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# *STANDING FOR JUST AND RIGHT DECISIONS*

## *The Long, Slow Path to School Safety*

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**Changing school culture** is, as Sarason (1971) asserts, a long, slow, and often uncertain process. Such change is made all the more difficult when school culture reflects entrenched societal norms. Changing the way gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (GLBTQ) students, teachers, and administrators in public schools are treated is not a matter limited to what goes on in schools; rather, treatment of sexual and gender minorities in schools is a function of deeply rooted cultural norms about heteronormativity (see Macgillivray, 2000 [this issue]) that mandate rigidly dichotomous male and female roles as well as patterns of behavior and belief in American life. These norms legitimate repression of diversity and condone sexual harassment.

As the articles in this journal issue argue, heteronormative cultural patterns not only put persons who are GLBTQ or simply searching for a sexual identity at risk but also make victims of those who are perceived by others to be GLBTQ, regardless of their actual sexual orientation or gender identity. Furthermore, the use of epithets and harassment based on sexual orientation go unnoticed or even are treated as acceptable—as epithets based on other forms of identity such as race or class can no longer be. Because they are so deeply embedded in American cultural norms, ameliorating practices that result in discriminatory and violent behavior against GLBTQ persons cannot be done rapidly, nor can they be addressed in isolation, without simultaneously examining all forms of violence against persons who deviate from

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mainstream, dominant cultural norms. Similarly, because harassment of GLBTQ persons derives from forms of hatred, bias, and arrogance resembling those that legitimate harassment of women, persons of color, the disabled, and persons from nonmainstream ethnic groups, attempts to provide safe and educationally stimulating environments for GLBTQ students and staff cannot be undertaken without considering the entire culture of the school and community as well as all the forms of diversity schools now must accommodate (see Berliner & Biddle, 1997). The task, then, requires a long-term, persistent, and multipronged effort. The case study of Kirkwood High School presented in this article recounts a 20-year struggle to create a safe school; it is included here not because Kirkwood High School has successfully resolved all its problems but because it is emblematic of the degree of effort that the administrators and staff of a school, as well as key members of the community, must undertake to make schools safe for all its members. It is important to note that the "safe school" effort at Kirkwood High School was initiated because of what the community termed "race riots" and sexual harassment of young women; these ongoing efforts set the pattern for what now also is an effort to provide equal protection to GLBTQ students.

### A BIT OF HISTORY

Kirkwood, Missouri, is an older suburb of St. Louis, Missouri. Possessing mineral springs on its outskirts, it was founded in the mid-1800s as a spa town between the Missouri Pacific and Southern Pacific railroad lines leading out of St. Louis. When I attended its brand-new high school in the late 1950s, it was a deeply conservative, White, middle- to upper-middle-class community. Unlike many such communities in the 1950s, however, Kirkwood included two Black neighborhoods whose existence dated to the founding of the town. Furthermore, Kirkwood racially desegregated its schools in 1953, a year before *Brown v. Board of Education*, following the lead of the Catholic Archbishop of St. Louis, who had just desegregated the St. Louis parochial school system.

I remember no overt incidents of racial unrest during my years at the high school. African American and White students were, however, not treated commensurately; my mother recalls trying to help Mary Jean, an African American classmate of my brother (class of 1964), return to school for her senior year after having had a baby during the summer. The girl had had an excellent academic record the previous year and had stayed in school until the

summer recess. Ignoring precedents set by female White students who also had had babies but been allowed to return to school, the principal initially refused to allow Mary Jean to enroll in the fall. Only a concerted effort and threats of lawsuits made it possible for her to continue her schooling and graduate the following spring.

