



A Student Who Teaches Schools

Before Reading Poll

Sameer Jha is working with student leaders and educators to make schools safer and more inclusive for LGBTQ students. What do you think of this quote by former South African leader Nelson Mandela?

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Agree

Disagree

Explain why you voted the way you did.

Article

FREMONT, California (Achieve3000, September 14, 2020). Sameer Jha got through middle school, but it wasn't easy. Day in and day out, the teen was bullied by other students. Most kids at the California middle school didn't understand what life was like for LGBTQ students like Sameer, and some of the teachers didn't, either.

You might expect someone in Sameer's shoes to never set foot on that campus again after moving on to high school, but Sameer *wanted* to return. He was determined to make sure no one else would have to endure the same trauma he did. So, a year later, Sameer went back to his middle school, but he didn't go alone. This leader showed up with a team and a plan of action.

At age 14, during his first year of high school, Sameer founded an organization called The Empathy Alliance. The group's goal was to make schools safer and more inclusive for LGBTQ students by promoting understanding and acceptance. The Empathy Alliance's first mission? To change the environment at Sameer's old middle school.

To that end, the group enlisted the cooperation of the middle school's student leaders, teachers, school counselor, and principal. Together, they started a club for LGBTQ students and stocked the library shelves with books on LGBTQ topics. Teachers and other staff received training to educate them about issues related to gender identity. They also learned how to act as allies to LGBTQ students.

The Empathy Alliance's initiatives transformed the middle school. Sameer summed up the impact in an interview with the *Bay Area Reporter*. "There is such a huge change," he said. "I'm so happy to see the whole school completely shifting and beginning to be a community of people driven to make change and support each other."

It was a big accomplishment, but the group didn't stop there. Having conducted research at other schools in the area, Sameer knew that bullying was a widespread problem. The majority of LGBTQ students surveyed had experienced it firsthand. The activist therefore set out to spread the group's message to a wider audience. Soon, The Empathy Alliance was working at schools throughout the district, which included more than 40 schools serving about 35,000 students.

Today, the group has extended its reach across the country. Its busy leader—who is still a teenager—continues to speak at events, conduct workshops, and appear on radio shows. Sameer has also been awarded the Congressional Silver Medal and is a Youth Ambassador for the Human Rights Campaign, America's largest LGBTQ advocacy group.

Sameer believes that supportive adults can make a big difference to LGBTQ students. That's why many of The Empathy Alliance's initiatives focus on "educating the educators." Sameer has even written a book for teachers that offers guidance on how to create classrooms that will help LGBTQ students thrive. Someday he plans to put those techniques into practice in the classroom...by becoming a teacher.

Educators aren't the only people who can learn a lot from Sameer. His story shows that living through emotional hardships like bullying can often inspire people to reach out and make a difference. Sameer has said, "No student should have to go through what I went through," and this young leader is working to make sure that, in the future, no one does.

Think about and discuss these questions:

- How would you summarize the different ways that The Empathy Alliance is "educating the educators"?

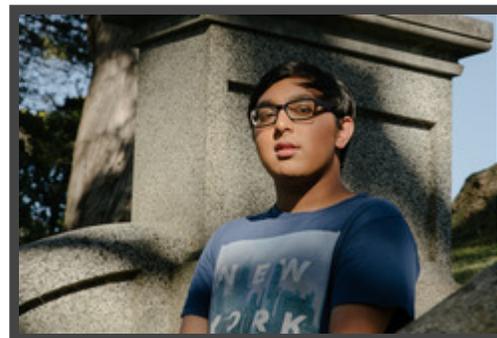


Photo credit: PETER PRATO/The New York Times/Redux

Sameer Jha, a 16-year-old LGBTQ activist, at the Mountain View Cemetery in Oakland, California. Jha started The Empathy Alliance, a group that works with students and teachers.

- What changes would *you* make to promote understanding and acceptance of all students at your school?

Dictionary

inclusive (*adjective*) aiming to include everyone

initiative (*noun*) a plan or program set up to take care of a problem

technique (*noun*) a particular method or way of doing something

Activity

PART 1

Question 1

The Article primarily discusses _____.

- Ⓐ the surveys Sameer Jha conducted at other California schools, which revealed that bullying of LGBTQ students was widespread
- Ⓑ the ways that Sameer Jha helps schools implement programs to support LGBTQ students and trains teachers to be allies
- Ⓒ the awards that Sameer Jha has received for his work in LGBTQ advocacy, which includes the Congressional Silver Medal
- Ⓓ the challenges Sameer Jha faced because most kids at his school didn't understand what life was like for LGBTQ students

Question 2

Which of these is a statement of opinion?

- Ⓐ The Empathy Alliance exists to make schools safer and more inclusive for LGBTQ students.
- Ⓑ Sameer Jha founded The Empathy Alliance at age 14 during his first year of high school.
- Ⓒ The Empathy Alliance provides the best tools for teachers looking to be student allies.
- Ⓓ Sameer Jha founded The Empathy Alliance after experiencing bullying while in middle school.

Question 3

Which is the closest **antonym** for the word *inclusive*?

