

# Students Who Sued to Get Gay-Straight-Alliances in Utah Schools Reunite After 20 Years

When their school shut down all after school activities to stop their GSA from meeting, they fought back and won.

Newnownext.com

August 3, 2018

by [Jeff Taylor](#)

Link: <http://www.newnownext.com/students-who-sued-to-get-gay-straight-alliances-in-utah-schools-reunite-after-20-years/08/2018/?xrs=synd> [twitter](#) [nnn](#)

Former students of a high school in Salt Lake City have reunited to honor the 20 year anniversary of successfully winning the right to have a Gay Straight Alliance—a decision that had statewide impact.

Ivy Fox and Leah Farrell were among a handful of students at East High School who filed suit after the school board canceled all extracurricular clubs to shut down the GSA. The legal fight drew national attention and saw the utilization of harmful rhetoric by critics, such as the president of a conservative group [claiming the GSA was an attempt to “recruit”](#) young people into a life of homosexuality.

Fox and Farrell recently returned to the school, sharing a hug and reminiscing about the battle to secure a safe community within it. They will take part in a panel discussion tonight at the Utah Pride Center, starting at 6pm.



[Fox 13](#)

The [event is hosted in part by the ACLU](#), for which Farrell now works as an attorney, where she helps others setup GSAs when they face push-back from school officials. Carol Gnade, retired Executive Director of the Utah Pride Center, who led the ACLU of Utah during the case, will also take part.

East High's LGBTQ students won their bid when a federal judge dismissed the case, but ruled the students had a First Amendment right to express their views. The school district decided to allow the GSA to meet following the judge's ruling.

Fox (above, at center) recalled the difficulty they faced during those years, having her tires slashed "weekly," as well as having her locker broken into, but [told Fox 13](#) on Thursday that she would "do it all again in a heartbeat."

While she's proud of the progress that was made, she expressed the desire to see more efforts to help support LGBTQ young people.

"Every person, every student deserves to have a safe, comfortable space in their schools," she said. "In Utah, we're still looking at the highest teen suicide rate in the nation and that's not something to be proud of."

Farrell (above, left) said she takes hope from the calls she receives from students working to start their own GSAs all across the state.

"It means that these spaces are being created in parts of Utah where they've never been created. People are calling for GSAs and creating safe spaces and that's great."

### [Jeff Taylor](#)

Journalist based in Charlotte, North Carolina, whose work has appeared in The Charlotte Observer, Creative Loafing, and more.