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## **A harassment-free school opens in L.A.**

**A new academic program for grades seven through 12 serves lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth.**

By Nicole Santa Cruz

11:00 PM PST, February 1, 2010

Aiden Aizumi almost didn't graduate from high school.

Aizumi, now 21, is one of many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender young people who say they have suffered through school, enduring homophobic taunts and name-calling.

He completed his final semester of high school from home.

His mother, Marsha Aizumi, didn't want others to endure the same treatment, so she approached educators about a new school geared for such students.

The school, which serves grades seven through 12, is a collaboration between [Opportunities for Learning](#), a charter school with 34 locations across Los Angeles and Orange counties, and [Lifeworks](#), a mentoring program for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth sponsored by the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center.

The school opened for enrollment at the center in January, but it will host an open house from 3 to 7 p.m. Tuesday at 1125 N. McCadden Place.

Currently the satellite campus employs one teacher. Three students will begin instruction in the upcoming weeks.

The school's independent study program is tailored to individual student needs.

Students meet with an instructor twice a week and are expected to complete between four and six hours of work at home each weekday.

School officials will expand the program, which is open to about 40 students, if the need arises. Those officials say they aren't aware of any similar schools in the county.

Michael Ferrera, the director of the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center, said there's a demand for more safe programs that award high school diplomas rather than high school equivalency certificates.

About 86% of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender students reported experiencing harassment at school, according to a 2007 survey conducted by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education

Network.

About three-fifths of students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation and one-third had skipped school because of feeling unsafe, the survey found.

Eliza Byard, the executive director of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, said schools that embrace every aspect of diversity are greatly needed.

"One could really not create enough seats for the kinds of needs that are out there," she said.

Ferrera said the educational addition to the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center makes it a "one-stop" shop for services ranging from job placement to housing.

Students can also participate in various community programs offered by the center. Aizumi said he'd love to see students succeed in the charter school but wishes it weren't necessary for some.

High school, he said, is hard enough.

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