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## Dean's Corner: Intentional Support

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# Intentional Support

Effective schools understand that student academic success and school climate are critical partners. *All* students need to feel safe, supported, nurtured and understood. Expressing this well-known fact, however, is wholly different than its implementation. To change a school's climate to one of an all-inclusive accepting nature requires much more than a professional development session or statement.

Effective and sustainable school environments that focus on students' needs for safety and support take immense planning, work and commitment. As such, special attention needs to be given to at-risk groups and students of all diverse backgrounds. This issue of *Colleagues* focuses on one of these at-risk groups—students who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and/or Transgendered (LGBT). LGBT students report being harassed at school at a much higher rate than their non-LGBT peers. Due to the lack of role models, harassment, and resulting depression and absenteeism, LGBT student frequently experience negative learning outcomes, and are at high-risk for failure/dropping-out. This issue, therefore, provides a direct response to the knowledge that can be considered by schools that want to create safe and supportive environments for their LGBT student population.

America is experiencing a very rapid shifting social environment, largely due to the changing opinion and laws on LGBT rights. Because of this rapid change, educators may be unsure or ill-prepared to support LGBT students. Acceptance of homosexuality in the United States has increased eleven percent since 2007, with sixty percent of the American population stating that it should be accepted (Pew, 2013). As educators 'in loco parentis', while we



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understand that personal beliefs should not hinder our support of students charged to our care, at times our lack of awareness may be as much of a problem as prejudice. This issue provides articles to help teachers to: a) understand the LGBT community and its issues related to marginalization, and b) create a climate in which vulnerable students feel safe and valued—an environment that is truly welcoming to every student.

We dedicate this issue to the memory and the work of the late GVSU professor Dr. Milton E. Ford, who is credited with establishing the LGBT Resource Center on Grand Valley's Allendale Campus. Dr. Ford's legacy as an educator, advocate, and humanitarian will be remembered for generations to come.

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