By the mid-1970s, Kirkwood had become an increasingly affluent dormitory community, fully integrated into the metropolitan St. Louis sprawl. As the civil rights and women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s swirled around the town, it also began to diversify somewhat; the school enrolled more students of color as well as more students from a nearby lower-income community. It remained, however, very socially and politically conservative. After a decade in which the leadership of the high school paid little attention to problems of race relations, racial unrest came to a head at Kirkwood High School in 1978. A group of Black parents lodged a complaint stating that White students consistently were treated more leniently in disciplinary matters than were Black students; after investigating, the U.S. Office of Civil Rights proclaimed the school to be guilty as charged in 1979.<sup>1</sup>

At this point, a desperate Board of Education began looking for a new principal. In 1979, they found Franklin McCallie in University City, Missouri, where he had established a reputation for solving racial problems. McCallie, a tall self-described "southern gentleman from Chattanooga, Tennessee," with piercing blue eyes and a full beard, told it straight to the board: "If you want a quick, simple solution, I'm not your man. But if you've got 45 minutes to listen, I'll tell you what I'll do if you hire me." The board opted for the long answer and hired McCallie.

### MCCALLIE'S TENURE BEGINS

When McCallie arrived at the high school during the summer of 1979, he was told by the school superintendent that his first task was to do something about race relations at the school. McCallie called in the parent-teacher organization during the summer to assist him in holding meetings to discuss racial relations and other matters at the school in the homes of seven parents in the district; approximately 20 to 50 parents attended each of these meetings. During the fall, McCallie also met with small groups of students to discuss Black-White issues. He also made repeated statements over the school's public address system about the importance of living together in harmony at the school; again, he told it straight, consistently calling attention to "Black/White/Red/Brown/Yellow relationships, male-female interaction,

prejudice, racism, reverse racism, name-calling, racial epithets, the existence of fear and harassment, and injustice." McCallie says that he used such strong language because the situation was so serious; there was considerable potential for life-threatening violence, something no principal could afford to ignore.

Despite the fact that the spokesperson for the Black parent group had expressed some satisfaction that race relations were improving at the school, in February 1980, two angry groups of approximately 25 White and 15 Black male students squared off at each other in the cafeteria hallway before school. McCallie and his staff intervened immediately, separating the students into two rooms and calling in members of the Kirkwood Ministerial Alliance to act as mediators and role models. Nine ministers dropped what they were doing and helped the school staff through a day-long process of discussion. After 7 hours, a Black and a White student addressed the student body over the public address (PA) system, announcing that the groups had decided that Blacks and Whites could and would work together at Kirkwood High School. That night, McCallie wrote a declaration about the need for students to respect one another and live in harmony at the school for all teachers to read during their second-period classes the next day; that declaration about harmony and social justice served as a basis for group discussions in the classrooms.

McCallie also fostered creation of student groups to help defuse tensions. The first was a Black Achievement and Cultural Club. Additional student groups followed; in 1987, one of the guidance counselors founded Peer Helpers, a group of students who, having been recommended by teachers and staff as those whom other students respect, are selected by their peers to be trained to help other students find solutions to their problems. They are a key if quiet force for improving relationships at the school. In 1994, a Council for Unity was started; the council is part of a New York-based student organization whose intent is to foster good working relationships between all people regardless of race, color, creed, gender, or sexual orientation. Members engage in dialogue about the toughest kinds of issues, exchange visits between students from New York City and other communities, hold assemblies about tolerance for the student body, and make announcements about interpersonal issues over the PA system to the whole school.

These efforts generated some criticisms of McCallie's methods from both Black and White members of the community. Some White parents and students alleged that McCallie favored Black students. However, no specific charges of favoritism were ever brought forward. Then two mothers of African American students asked a television station to "see how Principal McCallie is stirring up Black and White students at Kirkwood High School." An African American investigative reporter from the station visited the school to talk with students; he also followed McCallie with a camera as he

made his rounds in the hallways and the cafeteria. When his report was broadcast, the reporter announced, "What we found was a principal and a school trying to bring Black and White students together."

