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Frequently Asked Questions about GSA Network

What is Gay-Straight Alliance Network?

Gay-Straight Alliance Network is a national youth leadership 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 only student-led organization that networks Gay-Straight Alliance clubs in California, and networks statewide organizations serving GSA clubs across the country.

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?

There are well over 900 Gay-Straight Alliance clubs registered with GSA Network from across California. This includes more than 53% of the public high schools in California. View our GSA Directory [1] for an up-to-date list.

Who are the members of GSA Network?

Members of GSA Network are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and straight ally youth, school personnel, and supportive community members who care about stopping homophobia and transphobia in schools. GSA clubs 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 and transphobia as an important civil rights and human rights issue.

How many straight youth are involved with GSAs?

The number of straight youth involved with GSAs varies from club to club. In some cases, straight ally youth comprise the majority of a club. Most clubs do not require student members to label or identify themselves, so it is difficult to estimate. At GSA Network?s events in the last school year, approximately 28% of the participants identified as straight.

Does GSA Network start or sponsor GSAs in schools?

No, because Gay-Straight Alliance clubs in schools are student-initiated and student-run. However, GSA Network offers support, technical assistance, training, and networking opportunities to students and advisors who wish to start or run a GSA to end homophobia and transphobia in schools. We offer regional trainings and summits open to students and advisors who are starting a GSA club. GSA Network also supports non-school-based Gay-Straight Alliance clubs for youth in areas (e.g. rural areas) where there are few GSAs established 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.

Is homophobia and transphobia a widespread problem in schools?

Harassment and bullying based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are pervasive, according to the California Healthy Kids Survey. 7.5 percent of California students reported being harassed on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation: that translates to over 200,000 middle school and high school students harassed every year.

Harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation has dangerous consequences for students, according to data from the California Healthy Kids Survey.

Compared to students who were not harassed:

- Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are more than three times as likely to carry a weapon to school, to seriously consider suicide, to make a plan for attempting suicide or to miss at least one day of school in the last 30 days because they felt unsafe.
- Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are more than twice as likely to report depression (feeling so sad and hopeless they stopped normal activities for two weeks), to use methamphetamines, or to use inhalants.
- Students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are also more likely to have low grades (Cs or below), to be victims of violence, to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, binge drink, or use marijuana.
- School climates are unsafe for LGBT students, students perceived to be LGBT, and gender non-conforming students, according to the Preventing School Harassment survey in California.
- 91 percent of students reported hearing students make negative comments based on sexual orientation.
- 44 percent reported hearing teachers make negative comments based on sexual orientation.

- 46 percent of students said their schools were not safe for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students.
- Two out of every three students who identified as LGBT reported being harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation.
- School climates are also unsafe for gender non-conforming students. 53 percent of students said their schools were unsafe for ?guys who aren?t as masculine as other guys,? and 34 percent said their schools were unsafe for ?girls who aren?t as feminine as other girls.? 27 percent of students reported being harassed for gender non-conformity.

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 there GSAs in middle schools?

As of February 2013, there are over 40 GSAs established in middle schools or junior highs in California. Harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity is also pervasive in middle schools and junior highs and data from the California Healthy Kids Survey shows that it is even more pervasive.

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 went into effect.

What is AB 537?

AB 537 is the California School Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000. The law prohibits harassment and discrimination in schools on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender. The definition of gender includes "gender identity and gender-related appearance and behavior.?

Why is it important to prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender?

Much of the harassment that occurs in schools, such as name-calling, is the result of gender non-conformity. For example, a female may get called a "dyke" or "lesbo" not because of her actual sexual orientation but because she wears boyish clothing or likes to play sports. Similarly, a male may get called a "fag" or "homo" because his mannerisms are perceived as "effeminate" or he is in a dance class. Students who are transgender-identified also get harassed in schools.

Where is GSA Network based?

GSA Network is headquartered in San Francisco, and has a regional office in the Central Valley and one in Los Angeles serving Southern California.

Source URL: http://www.gsanetwork.org/about-us/faq

Links:
[1] http://www.gsanetwork.org/directory