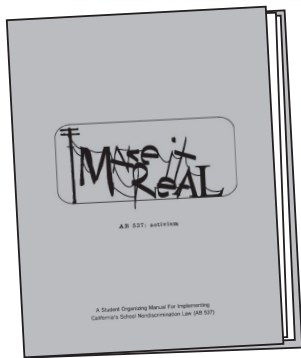




## FIGHTING HARASSMENT & DISCRIMINATION IN YOUR SCHOOL



**THE MAKE IT REAL HANDBOOK** is designed to help you and your GSA translate your goals and ideals for safer, more supportive school for LGBTQ and ally students by using the basic tools and strategies of student activism. This campaign guide is a brief summary of the *Make It Real* manual. To read the entire manual, go to [www.gsanetwork.org/makeitreal](http://www.gsanetwork.org/makeitreal)

### What is the law?

**The California Student Safety & Violence Prevention Act of 2000 (AB 537)**, added *actual or perceived* sexual orientation and gender identity to the existing non-discrimination policy in the California Education Code (EC § 220).

State law says that “gender” means sex, and includes a person’s *gender identity* and *gender-related appearance and behavior whether or not* stereotypically associated with the person’s sex at birth.

The policy also **prohibits harassment and discrimination** on the basis of sex, ethnic group identification, race, ancestry, national origin, religion, color, or mental or physical disability.

### Who is protected under the law?

**State law** protects students and school employees at all California public schools and school receiving state funding, except religious schools.

• **Harassment:** severe or pervasive behavior which unreasonably disrupts an individual’s educational or work environment or that creates a hostile educational or work environment.

**Examples of harassment:** *slurs or hurtful words; damaging someone’s property; lewd comments or unwanted sexual behavior; hostile notes; etc.*

• **Discrimination:** any kind of differential treatment that negatively affects a group or an individual because he or she is perceived to be the member of a particular group.

**Examples of discrimination:** *a principal won’t allow GSA to form even though other clubs can; teachers don’t intervene when slurs like “fag” or “dyke” are used; same-gender couples aren’t allowed to hold hands an/or show affection, but straight couples are; etc.*

gsanetwork  
**CAMPAIGN  
GUIDE**

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Inspired by:

### The California Student Safety & Violence Prevention Act of 2000 (AB 537)

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS: SECTION 1.

*This bill shall be known, and may be cited, as the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000. SEC. 2. (a) The Legislature finds and declares all of the following: (1) Under the California Constitution, all students of public schools have the inalienable right to attend campuses that are safe, secure, and peaceful.*

— State Senator  
& AB 537 Author  
**Sheila Kuehl**

# TAKE A STAND

If you face harrasment or  
discrimination at school, you have the  
right to make a formal complaint.

*In the context of state law, the word "complaint" means that you are taking formal action by notifying authorities about a problem. Lodging a complaint is your way of officially taking a stand.*

## Before you make your complaint

- \* **Get safe first**—The most important thing to do is to make sure you're safe.
- \* **Educate**, if circumstances permit, about why the other person's actions are wrong.
- \* **Prepare yourself** for the risks you might encounter:
  - **Retaliation from the perpetrator:** At the very first sign of retaliation, be prepared to make another complaint and insist your school act to ensure your safety. Ask friends and trusted adults to help you and think about safe places at school, and safe ways to get to and from school.
  - **Inappropriate punishment:** If this is how your principal responds, you can pursue your complaint at the district level.
  - **Confidentiality:** Ask your principal to respect your wishes about whether or not your parents will be notified. Ask your principal or your district to commit to a confidentiality policy. Or, consider filing your complaint anonymously or through a third party or organization, like GSA Network.

## How to make your complaint

1. **Document the incident.** Write down a detailed description of the incident, the date and time, the names of witnesses, and whether any faculty members were present, and how they responded.
2. **Take the complaint to the school principal** or to the person who is supposed to receive and process complaints of harassment or other forms of discrimination.
3. **Ask the school official** to let you know what action he/she/ze plans to take and when.
4. Always make sure to **make a copy for yourself** of everything you give to the school official.
5. **Make sure a bias incident report is filed** by the school. Under the Hate Violence Prevention Act of 2000 (EC § 233), your school is required to report bias incidents and bias crimes.
6. **Report back. If harassment continues,** let the principal know that it's still taking place and that the disciplinary action is not working.
7. **After the meeting, write down what happened,** the date and time, what your principal said, what you agreed on, and whether your principal carried out his/her/hir end of the bargain.
8. **Take it to the next level. If the problem doesn't stop** and your principal is unable to fix it, consider filing your complaint with the school district.
  - You must lodge the complaint with the district **within six months** of the original incident.
  - Mail your complaint to the **superintendent's office**, or your district's designated compliance officer.
  - The district has **60 days** to investigate and send you a response.
9. **Decide if you want to appeal.** If you are not satisfied with the district's decision, you have only 15 days to appeal to the California Department of Education (CDE), (916) 445-9174.  
**Send your appeal by registered mail to:**
  - Office of Equal Opportunity
  - CA Department of Education
  - Attention: Director
  - 1430 N Street, Room 4206
  - Sacramento, CA 95814



# ORGANIZE A CAMPAIGN



(Also see next page for campaign ideas & tactics that have worked for other GSAs.)

