings, having educational opportunities, and having **LGBTQ support in their schools**. We applaud Jasper’s bravery and strength. We extend our support to him and the ACLU and affirm Jasper’s fight for equal rights.

Sincerely, the Board of LGBTQ Outreach of Porter County  
Simon Anderson Schelling, Chair  
Ezra Burke, Secretary  
Scott Saporiti, Treasurer  
Mark Fesenmeyer  
Carrie Sovola  
Joint Statement with Valparaiso PFLAG; Deb Porter, Chair

Reference:  
<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2021/>