### **A MODEL FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION EVOLVES**

These early conflicts and their resolution helped to create a model for how McCallie and his staff handled all subsequent controversies: First, help was solicited from outside experts and community groups. Second, parents were informed of school plans and their help was solicited in problem solving. Third, parents were given opportunities to exempt their children from planned activities if they found those activities to be objectionable.<sup>2</sup> Fourth, all members of the faculty and staff were involved in seeking solutions to problems. Fifth, students were induced to talk about issues and their feelings in small groups, in classrooms, in workshops, and in large group assemblies. Sixth, consistent and frequent use of the school's PA system was made so that the policies of the school were unambiguously and strongly reinforced to students and staff. Finally, student groups were created to provide various constituencies a forum and to facilitate problem solving and conflict resolution. McCallie also worked on the attitudes and behavior of his own staff and faculty, strongly encouraging them to support the philosophy now espoused at the high school. Under this pressure, some staff members chose to take early retirement. Although the high school has not solved all of its racial problems, its efforts to do so have not ceased. Over the years, all-day workshops on race relations have continued to be held, encompassing groups of up to 200 students. Some of these workshops have been facilitated by faculty and administrative staff at the school; others have been from the metropolitan area's Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Committee and other groups. McCallie has continued to use the school PA system, to hold assemblies, and to meet with small groups of parents. He also has become very visible as a public speaker on the radio and television and in the newspapers.

### **CONFRONTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF YOUNG WOMEN**

Not long after the events in February 1980, McCallie began to notice that harassment of young women at the school by male students was as common

as was race-based harassment and discrimination. During the early 1980s, McCallie was told that male abuse of female students was simply normal male behavior and that the abuse of freshman and sophomore males by older male athletes, who inflicted "wedgies" or "grundies" as part of hazing practices,<sup>3</sup> was a hallowed school tradition that improved team spirit. Students, however, complained privately to McCallie of being afraid to come to school because of such harassment, and their parents echoed such complaints.

To counteract such beliefs and practices, McCallie and his staff employed many of the same strategies used to defuse the hostile climate for Black students. McCallie again took to the PA system to denounce abusive behavior and began a consistent policy of suspension of male students who harassed females.<sup>4</sup> He also began to look for help from organizations that had successfully begun to confront this issue. A speaker from one such group, Rape and Violence End Now (RAVEN), a support group modeled after Alcoholics Anonymous and made up of men who were or still are wife or girlfriend abusers/beaters, was invited to present a slide show the group had made concerning the role of the media in fostering sexual harassment. Initially, McCallie asked the RAVEN speaker to present the show to male students in the senior class only, knowing that female students would generally agree with the presentation and that the beliefs of young men needed to be confronted. Although McCallie felt the presentation to be a great success, the speaker thought it a disaster because of the students' raucous questions and unruly behavior. The students refused to see any sexism in the advertisements shown and denied that they ever engaged in sexist behavior. The next year, McCallie showed the slide show himself to both males and females in the senior class. Again, the male students denied any complicity in sexist behavior and showed their discomfort with the whole topic in rowdy behavior. This time, however, they were confronted by their female peers, and the ensuing discussions continued for months.

The RAVEN workshops were repeated for 3 years, and a standing policy calling for suspension of students who sexually harassed others was instituted. McCallie made repeated announcements on the PA system calling for students to treat one another as human beings and reminding them of the consequences of engaging in harassment. Students were encouraged, via meetings with staff and announcements over the school PA system, to come to staff members for help in confronting or stopping harassment if they needed it. Administrators, groups of teachers, and walking counselors (paraprofessionals who supervise the campus by walking around and providing counsel where problems arise) organized role-playing experiences for freshmen at the beginning of each year. These plays addressed Black-White and male-female relationships and, during years when gang activity became a problem,

issues of destructive gang interactions. These same role plays also were brought to the entire student body in assemblies held during each period of a particular school day.

The school even made use of former students. In 1988 and 1989, a 1985 Kirkwood High School graduate, who had been named by *Time* magazine as one of 20 outstanding college junior leaders in America for her activism in the area of women's rights, was invited back to talk about her campaign against rape on the University of Illinois campus where she was a student. She provided a 3-hour assembly to the senior class on women's rights, rape, date rape, and sexual harassment. Again, many of the male students rejected the message. Notwithstanding, the assembly was repeated the following year, accompanied by repeated messages from the principal via the school's PA system. When the young woman graduated from college and was no longer available as a speaker, McCallie and his assistant principal continued the talks themselves for 2 years, and since then, a former policewoman has given assemblies and workshops on rape and defense against physical attack to all students in the school. McCallie admits that the sexual harassment at Kirkwood High School is not always perpetrated by males against females but notes that the vast majority of the incidents do involve males—such that 10 to 15 male students are suspended every year for harassment. He also suggests that more male students would be suspended if the administration knew who was engaging in harassment.