Besides filing complaints, your GSA can also work on creating and carrying out a campaign to change your school. Before you start a campaign to change your school, you need a plan. When taking on any campaign, it helps to be organized and strategic.

**What is your overall goal?** Think Big! What would your school look like if all students were safe and free from harassment and discrimination? Your goal is what you are fighting to accomplish. Everything you do in your campaign should work toward your goal. Then, when you begin considering specific tactics and actions, you can ask yourselves this question: “If we take this action, will it get us closer to our goal?”

**What is your campaign?** A plan that focuses on one or two winnable gains toward your overall goal. A typical school-based campaign will take between six and nine months to complete.

**What do you know about your problem?** Research, research, research! What do you need to know about your issue? Think about student surveys or collecting student stories, getting statistics, etc. The more you know about your issue, the better chance you have of choosing the best strategy.

**What are your strengths and weaknesses?** Honesty is key in this section of your planning. Think about the number of people working on your campaign, access to transportation, money, and also your group's morale. The more honest and thorough you are, the easier it will be for you to get organized.

**Who are your supporters? Who are your opponents?** Consider who will help you achieve your goal—who else wants to stop discrimination and harassment? Teachers? Student groups? Community members? Remember that people may organize against you; figure out who they are and create a list. Your opponents can never be your targets.

**Targets?** Your target is who has the power to give you what you want. If your target appears to be a group of people (example: School Board / Student Governing Body), concentrate your efforts on a particular person or two people rather than the whole group. Determine who in the group is undecided about letting you carry out your campaign and focus your efforts on them. Their votes of approval will make the difference.

**Tactics:** What actions will help you reach your goal? While brainstorming tactics, ask yourselves how each tactic will help you meet your campaign goal. Examples of tactics may include: getting students to sign a petition supporting what you are trying to do, asking parents to write supportive letters to the school board, or having students wear buttons or ribbons in support of your campaign.

**Develop a timeline.** A timeline will help you keep track of what needs to be done, who needs to do it, and when it will be done. It's also a great way to keep track of your progress and to make sure that no details get lost along the way.

**What do you do after the campaign is over?** Once your campaign is over, it is important to spend some time evaluating what happened and what impact your group had on your community. If you won a victory such as changing school policy or getting teachers trained on campus, be sure to celebrate your success. If you weren't successful, think about what prevented you from succeeding.

**Finally, ASK FOR HELP!** Reach out to a supportive teacher, parent/guardian, and especially us here at GSA Network for help at any stage in your campaign. We're here to help and will do anything we can to make sure your campaign is successful!



## IDEAS, TACTICS & DAYS OF ACTION FOR A CAMPAIGN AT YOUR SCHOOL

**Do your homework (research).** If you think there's a pattern of discrimination or harassment at your school, you will likely have to prove it. The first step is to develop your research plan:

- **Formulate the questions** you are seeking to answer. These are your **objectives** (what you want to find out).
- **Plan how you're going to do your research.** Research can be used for all sorts of purposes—presenting it at a school assembly, sharing it with the media, persuading a principal to take action, etc.
- **Present a report.** Make sure there's a statement concerning your objectives, a description of your methods, the results you found, the conclusion, and that it's well-written, clear, and free of errors.

**Poster & flyer campaign:** Educate through art! Plaster the hallways with educational posters and pass out flyers during lunch.

**Organize peer-to-peer trainings** about the state non-discrimination law and what the school can do to protect students from harassment. Ask your teacher to hold these trainings during class or hold them during GSA meetings and invite everyone to attend.

**Organize or advocate for a teacher/staff training.** Educate the adults in your school on issues important to LGBTQ and ally youth and train them how to intervene when they see harassment taking place.

**Change your school district's policy.** Campaign for your school district to pass and commit to carrying out a non-discrimination policy that includes real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity.

**Circulate a petition.** Gather student and staff signatures and show your principal how many people want your schools to be safer.

**Organize a speak-out.** Host an open mic where students can talk about their experiences and discuss what needs to happen on your campus for them to feel safer.

**Cast a wider net with media activism.** Media help you reach more people, and they help create a community's values. Work with your campus newspaper and get them to write an article about what you're doing.

THIS CAMPAIGN GUIDE BROUGHT TO YOU BY:

**gsanetwork**

For more ideas on how to fight  
homophobia & transphobia in your school,  
visit [www.gsanetwork.org](http://www.gsanetwork.org).

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