

# **Bozeman students protest Christian athlete club as anti-gay**

**[If you disagree with us we will destroy you]**

By Gail Schontzler Chronicle Staff Writer Nov 13, 2019

[https://www.bozemandailychronicle.com/news/bozeman-students-protest-christian-athlete-club-as-anti-gay/article\\_59be6f52-a2a2-56e9-9605-dd0fe5a1b4b3.html](https://www.bozemandailychronicle.com/news/bozeman-students-protest-christian-athlete-club-as-anti-gay/article_59be6f52-a2a2-56e9-9605-dd0fe5a1b4b3.html)

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Rachel Leathe/Chronicle

Several students at Bozeman High School have raised concerns about the Fellowship of Christian Athletes student club, arguing that the national organization’s positions discriminate against gay and lesbian students.

Four girls went to the Bozeman School Board meeting Monday night to express their frustration with school administrators for taking seven months to act on their concerns.

The national FCA’s statement of faith and sexual purity pledge required of its leaders depict homosexuality as a sin, and that conflicts with the school’s motto that “the Hawk Way” promotes “acceptance, respect and integrity,” the girls argued.

Bozeman School Superintendent Bob Connors said Tuesday that Kris Goss, an attorney with the Montana School Boards Association, “advised the school district that the FCA’s national mission statement does violate the Bozeman School District’s discrimination policy.”

“We’re happy the girls did come forward and follow the procedure,” Connors said. “They’ve handled it appropriately. I’m glad they took an active role in questioning the policy and procedures.”

Bob Veroulis of Helena, state director of the Montana Fellowship of Christian Athletes, said Tuesday that the group doesn't discriminate against any students or require kids to sign purity pledges. Rather, he said, that's required of adult leaders to ensure they represent the FCA's values.

The four girls — Maggie Callow, Katherine Callow, Esmie Hurd and Kate Bick — told the school board that they first tried to speak to the club's faculty adviser. Then they went to the acting principal, who said the high school knew of no cases of discrimination by FCA, that the harm to LGBTQ students was hypothetical, and that outlawing the club might be discriminatory toward the Christian students.

This fall the girls brought the issue to the new principal, Dan Mills, and said they at first got similar responses. Finally school administrators agreed that the FCA does violate school district policy, the girls said.

The school board voted in 2008 to add "sexual orientation" to its anti-discrimination policy. It states the school district "will make equal educational opportunities available for all students without regard to race, creed, religion, gender, sexual origination, marital status, color, age, physical or mental disability, national origin or political beliefs."

The girls said the local FCA chapter was given two options — changing its name and continuing as an inclusive Christian club, or staying with FCA and becoming an unofficial club. As an unofficial club it would not have announcements on the school intercom, and its flyers posted around school would carry stickers labeling it as an unofficial organization.

Connors said the principal hasn't yet heard back from the local club which option they'd choose.

Hurd said in the girls' opinion, the unofficial club option still would not stop discrimination against LGBTQ students, who nationally are at higher risk of suicide.

“These girls have no problem with a Christian club,” said Sara Callow, mother of two of the girls and a university instructor. She said their concern is with protecting vulnerable LGBTQ students, who are at risk. “They’re not anti-Christian or against kids having a safe place at school to share their faith together.”

Callow said the girls saw news stories last spring about controversy surrounding the Chick-fil-A Foundation giving more than \$1 million to FCA and other organizations that oppose same-sex marriage. The girls started asking whether Bozeman High’s FCA shared that position.

They read about FCA’s statement of faith, which states that God instituted marriage as a union between one man and one woman, and that homosexuality and sex outside of marriage are not acceptable to God.

The girls said they didn’t feel listened to or taken seriously and suggested school administrators take sensitivity training.

Veroulis, state FCA director, said he didn’t want to comment on the Bozeman High issue before hearing officially from the school, but he stressed that FCA is “open to anyone and everyone.”

“We’re called to love everyone and our kids have the same opinion,” Veroulis said. The club serves pizza to all who come to its meetings and shows everyone love, he said.

No kids are required to sign the sexual purity statement, he said. Rather, he said, it’s required of adult leaders, to make sure their beliefs align with FCA’s.

Statewide FCA has about 350 student members in college, high schools and middle schools. After the controversy broke in Bozeman, he said, about 48 kids showed up at the FCA meeting, a huge increase.

The benefits of FCA are many in an era when kids often come from broken homes and Montana leads the nation in suicide, Veroulis said. FCA helps give students a “true north to guide them,” he said, and rather than being athletes who take and take, FCA encourages athletes to serve their classmates and serve their community.

“We believe every life is sacred, every person has hope,” he said. “There’s people (at FCA) to love on them, build them up, make them stronger. We’re raising the next generation of leaders, servant leaders.”