## TALKING ABOUT HIV/AIDS

In the mid-1980s, Kirkwood High School began a yearly series of AIDS Awareness assemblies that continue to this day. McCallie had come to believe that it was vitally important for students to know that AIDS was not a "gay disease," that it was spreading rapidly among the heterosexual population, and that teenagers especially were at risk. Again, the same model for addressing difficult and controversial subjects was followed: Seek outside experts for help in amassing knowledge; provide notice about the planned intervention to parents and members of the community; solicit the participation of staff and faculty; make presentations to the staff and student body; and follow up with announcements, small group discussions, classroom discussions, assemblies, and workshops.

For the first assembly on AIDS awareness, McCallie invited the president of the St. Louis Effort for AIDS to speak, and in following years, he asked the same organization to bring in some of the persons with whom they were

working. Some of them had AIDS; some did not. As was his custom, McCallie provided advance notice to parents, even lending a group of very conservative parents the video that was to be used in the assembly so they could view it at home. In this videotape, a gay man who was very ill with AIDS pleaded with the audience to "blame the disease, not the victim." For the second time, McCallie began to run into open resistance.

Arguing that the videotaped plea for understanding was a call for support of the homosexual lifestyle, one group of very conservative, very religious fathers of Kirkwood High School students met with McCallie at breakfast and asked him to cancel the AIDS assemblies that were to be held that day. McCallie disagreed with them, given the importance of the issue in his mind to the physical health of the high school adolescents, and the assembly was held despite the parents' objections.

In addition to these regularly held assemblies, Kirkwood High School also has accepted the offer of St. Louis University Medical School to send 2nd- and 3rd-year medical students into the high school's classrooms to talk to students about AIDS awareness four times in the past 12 years. Again, notices were sent to parents about these meetings, and parents were invited to attend. The medical students' talks were met with both applause and criticism before and after being held, but McCallie's efforts retained a majority of the community's support.

In 1998-1999, another student organization was formed to bolster services provided to teens at Kirkwood High School; one of the counselors formed the Prevention Team to help combat drug and alcohol abuse. The Prevention Team consists of one representative from every club and organization at the school; they hold assemblies and sponsor Health Fairs for the student body that include, among other topics, the problem of AIDS.

### **DEVELOPING AN AWARENESS OF THE PROBLEMS OF GLBTQ STUDENTS**

As is clear from the above description, Kirkwood High School has had a 20-year history of dealing courageously and firmly with the kind of contentious issues that erect barriers between people, especially issues of violence and harassment. Indeed, some of the concerns McCallie confronted early on even had to do with issues concerning gay and lesbian persons, even though, according to McCallie, it was not until 1998 that a conscious decision emerged to include GLBTQ students among those who were in need of protection at the high school. It was not that awareness of GLTBQ issues grew



because staff noticed an increase in the amount of abuse students and staff perceived to be gay received or even that staff and administration were unaware that gay and lesbian people were being harassed, intimidated, beaten, and murdered in America. It was just that until events conspired to bring such violence home, no one at Kirkwood High School, according to McCallie, ever paid much attention to the seriousness of the problem. Those in control at the school—and, by his own admission, this particularly included McCallie—just did not think that homosexual persons were suffering at Kirkwood High School.

However, in February 1998, the school newspaper, *The Call*, conducted a survey in which 61% of all Kirkwood High School students responding admitted that every single day, they personally “called someone a name such as gay, in a derogatory manner, even if it was a joke.” In the weeks following the article, McCallie began to notice how frequently the epithets *fag* and *faggot* were used in the hallways. He continued to listen and to observe and, on Thursday, September 10, 1998, made his first announcement to the student body over the PA system. After an introduction about the need for courtesy and respect for all and a call to students to end embarrassing and humiliating hazing activities, McCallie referenced *The Call*'s survey. Noting that the epithets he heard most often of all in the hallways were fag and faggot, he argued that these terms were as insensitive and hurtful as racist and sexist epithets. In his morning announcement, McCallie said,

