# Tim Walz's legacy of LGBTQ+ inclusivity at Mankato West High School shapes his political journey



In 1999, at Mankato West High School in Minnesota, Jacob Reitan experienced a life-changing moment when teacher Gwen Walz declared her classroom a safe space for gay students. The significance of this supportive environment was profound for young Reitan, who subsequently confided in Gwen Walz about his sexuality before even informing his own parents.

Both Gwen and her husband, Tim Walz, were educators at the high school. Tim, who has since ascended the ranks of public service to become the Governor of Minnesota and the Democratic vice-presidential candidate alongside Kamala Harris for the 2024 election, demonstrated considerable support for LGBTQ+ issues long before his political rise. Reitan recounted approaching Tim to establish a Gay-Straight Alliance at the school. Tim Walz's endorsement, given his standing as both a geography teacher and the football team's defensive coordinator, vastly empowered the initiative.

"Having the support of a straight, married man and a soldier in the Army National Guard brought immense credibility to our cause," Reitan reflected, further emphasizing Tim Walz’s efforts to address the rampant issue of bullying comprehensively.

Despite facing opposition, including threats from some parents to withdraw their children from school, the administrative support from the high school management ensured the continuity and success of the Gay-Straight Alliance. Reitan’s car was vandalized with a slur, yet the inclusive atmosphere fostered at the school ran significantly counter to such hostility.

Fast forward to the present, Kamala Harris highlighted Tim Walz's supportive actions during her campaign introduction speech. However, Walz’s staunch advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights has garnered its share of criticism. Certain conservative voices, including Tiffany Justice from the parental rights group Moms for Liberty, have condemned his stance, particularly his opposition to bans on gender-affirming care for minors, branding him excessively liberal.

Reitan encapsulated his viewpoint by asserting that Walz's unwavering authenticity and understanding of diversity are well-suited for the political realm. As the 2024 election unfolds, it remains to be seen how voters will respond to Walz’s longstanding and deeply-rooted values of inclusivity and support for marginalized communities.