

Deseret Morning News, Thursday, October 13, 2005

Gay-straight club meets

But attendees fear the alliance won't last long

By Laura Hancock and Jeffrey P. Haney

Deseret Morning News

PROVO — Utah County's first gay-straight alliance club held its initial meeting at Provo High on Wednesday, but many attending the gathering worry the club could be short-lived.

The Provo School District Board of Education is currently considering a proposed districtwide club policy that is a requirement under state law. The board became aware the district was not in compliance with the requirement when students at Provo High filed a request to form the gay-straight alliance last month.

The board had been scheduled to act on the policy at its monthly meeting Tuesday night but opted instead to wait until November after concerns were raised during a pre-meeting work session. Board members said they wanted more time to consult with constituents and consider possible modifications to the policy which is modeled after one being used in the Granite School District.

One option the board could consider, and hasn't ruled out, is eliminating all clubs.

On Wednesday, about 30 students met with Provo High principal Sam Ray to receive information on district rules along with state and federal laws they must follow if the club wants to keep its charter.

Included in the information was the guarantee of the club's right to exist, as well as a reminder that the state prohibits discussions about premarital sex and other similar topics in schools.

The students had told the Deseret Morning News it could attend the first meeting; however, when a reporter arrived, the principal demanded she leave or he would have office staff escort her out. He cited a new district policy relating to the media and students.

Provo High senior Lucinda Ward attended the meeting and said she believes the laws are fair. She expects some of the students at the first meeting will not attend in the future because they will need permission slips signed by their parents to participate in the club.

"I'm worried about a lot of things," Ward said. "I'm worried about getting some prejudice."

Other students at Provo High said a number of petitions opposed to the gay-straight alliance have been circulating around the school.

"I have not seen any petitions," Ward said. "(But) that could be expected."

"I don't have anything against people who want to be in the club," said Becca Edward, a junior. "But it's going to give the school a bad name."

"I've heard (complaints) from so many people," said Jeremy Christiansen.

The desk of Greg Hudnall, Provo district's director of student services, is littered with scraps of paper filled with phone numbers and messages, all from people who want to voice their opinion about the student gay-straight alliance.

Hudnall said he has also been swamped with phone calls from news reporters seeking comment about the club.

Considering the heated response thus far, he said, he wouldn't be surprised to see the board vote next month to ban all clubs so they won't have to approve the gay-straight alliance club at Provo High.

Hudnall said the district has been told politically active conservative groups are marshalling forces to quash the proposed policy that would allow the club.

Hudnall said the parent approval slip required to attend club activities will put some teenagers in a bad spot — basically serving as a participation barrier for students who do not want to address deeply personal maturation issues with adults.

District officials believe it would be unwise to withhold club participation information from parents.

E-mail: lhancock@desnews.com; jeffh@desnews.com