Insensitivity hurts us all. You and I both have friends who are gay or lesbian, and they are good, fine citizens of our school, our community, our state, and our country, who deserve no harassment, no discourtesy, no put-downs, no ill-treatment. . . . There are recent statistics showing that gay and lesbian teenagers are more likely than other students . . . to attempt or commit suicide. I cannot prove that this terrible situation is due to the brutal treatment many gay and lesbian students receive from the so-called straight population, but I see no room for name-calling or mistreatment of any person at Kirkwood High School. Now, after this PA announcement, somebody is probably going to say that if Mr. McCallie is nice to gay and lesbian students, parents, and staff, he will encourage more people to become gay and lesbian. I happen to think that's a ridiculous statement. I call for courage on the part of every member of the Kirkwood family to stand for courtesy and respect for every other member of our Kirkwood [High School] family. . . . We will be kinder human beings and a better school for it.

In quick succession a few weeks later, seven male students from Kirkwood High School were suspended for sexual harassment of female students. During that same period, Wyoming college student Matthew Shepard

was murdered, allegedly because of his sexual orientation. With a music assembly for the whole school already set, McCallie decided to use the last 12 minutes of the assembly to discuss sexual harassment and to decry the hatred displayed both by perpetrators of such harassment and by the events that led to Shepard's murder. In his remarks, McCallie said, in part,

In an educational institution where students and staff and most of the student body pride themselves on courteous and respectful treatment of all other human beings, seven male students [at this school] have either said nasty things to young women who did not want to hear such language or have touched or grabbed young women's bodies in private places where they did not want to be touched or grabbed. These young men live in ignorance and cruelty, and we will not tolerate this type of behavior. . . . [These seven young men] still are caught up in a macho, beat-them-up, no-woman-is-actually-a-real-human-being world. It is a tradition passed down within some families and some male cultures, and we must all work to bring it to a halt, especially we who are men.

Another critical incident has taken place not here, but in Wyoming. Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old gay college student was beaten until his skull was bashed in . . . tied in near-freezing weather to a fence and left in a coma. He died some days later. . . . Matthew Shepard is also a victim of male inhumanity to other human beings, because he was thought to be less than human. And even as his killers go to trial, some people are so hateful that they have written on e-mail that Matthew Shepard got what he deserved. This is the same thing I heard men in the U.S. Navy say about their wives when I was an enlisted man on a ship: "Aw, McCallie, you gotta beat your old lady around a little to get her to mind you and show her who's boss."

Wife beating knows no color or ethnic bounds. Gay and lesbian bashing knows no color or ethnic bounds. And cruelty to human beings is cruelty to human beings. This cruelty deserves no defense; all [who practice it] should be ashamed; none should be able to joke and laugh that "she deserved what she got" or "he deserved what he got." Young women, do not let men tell you it is your fault and you deserve to live with this outrageous behavior because you are female. That is a lie. And gay and lesbian persons, do not let anyone tell you that you deserve to live with harassment and abuse and murder because you are gay or lesbian. That is a lie. Please understand: I will not make a woman any more of a woman because I seek her safety; rather, I will make her a safe woman, one who deserves and receives what all males deserve and most males receive under our Constitution. And I will not make a gay or lesbian person any more a gay or lesbian person because I seek his or her safety; I will make him or her a safe person, one who deserves what every other human being deserves under our Constitution. So-called straight men and straight women and so-called gay men and lesbian women all deserve life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness under our Constitution. We need to stand up against any philosophy which denies that safety and against any person who threatens that safety.

The day of the assembly happened to be the second day in attendance at Kirkwood High School of 20 exchange students from Germany who were visiting the school for 3 weeks. A faculty member sitting behind them watched with interest for their reactions to such controversial material. Five of the students happened to be scheduled into the subsequent class of this teacher. Rather than launching into her planned discussion of British literature, she began a class discussion of McCallie's remarks—something teachers regularly did following one of McCallie's PA broadcasts or addresses. The German students expressed their amazement at what had happened. No subject of a similar nature would ever have been tackled, they said, in their own country. They were stunned and impressed that there had been no giggling, snide comments, or sly nudges from students during the assembly; rather, they commented on the rapt attention and courtesy paid to McCallie's remarks by all students present.

