



October 10, 2007

By mail and email

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Schools
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Dear Board members:

I understand that at your October 11 meeting you will entertain the idea of eliminating all non-curricular clubs as a response to plans to form a Gay-Straight Alliance club, or GSA, at Piedra Vista High School. I hope to dissuade you from that proposal.

In your policy 3.21.1, the Farmington Municipal Schools Board of Education recognizes non-curricular activities as "a vital part of the total educational program...a means for developing wholesome attitudes and good human relations, as well as knowledge and skills." Few would argue with the wisdom of that statement

No doubt many of your students cite their involvement in non-curricular clubs as a way of distinguishing themselves in the competition for university placement—as community leaders; as young adults dedicated to community service. I suspect many students would find less constructive ways of occupying their after-school hours if not for the positive channels afforded by these clubs.

Surely the goal of stopping the GSA is not worth sacrificing this "vital part" of your students' education.

Make no mistake, a ban of non-curricular activities would have to be absolute and consistently enforced. Several courts, including the Supreme Court, have interpreted those activities to include most of the groups we take for granted in the school community: cheerleading teams, anti-substance-abuse clubs like Students Against Drunk Driving, the Fellowship for Christian Athletes, and community service clubs, among many other valuable extracurricular outlets.

If you abolish these clubs in rhetoric only, but then allow them to continue with the school's implicit endorsement, you will invite the same legal liability, under the First

Amendment and the Equal Access Act, that I described to Principal Gattis in our letter dated September 26, 2007 (attached).

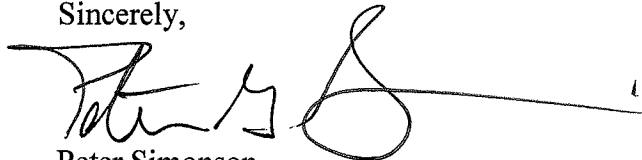
The same holds true for any attempt to configure the rules for clubs so that existing clubs can continue to function but the GSA cannot.

Time and time again, in other schools around the country, GSAs have proven vital for students who are struggling with harassment and discrimination because of their sexual orientation, or that of a friend or family member. They shelter students from violent bullying, and provide a safe place to work through experiences that sometimes are so upsetting that some students consider suicide. Nowhere have GSAs given rise to the vulgar activities that some parents have alleged in recent news articles.

I understand that you are faced with a difficult decision in this matter, but difficult times call for wise, proactive leadership, not timid or reactionary solutions. I urge you to keep your existing policy on clubs intact and to allow the formation of a GSA.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Simonson', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Peter Simonson
Executive Director

cc: Janel Ryan, Superintendent of Schools