



National Education Association - New Mexico

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Farmington Teachers Garner Human and Civil Rights Award

NEA-New Mexico presented its third annual Human and Civil Rights Award to Farmington High School teachers, Ann George and Alison Goff, at the annual Delegate Council held in Albuquerque on November 5, 2011. These two teachers heeded the call from their students in creating the Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) at Piedra Vista High School in 2007. These students brought the issues of persistent verbal abuse and physical beatings experienced by their fellow students because of their sexual preference or just supposed sexual preference. They saw the purpose of a GSA as a safe haven that would offer help and support to any person meeting hate or cruelty. George and Goff immediately supported their students who wanted to make their high school a better place for all students. Facing incredible resistance from the community, these two teachers and their students persevered through four school board meetings and a public forum. The teachers encountered a torrent of personal attacks and the students, who were just as courageous in their public support, suffered rejection, loss of friendships, shunning, and bullying in and out of school.

One letter of nomination from a colleague reads,

"... Ann George and Alison Goff stood at the forefront of what should have been a commendable effort to establish a forum where students in the minority might find a means of promoting positive self-image while simultaneously enhancing intergroup relations....Instead it became a battle for civil rights akin to those vicious confrontations most of us consider relics belonging in the twentieth century..."

One from a parent reads,

"...They have my respect forever for what they did during those very trying times. It is of paramount importance that our LGBT teens find the support they need at school and in our community or we are going to continue losing them to suicide. I am so sorry that a large part of our community let them down. But they had two wonderful teachers who were willing to go to bat for them..."

And finally a letter from a student reads,

"...I lost many friends and I lost the respect of many of my teachers, but not once did I feel alone. I had two adults who would step out of their classrooms for me and help me through the pain that was the result of so many people telling me I was a bad person for standing up for a group of people...Alison Goff and Ann George have been protectors of students who otherwise would have no one else to help them. Piedra Vista, without these two outstanding women would still be some teenagers' worst nightmare..."

George and Goff continue their work of teaching, protecting, and advocating for the rights and needs of their students at Piedra Vista High School in Farmington, NM.