A few days after McCallie's speech at the music assembly, a guidance counselor at Kirkwood High School suggested inviting the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Educators Network (GLSEN) to speak to a regular faculty meeting to give teachers and staff some idea of the treatment students who were or were perceived to be homosexual might be experiencing daily. As in the past, the purpose of the presentation was to use a relatively small group situation to identify and learn to deal with the problem of harassment. Notices of the meeting were sent to district central office staff inviting them to attend; two assistant superintendents showed up. One of the presenters was the mother of twin Kirkwood High School graduates, one of whom revealed that he was gay to his parents at age 26. His mother spoke of his agonies in school and of her struggle to accept him as he is rather than what she might want him to be. A gay teacher and a gay student from the local community college also spoke about making students feel safe at the high school. After the meeting, McCallie put a pink triangle<sup>5</sup> sticker with the words *Safe Space* on his office door, saying that he hoped any gay or lesbian student or staff member would feel safe in sharing with the principal his or her goals, beliefs, visions, sorrows, or troubles. Many Kirkwood High School teachers and counselors also put the pink triangle sticker on their doors.

## THE COMMUNITY REACTS

Word of the stand McCallie had taken soon spread, especially when the local newspaper asked for a copy of his statements and published an article about them on December 11, 1998.<sup>6</sup> In it, McCallie was quoted as saying that

he intended to make Kirkwood High School a safe place for all students regardless of their race, class, gender, or sexual orientation. As soon as the article was published, reaction poured in from a variety of sources, including parents of former students who are gay or lesbian. These parents applauded the school's stance. Several former students wrote, telling of the daily, unending misery they had experienced at Kirkwood High School. One wrote,

As I look back, I realize that it was only a handful of people who made my days at school hell. But others seemed hesitant to befriend me for fear of what others would think. I was spit on, tripped, punched, had my books knocked out of my hands, and things hidden from me. I was called fag, fudgepacker, homo and queer. I couldn't even sit in classes or take tests without being called names. I barely graduated. I would pray every night that the Good Lord would take my life so I wouldn't have to go to school; I tried to commit suicide on four or five occasions, but I never had the courage to go through with it.

McCallie was stunned by the letter; the student above had attended Kirkwood High School during his own principalship, and he had been totally unaware of this student's agony.

Awareness of GLBTQ problems began to grow at the high school. In January 1999, a social studies teacher wanted both to develop a unit on discrimination and to explore it using the method now familiar at the high school for exploring controversial subjects: Bring in experts, notify parents and community members, and organize small group discussions to deal with serious topics, especially those of an interpersonal nature. He decided to invite the local chapter of the Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) organization to speak to his civics classes about the discrimination experienced by gay and lesbian students, their parents, and their friends. The psychology teacher as well as the sponsor of the Council for Unity wanted to join the social studies teacher's class in this activity. The presentation was similar to the one GLSEN had given earlier; a mother of a gay Kirkwood High School student spoke, as did a gay senior from another area high school. Both described the problems and harassment gay and lesbian students experience, and the student made it clear that he did not ask to be the way he is but simply wanted to feel safe and accepted in school. The mother echoed his sentiment. As usual, letters were sent out to parents about the presentations, but in this case, McCallie and the social studies teacher, for various reasons, had not allowed enough time for the notices. Many of the letters arrived just before the day the speakers were to come.

The community reaction to this effort was mixed and almost immediate. McCallie began to receive letters, phone calls, and requests to confer. Most

were overwhelmingly positive, praising the school for dealing with a very real safety issue, but some callers criticized the short notice parents received. Then word began to filter back, to the amazement of teachers and staff who had been in attendance, that some members of the community had gotten the idea that PFLAG had used the meetings as an occasion to proselytize about the "homosexual lifestyle." One caller told McCallie he wanted the "homosexual rallies" to stop. Another asked why, when he had put a sticker on his door for the safety of homosexual students, he had not also put one on his door for the safety of Christians. McCallie was shocked, responding to the latter that if Christians were indeed being abused and harassed in his school because of their religion, he certainly would put up a sticker for them. As yet, however, he was aware of no such harassment. Furthermore, he noted that he had had ample assurance from those in attendance that no homosexual rallies, proselytizing, or other inappropriate activities—other than urging safety for all students—had taken place at the school. Students from the Council for Unity who had attended the meeting were appalled to find that the school was being criticized for the alleged proselytizing; they wrote to the superintendent informing him that no such actions had occurred.