- Ⓐ discriminatory
- Ⓑ diplomatic
- Ⓒ dependent
- Ⓓ deceitful

Question 4

According to the Article, why do many of The Empathy Alliance's initiatives focus on training educators?

- Ⓐ Because Sameer enlisted the school counselor, principal, and teachers at his middle school to start a club for LGBTQ students
- Ⓑ Because Sameer plans to become a classroom teacher and wants to know if his techniques are effective
- Ⓒ Because Sameer believes that supportive teachers create classrooms where LGBTQ students can thrive
- Ⓓ Because Sameer has shown that living through emotional hardships can inspire people to make a difference

Question 5

Think about the following statement made by Sameer Jha:

"There is such a huge change," he said. "I'm so happy to see the whole school completely shifting and beginning to be a community of people driven to make change and support each other."

The author's purpose for including this quote was to _____.

- (A) demonstrate how effective The Empathy Alliance was at Sameer Jha's former middle school
- (B) explain the process The Empathy Alliance uses to help schools become supportive communities
- (C) argue that the training methods used by The Empathy Alliance are the only way to end bullying
- (D) highlight the need for The Empathy Alliance to expand its work to more schools across the U.S.

Question 6

This Article would be **most** useful as a source for a student research project on _____.

- (A) understanding topics related to California students
- (B) creating more inclusive learning environments
- (C) being a Youth Ambassador for the Human Rights Campaign
- (D) using literature to teach about the LGBTQ experience

Question 7

Read this passage from the Article:

...many of The Empathy Alliance's initiatives focus on "educating the educators." Sameer has even written a book for teachers that offers *guidance* on how to create classrooms that will help LGBTQ students thrive.

In this passage, the word *guidance* means _____.

- (A) unrealistic assumptions
- (B) harsh judgments
- (C) practical recommendations
- (D) legal requirements

Question 8

Which question is **not** answered by the Article?

- (A) How did Sameer create a more inclusive environment at his former middle school?
- (B) What techniques does Sameer teach to help educators become allies to LGBTQ students?
- (C) What are the goals of the group Sameer established when he was in high school?
- (D) How does Sameer plan to put his techniques into practice as he gets older?

After Reading Poll

Now that you have read the article, indicate whether you agree or disagree with this statement.

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Agree

Disagree

Explain why you voted the way you did. Then read and respond to what others have to say.

Sorry, comments are not available at this time. Please try again later.

Thought Question

Explain the challenges that Sameer Jha experienced as a student and describe the steps he has taken to make schools more inclusive. *Use facts and details from the Article in your response.*

Type your answer in the text box below.

Poll Results

OPINION STATEMENT: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

BEFORE READING	AFTER READING
HOW YOU VOTED	
Agree	Agree
Disagree	Disagree

WORLDWIDE RESULTS					
Agree		87%	Agree		90%
Disagree		13%	Disagree		10%

6% changed their opinion after reading the article.

Stretch Article

FREMONT, California (Achieve3000, September 14, 2020). Sameer Jha got through middle school, but it wasn't easy. Day in and day out, the teen was bullied by other students. Most kids at the California middle school didn't understand what life was like for LGBTQ students like Sameer, and some of the teachers didn't, either.

You might expect someone in Sameer's shoes to never set foot on that campus again after moving on to high school, but Sameer *wanted* to return. He was determined to make sure no one else would have to endure the same tribulations he did. So, a year later, Sameer went back to his alma mater, but he didn't go alone—this leader showed up at the middle school with a team and a plan of action.

At age 14, during his first year of high school, Sameer founded an organization called The Empathy Alliance. The group's goal was to make schools safer and more inclusive for LGBTQ students by promoting understanding and acceptance. The Empathy Alliance's first mission? To change the status quo at Sameer's old middle school.

To that end, the group enlisted the cooperation of the middle school's student leaders, teachers, school counselor, and principal. Together, they started a club for LGBTQ students and stocked the library shelves with books that covered LGBTQ topics and portrayed LGBTQ characters. Teachers and other staff received training to educate them about issues related to gender identity and to help them better understand how to act as allies to LGBTQ students.

The Empathy Alliance's initiatives transformed the environment at the middle school. Sameer summed up the impact in an interview with the *Bay Area Reporter*. "There is such a huge change," he said. "I'm so happy to see the whole school completely shifting and beginning to be a community of people driven to make change and support each other."

It was a big accomplishment, but the group didn't stop there. Having conducted research at other schools in the area, Sameer knew that bullying was a widespread problem—the majority of LGBTQ students surveyed had experienced it firsthand. The activist therefore set out to spread the group's message to a wider audience. Soon, The Empathy Alliance was working at schools throughout the district, which included more than 40 schools serving about 35,000 students.

Today, the group has extended its reach across the country, and its busy leader—who is still a teenager—continues to speak at events, conduct workshops, appear on radio shows, and collaborate with many other organizations, including Gender Spectrum and the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union). The teen has also been awarded the Congressional Silver Medal and is a Youth Ambassador for the Human Rights Campaign, America's largest LGBTQ advocacy group.

