

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 20, 2012

## Equality Illinois: "The Bullies Won in East Aurora"

**Bernard Cherkasov, CEO of Equality Illinois, on Saturday commented on the Friday night vote of the East Aurora school board that rescinded a policy designed to provide a safe learning environment for all of its students:**

The bullies won this time. The East Aurora school board panicked under intense pressure generated by a recognized "hate group," the Illinois Family Institute, to rescind a policy it had unanimously adopted only on Monday. The consequence is that the IFI, designated a "hate group" by the respected national civil rights organization The Southern Poverty Law Center, thinks it can notch another victory.

There were other avenues the Board should have taken.

First, the board should have provided a teaching moment for the students of the district and stood up to the bullies and simply said, "No" to rescinding its respectful policy.

Second, we fail to see the emergency stampeding it to schedule a special board meeting with three of the members unavailable for the vote. The Board should have waited and taken the time for a more reasoned response.

Third, it appears the Board's concern was more with the politics of the issue and internal administrative disputes than with the policy itself. The Board should have kept the policy in force both for its protections and to demonstrate the intent to stand up to bullies while it took the time to sort through the other issues that really have nothing to do with safe schools.

Working with our partners such as the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance, we will organize efforts to educate the school Board and the community about the need for the rescinded policy, recommended by educational and psychological experts.

In its statements Friday night, Board members provided lip service about caring for all of its students; their subsequent vote spoke louder than words. They promised a new anti-harassment policy to include transgender students and to look to the Illinois State Board of Education for guidance on policies regarding transgender students.

So our request for the East Aurora school board: Do your homework and come back with a strong policy affirming protections for transgender and gender nonconforming students.

*Equality Illinois is the state's oldest, largest and most effective advocacy organization working to secure and protect the civil rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. Learn more about our mission at [www.equalityillinois.org](http://www.equalityillinois.org).*

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