

# Gay-Straight Alliance Network

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## Questions and Answers about Gay-Straight Alliance Network

### **What is Gay-Straight Alliance Network?**

Gay-Straight Alliance Network is a youth-led non-profit organization that works to empower youth activists to end harassment and discrimination in schools based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Founded in 1998, Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA Network) is the nation's largest student-led organization that networks Gay-Straight Alliance clubs.

### **What is a Gay-Straight Alliance?**

A Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) is a student-initiated and student-run club in a public or private school. The goal of a GSA is to provide a safe, supportive environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning (LGBTQ) and straight ally youth to meet and discuss sexual orientation and gender identity issues, and to work to create a school environment free of discrimination, harassment, and intolerance.

### **How many Gay-Straight Alliances are there in California?**

As of August 2002, there are more than 275 Gay-Straight Alliance clubs in California registered with GSA Network. The growth of GSAs in California in the last several years is astounding. When GSA Network was founded in 1998, there were only 40 GSAs in Northern California; now there are 175 in that same geographic region.

### **Who are the members of GSA Network?**

Members of GSA Network are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and straight ally youth, school personnel, and community members who care about creating safe schools. GSAs are also registered as group members of GSA Network.

### **Why do straight youth become members of GSAs?**

Straight youth are often members of GSAs because they have lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) family or friends. Straight youth who have been perceived as LGBT join to help stop harassment and intolerance in school. Some straight youth are involved because they see ending homophobia as an important civil rights and human rights issue.

### **Does GSA Network start or sponsor GSAs in schools?**

No. Gay-Straight Alliance clubs in schools are student-initiated and student-run. GSA Network offers support, technical assistance, training, and networking opportunities to students and advisors involved with GSAs and efforts to end homophobia in schools.

### **Can GSA student clubs be banned from schools?**

No. GSAs cannot be banned if other non-curricular student clubs are allowed to exist at the school. The Federal Equal Access Act and the First Amendment of the US Constitution establish the requirement of equal treatment for all non-curriculum related clubs regardless of the content of speech at the club meetings.

### **What impact do GSAs have on school climate?**

Anecdotal evidence indicates that GSAs can greatly improve the school climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning students and their allies. GSAs that conduct student and teacher sensitivity trainings typically see a decrease in slurs, name-calling, and harassment following their advocacy efforts. GSAs also create safe spaces for students to meet and socialize in a harassment-free environment.

### **Are students protected from discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity in California schools?**

Yes, beginning on January 1, 2000 when the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000 went into effect. The law prohibits harassment and discrimination in schools on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender. The definition of gender includes "a person's actual or perceived sex and a person's perceived identity, appearance or behavior whether or not that identity, appearance, or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with a person's sex at birth."

### **Where is GSA Network based?**

GSA Network is headquartered in San Francisco, CA with regional offices in Fresno and Los Angeles.

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*GSA Network is a project of the Tides Center.*

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