SAFE SPACES: Equality and Inclusion in K-12 Education

The National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute released the following data on an epidemic of homelessness amongst LGBT youth in 2006:

- 575,000 to 1.6 million per year are homeless/runaways
- 40% of all homeless youth identify as LGBT
- 3-5% of the U.S. population identifies LGBT

In the 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) students between grades 9-12 are surveyed and the data shows:

- 1.3 million students identify as LGB (12.2%) PLUS 500,000 are unsure of sexual identity
- 59% bullied AND 23% reported being threatened or injured w/weapon at school
- 24% are afraid to go to school

The LGBTQ+ youth group experiences exclusion, harassment and violence at a disproportional rate to their identifying straight peers in schools, family homes and state/federal subsidized housing, and are at risk for critical problems such as mental health issues and suicide. While there are current calls to develop state and federal level policies to support this underrepresented group, the question remains – how do we respond to this crisis at the practitioner level? This is where our work will begin.

Studio Program
In this studio section, students will examine architecture as advocate. To address the need for housing solutions for LGBTQ+ youth and to support equal rights to education and inclusive environments, we will collaborate with Pride School Atlanta – the first LGBTQ+ affirming school in the South (www.prideschoolatlanta.org). We will deploy architecture as a device to engage in the creation of safe spaces and diversity in education. Students will develop the first studio level assignment on structure/systems (per course objectives) as a design initiator for two safe spaces for LGBTQ+ youth in Atlanta, GA:

[1] Interior renovation of a small commercial rental space providing educational support for up to 15 students (two-week charrette). In this project, we will resolve pedagogy (the Free Model) in an open plan. Structure/System project becomes the tool for spatial organization and lighting strategies.

[2] Academic building for youth ranging from 9-18 years of age (grades 4-12) with attached/adjacent housing for students, faculty, supporting staff, and visiting care providers. In this project, we will utilize the first two projects to re-define educational and residential typologies, and deploy technology as a liberation device – for the project to become self-sustaining (from passive system design to agriculture) – lowering the dependency on private or government funding for its success. During site selection and planning, we will discuss what makes a safe community and map its effect the city’s overall potential for growth.