Several days later, an article appeared in the major area newspaper, the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, reporting on the whole subject of safety for gay and lesbian students and staff in local schools. Kirkwood High School was featured in the article, and although McCallie felt that the article had presented the school's position very clearly, more negative reactions followed. Pressure was put on the new superintendent to question McCallie's actions. A male student asked for a conference in which, after announcing that he was a Christian, he told McCallie that "we Christians are afraid of your intent." When McCallie told him that his sole intent was to make the school safe for homosexual students, the student protested that McCallie had not indicated whether he approved of the homosexual lifestyle and asked him to make a statement clearing up that point. McCallie refused to respond, repeating that, as principal, his responsibility and his intent was to make the school a safe place for all those in the building.

The next day's morning announcements of February 10, 1999, brought the following pronouncement from McCallie:

The article [in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*] deals with how our staff and student body treat each other in our school, specifically, our treatment of persons who may be gay or lesbian. Because the issue of homosexuality is a controversial one, I wanted to be sure that our stand for the safety of each staff member and student and for the protection of all persons' rights as human beings be the central theme of the article. If you read the *Post Dispatch* today, you will see that

we have not made a statement as to whether the gay or lesbian lifestyle is right or wrong; rather, we have said that all our staff and students need to feel at home in Kirkwood High School. That's what we want for all of us, a safe place where we all feel comfortable. . . . If you can explain that to your parents and other friends outside this school, then I think everyone will understand and appreciate the stand this public high school is taking on behalf of every human being—for safety and security and acceptance.

### THE TOUGHEST ISSUE OF ALL

Although not all members of the Kirkwood community have supported Franklin McCallie wholeheartedly, it is clear from his more than 20 years as principal at the high school that his has been a solid administration. His full disclosure of controversies and his ability to elicit help from all constituencies in the community to resolve them have been successful in building support for the school's philosophies. Up to now, even the most controversial stances taken over the years resulted in no disciplinary actions against McCallie and few calls for him to resign. For a number of reasons, however, his advocacy of safety for gay and lesbian students might prove to be a different case.

When McCallie came to Kirkwood, his policies promoting nondiscrimination, equal treatment, and positive social and personal relationships at the school benefited from nearly 20 years of protest against patterns of discrimination and oppression against persons of color and women. His actions were supported by laws at the federal and, in some cases, the state and local level, and the courts had ruled in favor of women and persons of color who had filed complaints protesting unequal treatment and lack of equal protection. Although certain segments of the Kirkwood community opposed and still oppose the policies he promulgated at the high school, such opposition no longer enjoys protected or culturally sanctioned status. As the articles in this special issue indicate, however, unlike the civil rights and women's movements, the struggle to obtain equal protection and treatment for gays and lesbians still is in its infancy. Few federal, state, or local laws extend protection directly to gays and lesbians;<sup>7</sup> those laws now used to back up constitutional guarantees for gays and lesbians are those also used to provide protections against unequal treatment to all citizens more generally. Furthermore, the cultural and political climate in the 1990s and early 2000s is quite different from that which prevailed in the late 1970s when McCallie began his transformation of Kirkwood High School. A politically and socially conservative,

