Published on *Gay-Straight Alliance Network* (http://www.gsanetwork.org)

Students with LGBT Parents

Making GSAs Inclusive of Youth with LGBTQ Parents

There is a long history of youth with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer (LGBTQ) parents being involved with Gay-Straight Alliances. In fact, a straight daughter of lesbian moms started the first GSA club with her LGBTQ peers and teacher as a way to fight homophobia and transphobia in the hallways. She understood that, as someone with LGBTQ parents, anti-LGBTQ harassment and discrimination directly impacted her. Both straight-identified and LGBTQ youth who have one or more LGBTQ parents bring leadership, unique perspectives, and intimate knowledge of the harmful effects of homophobia and transphobia to student clubs. However, GSAs do not always acknowledge or embrace the unique experiences of LGBTQ-parented students.

How to make sure your GSA is inclusive of students with

LGBTQ parents:

1. Be wary about calling students with LGBTQ parents ?allies.? Youth with LGBTQ parents often consider themselves part of the LGBTQ community and some even identify as ?culturally queer.? No matter their own sexual orientation or gender identity, many are personally impacted by homophobia and transphobia on political, cultural, legal and societal levels. Many youth with LGBTQ parents have been involved with struggles for LGBTQ equality. They aren?t just ?allies? to the community; they are part of it. Recognizing their unique role within the LGBTQ community will help honor the contributions and leadership of students with LGBTQ parents. Some groups and organizations might even spell out- LGBTQ youth, youth with LGBTQ parents and straight allies- in advertisements for members.
2. Include activities and content about LGBTQ families in the work of your GSA. Many GSAs tend to focus on issues impacting LGBTQ youth, sometimes to the exclusion of broader topics of importance to the LGBTQ movement. By including specific information, activities and education about LGBTQ families, and engaging in multi-issue organizing, students with LGBTQ parents will feel that your club is more applicable to their lives. Engage youth with LGBTQ parents by learning about laws and policies that impact LGBTQ families, celebrating people throughout history who have had LGBTQ parents, or creating educational campaigns in your school about youth with LGBTQ parents.
3. Create space for all youth to be leaders in your group. It is important to recognize that all youth can be leaders in the GSA movement, including youth with LGBTQ parents. All youth committed to the mission and goals of your club should be celebrated and nurtured as leaders.
4. Welcome all students. Create a space where youth are able to ?come out? about their reasons for joining the group in their own time. Maybe a student wants to be involved with the GSA but isn?t ready or able to say that they have a transgender parent. Try to avoid questioning any student?s reasons for joining the group- instead, extend a warm welcome to all.
5. Avoid making the children of LGBTQ folks into poster children. Leave room for youth with LGBTQ parents to share their expertise but don?t expect them to always educate or know all the answers about LGBTQ families and community.
6. Remember that youth with LGBTQ parents may be LGBTQ or straight. Youth with LGBTQ parents are diverse in their own sexual orientations and gender identity. Some are LGBTQ identified, also often called ?2nd Gen? for ?2nd Generation?, some are straight and others may be questioning. Try to let youth decide when and how they come out about any aspect of their identity and be open to the range of identities that youth with LGBTQ parents may have.

These tips are just a starting point for making sure that your GSA embraces and celebrates youth with LGBTQ parents. Asking for the input and advice of students with LGBTQ parents in your own school community is also important as each school and student has different needs and issues.

To learn more, check out ?Invisible, Involved, Ignored,? a report of the experience of middle and high school students with one or more LGBTQ parents released by GLSEN, COLAGE and Family Equality Council in 2008.
http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/news/record/2271.html [1]

"Making GSAs Inclusive of Youth with LGBTQ Parents" is co-authored by COLAGE and GSA Network. COLAGE is a national movement of children, youth and adults with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer parent(s). COLAGE builds community and works toward social justice through leadership development, youth empowerment, education and advocacy. http://www.colage.org [2] 415-861-5437

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