With Wit and Courage, He’s Created A Safe Place for LGBTQ Students

Michael Chavarria

At age 15 Michael Chavarria knew it was going to take an immense amount of courage to come out to his conservative community of Oroville, California. Although he expected the revealing of his sexuality to be met with criticism, this did not keep him from educating the school community about gay rights and advocating for those rights.

With just a Power Point presentation, an incredible sense of bravery, and a lot of wit, Michael Chavarria was able to “take action against prejudice”. He included slides on the gender neutral pronouns “hir”, “hirs”, and “ze” of which even many adults are unaware. He also discussed the meaning behind words such as “faggot” and “dyke”, and explained how damaging their labels can be for a young person.

The response to Michael’s presentation was overwhelmingly positive. He was asked to present it to the entire freshman body, and in just one year, he was able to reach 90 percent of Oroville High School’s student body. One student stated, “Michael’s presentation honestly took my breath away. Thanks to his speech, I am a bit more confident about being in the LGBTQ community...Hopefully he continues doing this to make the school a safer place for the LGBTQ community.”

Michael is president of his schools Gay Straight Alliance. “Our GSA provided a safe place for me to overcome my fear of coming out.” He has also emphasized the importance of LGBTQ students having allies who come to GSA meetings. Under Michael’s leadership, the GSA’s membership has more than doubled. “Change is what Michael HAS created,” explains one Oroville High School educator. “Teachers have heard fewer ‘that’s so gay’ comments. Students have noticed it too.”

Michael Chavarria has also made sure the district becomes compliant with Seth’s’ Law AB 9. It requires all California public schools to include sexual orientation/perceived sexual orientation or gender/perceived gender in anti-bullying policy. It also requires that all school personnel intervene if they witness bullying of any kind, including bullying of LGBTQ youth.