Sameer believes that supportive adults can make a big difference to LGBTQ students, which is why many of The Empathy Alliance's initiatives focus on "educating the educators." Sameer has even written a book for teachers that offers guidance on how to create classrooms that will help LGBTQ students thrive, and someday he plans to put those tenets and techniques into practice in the classroom...by becoming a teacher.

Educators aren't the only people who can learn a lot from Sameer. His story shows that living through emotional hardships like bullying can often inspire people to reach out and make a difference. Sameer has said, "No student should have to go through what I went through," and this young leader is working to make sure that, in the future, no one does.

Think about and discuss these questions:

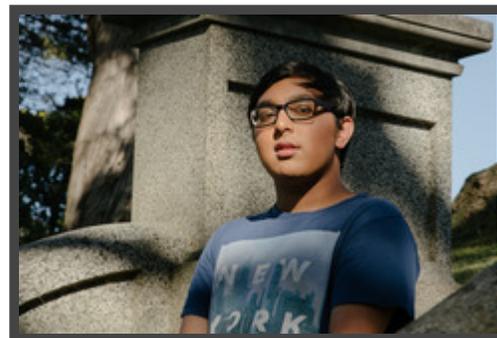


Photo credit: PETER PRATO/The New York Times/Redux

Sameer Jha, a 16-year-old LGBTQ activist, at the Mountain View Cemetery in Oakland, California. Jha started The Empathy Alliance, a group that works with students and teachers.

- How would you summarize the different ways that The Empathy Alliance is "educating the educators"?
- What changes would *you* make to promote understanding and acceptance of all students at your school?

Dictionary

status quo (*noun*) existing state of affairs

tenet (*noun*) any opinion or principle, especially one held as true by members of a profession, group, or movement

tribulation (*noun*) severe trouble or suffering

Stretch Activity

PART 1

Question 1

The Article primarily discusses _____.

- Ⓐ the surveys Sameer Jha conducted at other California schools, which revealed that bullying of LGBTQ students was widespread
- Ⓑ the awards that Sameer Jha has received for his work in LGBTQ advocacy, which includes the Congressional Silver Medal
- Ⓒ the challenges Sameer Jha faced because most kids at his school didn't understand what life was like for LGBTQ students
- Ⓓ the ways that Sameer Jha helps schools implement programs to support LGBTQ students and trains teachers to be allies

Question 2

Which of these is a statement of opinion?

- Ⓐ The Empathy Alliance exists to make schools safer and more inclusive for LGBTQ students.
- Ⓑ The Empathy Alliance provides the best tools for teachers looking to be student allies.
- Ⓒ Sameer Jha founded The Empathy Alliance at age 14 during his first year of high school.
- Ⓓ Sameer Jha founded The Empathy Alliance after experiencing bullying while in middle school.

Question 3

Which is the closest **synonym** for the word *tribulation*?

- Ⓐ posterity
- Ⓑ vitality
- Ⓒ integrity
- Ⓓ adversity

Question 4

According to the Article, why do many of The Empathy Alliance's initiatives focus on training educators?

- Ⓐ Because Sameer enlisted the school counselor, principal, and teachers at his middle school to start a club for LGBTQ students
- Ⓑ Because Sameer has shown that living through emotional hardships can inspire people to make a difference
- Ⓒ Because Sameer believes that supportive teachers create classrooms where LGBTQ students can thrive
- Ⓓ Because Sameer plans to become a classroom teacher and wants to know if his tenets and techniques are effective

Question 5

Think about the following statement made by Sameer Jha:

"There is such a huge change," he said. "I'm so happy to see the whole school completely shifting and beginning to be a community of people driven to make change and support each other."

The author's purpose for including this quote was to _____.

- (A) explain the process The Empathy Alliance uses to help schools become supportive communities
- (B) highlight the need for The Empathy Alliance to expand its work to more schools across the U.S.
- (C) argue that the training methods used by The Empathy Alliance are the only way to end bullying
- (D) demonstrate how effective The Empathy Alliance was at Sameer Jha's former middle school

Question 6

This Article would be **most** useful as a source for a student research project on _____.

- (A) creating more inclusive learning environments
- (B) using literature to teach about the LGBTQ experience
- (C) being a Youth Ambassador for the Human Rights Campaign
- (D) understanding topics related to California students

Question 7

Read this passage from the Article:

...a year later, Sameer went back to his *alma mater*, but he didn't go alone—this leader showed up at the middle school with a team and a plan of action.

In this passage, the word *alma mater* means _____.

- (A) a supportive parent, teacher, or other adult
- (B) an inclusive classroom where students thrive
- (C) a school that a person formerly attended
- (D) an organization committed to change

Question 8

Which question is **not** answered by the Article?

- (A) How does Sameer plan to put his tenets and techniques into practice as he gets older?
- (B) What organizations has Sameer partnered with in order to spread his message of inclusivity?
- (C) What techniques does Sameer teach educators to use in order to be allies to LGBTQ students?
- (D) How did Sameer create a more inclusive environment at his former middle school?