religiously fundamentalist climate has been in the ascendancy for the past 25 years; social conservatism has privileged local norms (see Apple, 1993), even if they are at variance with general tenets of social justice in a diverse population. One of the key struggles has been over the roles of men and women—perhaps because norms governing proper behavior for males and females are the most central feature of our lives and identities as human beings; traditional gender and sexual stereotypes also are critical to maintaining hegemony of a male-dominated political and cultural hierarchy. Religious fundamentalism has justified rigid construction of gender roles based on strict interpretation of religious texts and sectarian doctrines; although the Right promotes them for schools, such promotion is not in keeping with the separation of church and state that has heretofore marked political life in the United States. Notwithstanding, the conservative and religious agenda has gained power in America, because for the past 25 years, the religious right and fiscal and social conservatives have made diligent efforts to increase their political clout by gaining control of local political offices, especially city councils and school boards. It is not surprising, then, that Franklin McCallie's efforts to make Kirkwood High School safe for all students, including GLBTQ students, should have served as a lightning rod for opposition by specific, very vocal and active members of the community. It also is not surprising that some of McCallie's strongest critics should be part of the school district's authority structure. Control of the educational system has become a primary focus of struggles between conservative and fundamentalist forces and forces advocating a more open and diverse approach to education and society. The schools have become a battleground because parents and taxpayers always have had a legitimate right to intervene directly—by visiting as parents and interested community members—and indirectly—as voters—in school affairs. This, of course, includes those parents and community members holding views antithetical to the ones McCallie supports at Kirkwood High School.

## 2000 AND BEYOND

In the 1999-2000 school year, Franklin McCallie has continued his campaign to make Kirkwood High School safe for gay and lesbian students, staff, and parents. In August 1999, in talks with incoming freshmen and their parents, he noted that without such efforts, no one could feel safe on the high school campus. He emphasized the need for all staff and students to work toward the safety, comfort, and acceptance of every student, "and that

includes gay and lesbian students.” Not one parent or student at the meeting challenged his statement; all seemed to understand the logic of his statement and to appreciate his focus on safety for all.

McCallie also has continued his high visibility in the public arena. In October 1999, he raised the issue of gay and lesbian rights and safety during a keynote speech at the St. Louis “Stop the Hate” vigil and also in January at a Dr. Martin Luther King Day ceremony, sponsored by three St. Louis churches. He raised the same issue later that month at two meetings of private and church-related preschool programs in St. Louis County. When the local St. Louis public television channel refused to air the movie *It’s Elementary*—the story of six American elementary schools and their work to include gay and lesbian students, staff, and parents within their programs—McCallie bought a copy of the video and showed it to all Kirkwood School District administrators as well as to the Kirkwood High School faculty and staff. The video was followed by a discussion of the obligations Kirkwood educators have to gay and lesbian students, staff, and parents and how to meet that obligation most successfully.

What happens next? McCallie believes that the fight to preserve the safety and protect the rights of GLBTQ people in American schools is just beginning. Opposition to this fight is widespread. But careers come to an end. When asked about his long tenure and possible retirement, McCallie said, “There are too many things to accomplish in both the cognitive and affective domains. What Kirkwood High School is doing to challenge all students educationally is exciting. And the work we are doing in the recognition of rights of all people of all colors, ethnic backgrounds, creeds, sexual orientations and so on, is vital. I think I can help.”

## NOTES

1. It was only later, in 1981-1982, that the court-mandated desegregation plan for St. Louis was put into place.

2. A typical note sent home to parents was one written before a planned workshop on prejudice against sexual minorities. After describing the workshop and the persons who would help to lead it, the note included the following text:

Your son or daughter will attend the workshop during his or her civics class on January 26th. By this method, small numbers of students will be participating in the workshop at any one time, thus allowing for individual questions to be asked and answered in a non-threatening environment. Note cards will be distributed to students so that they can ask questions anonymously, should they so choose. The [Kirkwood High School] KHS counseling staff has participated in the development of this workshop



and will be available throughout the day for any student who has a need to talk. Should you find such a workshop to be inappropriate for your son or daughter, an alternative learning activity will be provided. Should this be the case, please contact your son's or daughter's teacher and let him or her know.

3. "Wedgies" or "grundies" involve reaching into a young man's pants and pulling his undershorts up sharply so that the testicles are hurt and sometimes even injured.

4. It should be noted that males who harass other males and females who engage in harassment also are suspended but that these events occur far less frequently.

5. The pink triangle, which homosexuals were forced to wear by the Nazis just as Jews were forced to wear a yellow star of David, has become a symbol of identity and pride for GLBTQ people and of support for such people by those who are straight.

6. It was by means of this article, passed on by my mother, that I learned of the transformation McCallie had made in my old high school.

7. See Buckel (2000 [this issue]) for a summary of laws and court rulings that do provide a legal framework for protection of sexual minorities.

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