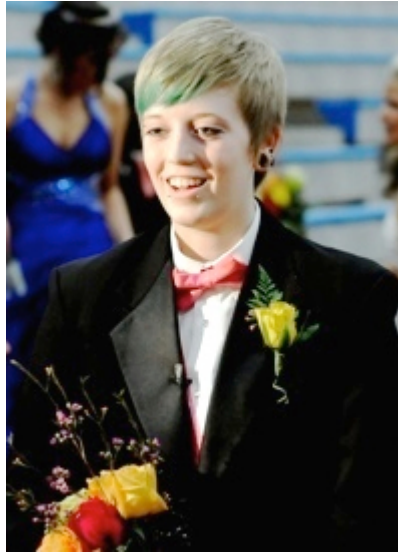




Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on February 2, 2011

Lesbian Couple Presented at High School Royalty Court

Two lesbian high school students walked hand-in-hand together as part of a royalty court on Monday to the cheers of hundreds of fellow students. Donned in matching black suits and pink ties, Sarah Lindstrom and Desiree Shelton entered the Snow Days Pep Fest at Champlin Park High School in Minnesota after the school was threatened with a lawsuit for nearly banning the couple from doing so.



[The Blaze](#) reports:

Students voted onto the royalty court traditionally enter the assembly in boy-girl pairs. After Lindstrom and Shelton, both 18, were elected, school officials last week announced a change in procedure: court members would walk in individually or accompanied by a parent or favorite teacher.

On the Friday following the announcement, two human rights groups sued the school on behalf of Lindstrom and Shelton.

School officials indicated that they were merely seeking to guard the girls and protect them from what the school feared would be relentless teasing.

Evidently, Champlin Park's Anoka-Hennepin school district has been under scrutiny in recent years for its handling of issues involving homosexual students. *The Blaze* explains:

It has been in the crossfire for its policy of "neutrality" in classroom discussions of homosexuality. [The policy] was reached in 2009 as a way to balance the demands of liberal and conservative families, but neither side has been completely happy with it.

The issues flared against last year after a gay student, Justin Aaberg, killed himself. His mother has said she heard too late from Justin's friends that he had been harassed.

Aaberg was one of six students who committed suicide in the district since the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year, and advocacy groups have linked some of the other deaths to the bullying of gay students.

School districts such as Anoka-Hennepin are finding themselves in the increasingly difficult role of having to [teach tolerance](#) while serving to [protect](#) its students.

Despite the district's investigations which found that bullying had not contributed to the deaths of the homosexual students, Champlin Park High School's administration thought it best to avoid any potential bullying by preventing the female couple from staging such an outward display of their homosexuality.

Federally mediated talks took place on Saturday, however, which ultimately resulted in the school



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relenting. Both sides agreed that escorts could be anyone who meant something special.

“This is a new chapter for the district,” remarked Sam Wolfe, a lawyer for the left-leaning Southern Poverty Law Center, which filed a lawsuit along with the National Center for Lesbian Rights and the Minneapolis law firm of Faegre and Benson.

Despite the school’s fears, the lesbian couple was well-received by the crowd of students. Hundreds applauded them, while dozens rose to give standing ovations. *The Blaze* writes, “If there were any boos, they were drowned out by supporters.”

“It felt amazing,” Shelton said of the event. Lindstrom added, “I feel so much better.” Lindstrom’s mother, Sarah, who joined other parents at the royalty court after the rally to take pictures, proudly professed, “They had a lot of courage. Look how far we’ve come.”

Pleasantly surprised by the reaction of the students, Principal Mike George said, “They did great. I’m proud of our students.”

A number of students at the high school indicated that they did not understand all of the fuss. “Some people are against it, but they don’t care if they walk down a stupid runway,” said Maggie Hesaliman, 14. Sixteen-year old Melissa Biellefe added, “We’re a pretty respectful school. Our rule is just let people be who they are.”

An increase in bullying incidents at schools in recent years has prompted a number of states to adopt anti-bullying legislation, including New Jersey, whose [legislation](#) is said to be the toughest, according to gay advocates, as it requires anti-bullying programs in public schools and college codes of conduct to address bullying. The gay rights group Garden State Equality applauded Governor Chris Christie for his signing of the law.

Photo: Desiree Shelton talked to a reporter with Sarah Lindstrom (out of picture) prior to the Royalty Court procession at the Snow Days Pep Fest at Champlin Park High School Monday, Jan. 31, 2011 in Champlin, Minn.



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