

April 29, 2009

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As part of our ongoing efforts to make Hopkins Academy a safe and supportive learning environment, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders will attend an assembly on May 11<sup>th</sup>, planned by the Hopkins GSA Focus Group with the help of PFLAG (Greater Boston Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). Our focus in the assembly will be on one of our school's key core values: respect for self and others.

The Massachusetts Department of Education requires that "all public schools shall, through their curricula, encourage respect for the human and civil rights of all individuals, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation." In 1992 the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth was established, and in February of 1993, made recommendations that include encouraging schools to develop policies protecting gay and lesbian students from harassment, violence, and discrimination, to offer training to school personnel in violence and suicide prevention, and to establish school-based support groups, as well as counseling. These recommendations were based on research that documents the risk of violence, harassment, and discrimination that gay, lesbian, and other students face.

While middle school students may be unsure of their sexuality, every student feels unsafe when any group is the target of name-calling and harassment. We frequently hear the word "gay" used in a variety of contexts as a common put-down at all grade levels. We want our students to refrain from using it in a negative or pejorative way. This program is about respect and acceptance of differences of all kinds.

As educators, our responsibility is to provide a safe and respectful learning environment for everyone. As with other differences, such as religion, race, or ethnicity, we want to make sure that all students and staff, as well as those who may be questioning their sexuality, or have gay parents or siblings, are validated and shown respect.

If you don't want your 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grader to attend this assembly, please contact Ms. Jennings at 413-584-1106 or [tjennings@hadleyschools.org](mailto:tjennings@hadleyschools.org).

Sincerely yours,

Tori Jennings  
School Guidance Counselor

Diana Bonneville  
School Principal

Julie Federman  
School Nurse