



## LGBTQ+ Panel

### **Panel participants:**

**Karen Edgerton, parent**

**Sandy McMurdo, parent**

**Kelly Clapp, Principal, Juanita High School**

**Scott Paul, Counselor, Inglewood MS**

**Vickie McCarter, teacher, LWSD**

**Ginger Chien, President, PFLAG Bellevue/Eastside**

**Rowan Wakley, MS Specialist, YES**

**Suzanne Campiche, Social Worker (Eastlake High School), Evergreen Community**

### **Brief Summary**

The intended focus of the this panel discussion was about how to be an ally and support to LGBTQ+ youth. Panelists shared personal stories as well as resources in schools and in the community. We talked about some of the challenges LGBTQ+ youth face in particular during the pandemic while they are unable to meet in schools. It's an isolating time and so peer interactions are limited to virtual experiences. We know that our LBGTQ+ youth are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges. Access a resource list on the LWPTSA Council website here: [Parent Ed Recap: LGBTQ+ Panel – Lake Washington PTSA Council 2.8 \(lwptsa.net\)](https://www.lwptsa.net/parent-ed-recap-lgbtq-panel-lake-washington-ptsa-council-2.8)

### **Some recommendations for how kids can connect with friends:**

Stay connected socially, but stay off of social media;

Watch movies together;

Share art and music together;

Use the flexi-schedule option and hang out with friends virtually at lunch time;

Practicing self-care is also essential and many shared their favorite strategies which also includes disconnecting entirely from the computer, social media and the phone.

There are still many challenges that we as school communities face. Some of these include really figuring out bathrooms in schools (there are still barriers to the district gender-neutral bathrooms); we need more guidance around honoring name changes; teacher subs need more information when they teach a class; some students are (still) not comfortable talking about their sexual orientation and gender identity at home;

Parents asked many good questions. One was whether kids should share with their teacher or school their LGBTQ+ status. It was recommended that certainly if it's important to your student

to disclose that information, they certainly can. However, there is still some danger of coming out. That really comes down to what is right for your student and it's certainly their decision to make. It also isn't necessarily important who you tell, from teacher to coach to counselor to principal, it's again up to the student.

Fun fact, one of our panelists shared that when she started working for the Lake Washington School District over 20 years ago, she was told that she could not be fired for her sexual orientation and how incredibly comforting that was at that time.

Final thoughts / key messages to takeaway from our panelists:

Stop and listen; be present

Word gets out that you are supportive, kids will know they can come to you for support.

Allyship is essential.

No matter how your child identifies, they are still the same person on the inside.

All parents can help by educating their children about LGBTQ+ community!

Other ways to be practical LGBTQ+ allies:

- Donate money to any number of causes that support LGBTQ at-risk youth; these include social activity groups (see resource list), legal defense funds, groups working with lawmakers to defend and advance rights;
- Volunteer for these groups in a behind the scene capacity if you're more comfortable – database work for example;
- March in the Pride Parade.

Another listening opportunity:

**National PTA recently held a talk How to Help LGBTQ Youth Thrive on December 2<sup>nd</sup>. In it a parent shares her ideas about how you as a parent can be a strong ally to your LGBTQ child.**

**You can access that talk here: [Notes from the Backpack - Center for Family Engagement \(pta.org\)](#)**

**Respectfully submitted by Irene Neumann, Chair, Parent Education, LWPTSA Council**

