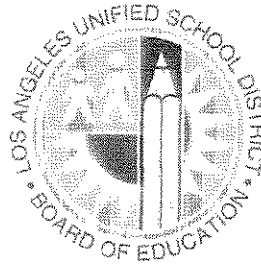


# PROJECT SPIN

SUICIDE PREVENTION INTERVENTION NOW



[projectspin.org](http://projectspin.org)

## PROJECT SPIN—An Overview

Project SPIN (Suicide Prevention Intervention Now) is a bold initiative by leaders of the Los Angeles Unified School District and the Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center to bring systemic change to LAUSD that will end conditions that contribute to LGBTQ youth suicide and suicidal ideation in the district's schools. The project seeks to create LGBTQ-affirming environments in all schools, all communities and all homes, as well as address the still pervasive presence of homophobia and transphobia—both subtle and severe—in our schools. And while our focus is on LGBTQ youth (including those presumed to be such), our efforts to create a welcoming and affirming environment for LGBTQ youth will have a salutary effect on the environment for all different and/or marginalized youth.

LAUSD is the nation's second largest school district and has been a leader in addressing issues facing LGBTQ youth for many years and has initiated innovative programs in this area. The Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center is the largest LGBT organization in the world and has long been at the forefront in offering services to LGBTQ youth and, in particular, at-risk youth. Starting at the end of 2010, these two organizations began collaborating on a plan for a comprehensive approach to ending LGBTQ youth suicide and reducing homophobia and transphobia in district schools. We believe this large-scale, coordinated and comprehensive approach is the only one of its kind the country.

The negative impact of institutional and individual homo/transphobia is well documented. LGBTQ students are at far greater risk of dropping out of school and they experience depression, violence, harassment, substance use and addiction, homelessness, HIV infection, and the ultimate tragedy—suicide—at much higher rates than their heterosexual counterparts. Despite efforts by some school districts, many LGBTQ young people still find their school environments to be hostile and dangerous. Not only does this make learning difficult or impossible, but this environment can result in an intolerable existence. This is the context in which some LGBTQ youth begin to see suicide as a viable or best option.

The District and the Center recognize the critical importance of anti-bullying education and programs in addressing these issues. But we also know that the bullying of LGBTQ youths and other psychological acts of brutality in school are usually at the end of a long chain of societal homophobia and transphobia that has battered the self-esteem of young people long before they arrive at the schoolyard. A serious response to suicidal ideation will require a comprehensive approach by school systems that incorporates anti-bullying efforts as well as collaborative partnerships with parents, mental health providers, social services agencies, and law enforcement and religious organizations, just to name a few.

Los Angeles—like many urban centers—has a variety of groups in the public and private sector that are dedicated to improving mental health outcomes for LGBTQ youth. To our knowledge, however, there is no initiative in any other city that has brought these groups together in a concerted effort to end the conditions under which a lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual or questioning youth might consider suicide. Project SPIN has done just that. In addition to LAUSD and the Center, the SPIN effort includes the GSA Network, the Trevor Project, Children's Hospital of Los Angeles, Trans Youth Family Allies, the ACLU of Southern California, the Latino Equality Alliance, PFLAG, the L.A. County Dept. of Mental

Health, the Los Angeles Police Dept. and a dozen other organizations. Representatives of these groups are now meeting monthly and developing an action plan to end suicidal ideation and reduce homophobia and transphobia in district schools.

The programmatic initiative focuses on six general areas: Training, Instruction/Curriculum, Mental Health, Transgender Support, Research/Evaluation and Community Resources. These areas have been identified as central to the district's efforts to achieve the project's objectives and are in need of additional support and resources. Work in these areas has already begun. For example, when an elementary school principal called to ask for support from the district after a fifth-grader came out as gay, Project SPIN became a critical part of the response. The SPIN staff member not only helped train the entire school staff, but also followed up with the student's family to ensure they are connected to resources and support. Project SPIN's work, however, is not just reactive in nature. Even at this early stage, a number of trainings have been set up, including a half-day symposium for teachers on inclusive curriculum, where teachers will get the tools they need and also hear from co-workers on effective best practices.

A specific plan for implementation of these programmatic elements has been set in motion and is crucial to the success of the initiative. Nonetheless, the leaders of Project SPIN will continue to stress the larger vision that seeks to address these issues in a comprehensive manner with an end goal of systemic change.

There are many organizations, programs, services, resources, curricula and assessment tools available to those who seek to ensure the safety, health and well-being of LGBTQ youth in Los Angeles County. The only thing standing between LGBTQ students and the safe and affirming learning environments that all students deserve is the will to ensure that everything that can be done to support these young people is actually being done. That requires a commitment to a sweeping cultural change—in our communities and in our schools. Although money and resources will be important to the development of the initiative, we have already witnessed the power of this vision and believe that the simple *will to act* is the most important requirement for the success of this project. Aided by the galvanizing efforts of Project SPIN, we are committed to creating just such a supportive environment, one in which young people can express their full potential as students and as human beings.

**For more information contact:**

**Sara Train**

**P: 323-993-7661 E: [strain@lagaycenter.org](mailto:strain@lagaycenter.org)**

**[www.projectspin.org](http://www.projectspin.org)**

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