Schools 'coming out' to address gay students

drowing up is tough enough, but when you're an adolescent not sure about your own sexuality it can be dequatating.

In this presidential campaign where "family values" are emphasized but not defined, many game and lesbions are worried they will be pushed back into the closet. The Birminghem and Bloomfield Hills public school districts have no efficial opinion on the homorexual lifestyle. But they do recognize that students generally discover they are gay or lesbion during their high gay or lesbinn during their high school years, and that discovery of-

gay or leablan during their alga-school years, and that discovery of-ted is traumatic, even deadly. In fact, "gay and leablan students are three times more likely to com-mity ancielle than other students," sapil Frank Colasanti, Jr., a cous-selvant of the students, and Frank Colasanti, Jr., a cous-selvant at Grower High School. They also are more likely to use drugs. Colasanti attended a workshop in the spring sponsored by the Nation-al Education Association in Wash-ington, D.C., on "Affording Equal Opportunity to Gay and Lesbian Students Through Teaching and Caunseling" General estimates show that about 10 percent of the general pop-ulation is gay, with a corresponding number in high schools, Colasanti said.

He'll use the knowledge he gained at the workshop to help the gay and leablan students he encounters when the new school year begins in

Innovative approach

Goal of the NEA workshop was to teach teachers, counselors and ad-ministrators about misunderstand-lorg, homophobia, violence directed at homosexuals, stereotyping and inappropriate teaching and coun-seling.

seling.
"It's definitely an innovative ap-proach," said Colasanti. "I thought it was a very balanced presentation. They gave a perspective of students

Students often have a feeling of alienation. "Society often views them as evil. Lesbians and gay are a

them as evil. Lesbians and gay are a part of society. They should be rec-ognized the same rights (as other people), "said Colasanti, who Is gay. "Gays and lesbians embrace the concepts of values, such as respect, pride in the country and a bellef in God," he said.

God," he said.

For the past two years the Birmingham school system has included discussions on homosexuality in its human sexuality curriculum, which is a part of its health courses.

The program brings in a panel of

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speakers, including gays and their parents, to discuss the issue. Parents are informed about the program and students don't have to attend if they don't want to.

According to Shiely Bryant, school spokeswoman, "We're trying to respond to what students find in real life."

Teaching immorals?

Not all parents see it that way. Pat Kendro of Bloomfield Town-ship sent five kids trough the Bir-mingham school system; four st-tended Scaholm.

"They (schools) should stay out of it. This should be private," Ken-

dro said.
"You're not allowed to teach mor-"You're not allowed to teach mor-nts in the school for fear religion night color the subject — but you are teaching immorals and appar-ently feel that's perfectly in line with a good (Birmingham Public School System) education. Not so," Kendro wrote to the school board.

Kendro said she is from "the old Kendro saus see is from 'to out school,' where emphasis was placed on the reading, writing and arithmetic. Courses on homosexuality 'are not what schools should be about.' she said. 'It's a matter of conscience,' she added.

Bloomfield Hills Schools don't

have a specific program on homo-sexuality, but the matter is covered in its regular school health curricu-

lum.

Andover High School principal
John Toma said cases of student
homosexuality have been "few and
for between"

homosexuality have been "rew and for between."

"We've had some instances, but not very often." Toma said. Counselors at Andover have taken seminars on the subject and guest speakers have come in to speak to them so they can assist students. But he said there have been so few inquiries that the issue has not generated a lot of itention. erated a lot of attention

No further seminars are planned, but he added, "Obviously, if we had a need for it, we would do it (have more seminara) agalo."

Julie Enszer, program director of Mirmationa Lesbian and Gay Julie Enszer, program director of Affirmationa Lesblan and Gay Community Center in Ferndale, as a support group, said she has gotten calls from gay and lesbian studenta in almost all the local school districts.

ricta.
"It's very traumatic," Einszer
said of student's coming to the realization that they are gay.
"If a student thinks they are gay,

we are someone they can feel com-fortable to talk to," said Enszer. Af-firmations has a hotline number (398-GAYS), which operates from 6

to 11 p.m. weekdays.

It is non-judgmental, Einszer said, and simply offers a voice that a troubled teens can talk to.

Einszer said that the recent emsis on "family values" has sed a backlash against gays and phasis

phasis on ranny caused because a backfash against gays and lesblans. Boyd Boama, senior professional associate of the NEA agreed. "There has been an increase (in anti-gay feeling)," said Boama. NEA sponsored the seminar Colasanti attended. "The Isaue is so polarized," Boama said, "it's a tricky isaue. Teachers tend to represent the values of their communities." And the NEA has come under fire from such conservative national figures as Pat

teachers.

The NEA is the largest union in the country, with about 2.1 million members including teachers and

Students unsure

The workshops cover three main topics: protecting the rights of gay students and staff, providing information about homophobia, and dealing with violence and gay basil-

"Participants have loved it," said Bosma. Teachers and staff from all 50 states have attended the annual

workshops.

How do students view the Issue?

They don't seem to be sure.
"I'd don't know how I'd react,"
said Seabalm junior Brad Tweeter
when asked if he knew a fellow stu-

when asked if he knew a leftow student was ago or leablan.
"I'm not really sure," said freshman Susan Lockman.
"I haven's had any contact personally with gays," said junior Neal

Sweeney.

But a former Seaholm student, who asked not to be named, said, "I have known some gays, but not in high school. I don't have eny problem with them."

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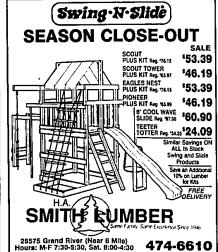


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