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## **Local group collaborates with first online LGBT high school**

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by Jen Colletta

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A local LGBT youth-advocacy group has signed on as a partner in the world's first online LGBT school.

The Online GLBTQ High School is set to launch in January, and Philadelphia's Educational Justice Coalition will spearhead an effort to introduce the local LGBT youth community to the school and its possibilities.

David Glick, founder and executive director of the school, said the motivation to open the virtual school was born of the countless incidents of bullying, harassment and overall pervasive homophobic attitude common to many LGBT teens' high-school experiences.

The most recent data from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network found that more than 86 percent of LGBT middle- and high-school students surveyed experienced harassment at school.

"The experience that GLBTQ kids have in school is usually not that positive," Glick said. "And we've seen statistics about how negative environments impact student learning and lead to higher dropout rates. This school provides another option for those kids who may want or need this now."

The school is designed for those in grades 9-12 and will follow a traditional public high-school curriculum with nearly 90 courses covering the standard English, history and mathematics, as well as some in the works to address LGBT-specific topics.

Full-time students can take up to 12 courses at a time, with a full slate of courses costing about \$5,900 per year, although scholarships may be available.

Glick said the school will have a flexible format, designed for youth in a variety of situations; it will operate on a rolling-admissions basis, with students able to start any day throughout the year and attend on either a full- or part-time basis.

About 200 people have so far applied for teaching positions, and Glick said the number of faculty will depend on the number of students who enroll; he's hoping to enroll at least 50 by January and, by the end of the 2010-11 school year, have between 100-150 students.

Glick and other school officials are working with a handful of LGBT agencies throughout the country to get the program on its feet, including the EJC, which launched earlier this year and strives to create safe and accepting spaces for

LGBT youth.

Quincy Greene, executive director of EJC, said he heard about the pending school over the summer and contacted Glick about lending a hand.

“Through our initial conversations, we realized that our missions were very similar and that we could potentially collaborate to support the school,” Greene said. “For the last four years I’ve been looking at this area of safety and quality of education for LGBTQ youth, and this option is the best that I’ve seen over this time.”

Glick attended EJC’s inaugural Youth Empowerment Fair earlier this month, which drew more than 50 local LGBT youth to learn about educational, health and career opportunities. Greene said he spoke with several participants who expressed interest in learning more about the school.

EJC is looking to initially recruit up to 15 students — from the database of youth collected during the fair and from other youth networks in the area — to enroll in the school. EJC will launch a support center in its Broad Street office with individual workstations set up for the students, as well as tutors and other resources.

Greene noted that, while virtual schools inherently don’t allow for much facetime between students and their teachers, EJC’s support center will bring together the students in a supportive, safe environment.

“One of the concerns we’ve been looking at is isolation and a lack of social interaction, so that’s what we at EJC, and in collaboration with other nonprofits, are looking to address. We want to create a community around this school that youth can rely on to make healthier choices and achieve positive outcomes in the area of education.”

In order to outfit the resource center with new computers and other needs, EJC has been canvassing for financial support and recently received a \$20,000 anonymous donation.

The group will continue to fundraise throughout the next few months in order to enhance the support services it will be able to provide to future students, with whom Glick said EJC will work one-on-one to ensure their personal successes.

“The school is new and this effort is new for EJC, so we’d like to be as thoughtful and careful as possible to maximize the potential,” he said. “We really think this will be successful, and we’re planning to work closely with the young people who express interest to make sure that happens.”

For more information about the school, visit [www.glbqtqonlinehighschool.com](http://www.glbqtqonlinehighschool.com).

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