



Lubbockpride.org



info@lubbockpride.org



PO Box 6771  
Lubbock, TX 79493

## Response to Bullying and Death of Nex Benedict

By now, many of us have heard of the recent death of Nex Benedict, a non-binary student at Owassa High School in Oklahoma, one day after a physical altercation in a school restroom. There has been conflicting information and lack of reporting from major news outlets, but one thing is certain. Nex Benedict was not properly protected by their school administrators. LubbockPRIDE would like to use this opportunity to once again make a call to action to the City of Lubbock and our local school districts. Our city and school administrators must be aware of the struggles LGBTQ+ individuals, especially youth, face on a daily basis. They need to acknowledge discrimination and hate is a national problem, and do their due diligence to prevent a similar tragedy from happening in Lubbock. Preventative measures exist and are worth much more than reactionary ones.

Nex Benedict endured countless months of bullying because of their gender identity, with seemingly little to no help from administrators. Things appear to have gotten to a point where reporting the bullying was pointless, as there were never any sustainable solutions. Police investigating the altercation even appeared to place significant blame on Nex because they stood up to the bullies. Police went so far as dissuading Nex and their mother from pressing charges, since Nex could also face charges for their part in the incident. Initial police reports seemed to state Nex's death was not caused by the fight in the bathroom, but police have since clarified that the altercation has not been ruled out as a contributing cause of death. Initial reports are also in contrast to the warrants issued to search the cell phones and lockers of the students involved in the attack. These warrants indicate an investigation into suspected foul play, and autopsy results remain pending.

While waiting for more factual information, numerous national organizations have called for an investigation into Oklahoma schools, their bullying and reporting policies, and their alignment with requirements under federal law. LubbockPRIDE supports these investigations, and suggests Lubbock area schools review their policies as well, to make sure that they address the highest level of safety and security for all of our students. Sometimes federal law requirements are simply a bare minimum, however, and additional measures need to be taken.



---

According to the ACLU, 72% of Texas youth have experienced harassment at school based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, with over 25% reporting physical harassment. More than 75% of students have also experienced some form of anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination at school in the past year, with 40% reporting hearing negative comments from staff. Harassment and discrimination is not only unacceptable, but extremely dangerous. Every student deserves a safe and supportive environment and should be treated with dignity no matter their identity.

These statistics are exacerbated by many Texas legislators. Texas legislators introduced more than 20% of all anti-LGBTQ+ bills across the country. This type of hatred coming from positions of power often gives others the green light to treat LGBTQ+ individuals as less than human. Locally, our own City Council refused a simple act of proclaiming June as Pride Month in Lubbock, Texas. Most of the council was completely silent, but one member went so far as to claim it was “sexual politics,” and they did not feel it was appropriate to deal with the issue. These comments further increase the likelihood of our LGBTQ+ community being put in danger.

According to the civil rights organization GLSEN (which was formed by a group of school teachers), schools that have a Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) provide a safer, more supportive, and more enjoyable experience for LGBTQ+ youth. A GSA is a student-led and organized group whose goal is to create a safe and welcoming environment free from discrimination, no matter the sexual orientation or gender identity of a student. LubbockPRIDE would like to offer assistance in creating a GSA to any Lubbock or surrounding area school, to provide additional support for LGBTQ+ students. We also welcome schools to reach out to us, or other organizations, for possible educational sessions that we could organize to better equip faculty and staff in supporting LGBTQ+ youth in their schools.

Sincerely,

LubbockPRIDE