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

Mission

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Gay-Straight Alliance Network is a national youth leadership organization that connects school-based Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) to each other and community resources through peer support, leadership development, and training.

GSA Network supports young people in starting, strengthening, and sustaining GSAs and builds the capacity of GSAs to:

1. **create safe environments in schools for students to support each other and learn about homophobia, transphobia, and other oppressions,**
2. **educate the school community about homophobia, transphobia, gender identity, and sexual orientation issues, and**
3.

fight discrimination, harassment, and violence in schools.

Why We Are Needed

Youth are coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning at younger and younger ages, in middle schools and high schools across the country. Far too many face pervasive harassment and violence at school because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

Research shows that youth harassed on the basis of sexual orientation are:

- More than twice as likely to report depression and seriously consider suicide
- More likely to report low grades, smoke, drink alcohol or use drugs
- More likely to become victims of violence
- 3 times as likely to carry a weapon
- 3 times as likely to report missing school in the last 30 days

While youth who are harassed report weaker connections to school and less support from teachers and other adults, research shows students with GSA clubs at their school feel safer and more supported.

According to the Preventing School Harassment Survey, students in California schools with a GSA club:

- experienced less harassment based on sexual orientation
- experienced less harassment based on gender non-conformity
- were more likely to feel safe at school
- were more likely to feel school is safe for LGBT students and gender non-conforming students
- reported stronger youth resilience factors, such as connections with supportive adults at school
- GSA clubs can successfully decrease harassment and increase school safety for LGBTQ students.

You can learn more in our Research and Reports [1] section.

Why Gay-Straight Alliance Clubs Work

GSA clubs provide a safety net for students during the coming out process. With a GSA club, youth break through the isolation to find support from peers and school staff. GSA clubs unite LGBTQ students, straight allies, and members of the school community who are committed to

making schools safer and more accepting for LGBT students.

GSAs draw on the courage of LGBTQ youth and the commitment of straight allies working in partnership to build bridges, improve school climates, and change school policies. Strong, well-supported GSAs can have a major impact on the education environment and possess the power to transform individuals, school cultures, and educational institutions.

Our Strategy

Our overall strategy for fighting homophobia and transphobia in schools is to work with grassroots, youth-led groups and GSAs, empowering them to educate their school communities, advocate for just policies that protect LGBTQ youth from harassment and violence, and organize in coalition with other youth groups across identity lines to address broader issues of oppression.

All of our work with students focuses on leadership development and activism that prioritizes building alliances not only across sexual orientation and gender identity lines, but also across race, ethnicity, and class lines, and our resources and trainings are designed to facilitate coalition building. Our programs benefit our constituents in three critical ways:

1. **Ending Isolation through Building GSAs**: Our GSA support programs help students start school-based GSAs, clubs that have proven to be vital support systems or "safe zones" for enhancing the well being of youth suffering from isolation, harassment, discrimination, and violence.
2. **Developing Leaders:** Our networking and leadership training programs develop youth leaders capable of effecting positive change in their schools and communities.
3. **Making Schools Safer**: We help student organizers learn how to educate teachers and student peers to reduce slurs and work with the school administration to implement school policies that prevent harassment and violence.

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[1] http://www.gsanetwork.org/resources/research-reports