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Passing the Torch: Getting Your GSA Ready for New Leaders

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Spring is finally here! That means losing an hour of sleep, flowers blooming everywhere, and the end of the school year is right around the corner. It also means its time to start getting ready to hand over the leadership of your GSA to new students!

As the school year comes to an end, many GSA leaders start thinking about what will happen to the GSA club once they are gone. Whether you're a graduating senior or a sophomore, it is never too early to start planning how you will turn over your GSA to the next student leaders.

But how do you do it?

Should you pick the most active younger student and make them the next club president? Is your Vice-President automatically going to become the new leader of the club? What resources do you make sure they have? How can you share all the tricks you've learned running the club, whether it's which administrator to talk to about an event or how to deposit your GSA's money? How can your advisor help you in making sure the club continues to grow and stay strong?

Well we've got some answer and ideas for you!

Successfully passing on the leadership of your GSA can be broken down into three categories - *Structure of Your GSA*,*Training*, and*Resources*. The great thing about all of these suggestions is that not only will they help you get the next group of GSA leaders ready, it will also make your GSA much stronger now!

To help us look at each of these pieces to a successful change in your GSA leadership, we asked some current GSA leaders to share how they are planning to train the next group of leaders after them.

Structure of Your GSA

Getting other students ready to take over the GSA begins the minute you become leader of the club. With a bit of thinking and some easy changes, you can set your GSA up so that your GSA is working year-round to get other students ready to be the strongest leaders possible. Even if

your GSA is brand new, you can still set it up so that you are building a group of younger students who are learning to be leaders.

Julie Dib, GSA President at**Beaumont High** in Riverside County, took over her GSA when the founder and president left in the middle of the school year. The previous president hadn't really planned for the next leader, so Julie was left without a lot of help. Julie explained how frustrating this was,

I had no clue what I was doing at first and I really wished I had had someone at my school to help me with the club in the early months. It didn't help that our president had not left any resources, or taught me how to plan the meetings or run the club.

The best way to avoid the situation Julie was in is to spread out the responsibilities of the club so that younger members can learn how to do things with your guidance and help. This also helps identify the students most passionate about the GSA and its mission to make your school safer for all students.

Another important thing is to communicate!**Starla Schneider**, GSA President at Granada Hills High in Los Angeles, shared that creating a club where everyone talks to each other, even when people are upset, is super important to having a strong club. Starla said,

We stress communication between all officers- when there's a club conflict we make sure the new officers know how we handle it, and if not, encourage them to help find a good solution. We also encourage our advisor to participate in the meetings, and encourage communications with the advisor- to ensure that even if we let some information slip through the cracks, the new officers have that safety net.

<u>Some good ideas to start doing in your GSA:</u>

- **Rotate who facilitates your GSA meetings**. This is a great way to build up the experience of students who are new to leadership and running a club. Invite other officers and regular members to run meetings. This not only helps them, but also strengthens your club as more people can help decide what the club is doing.

- **Hold regular Officer Meetings**. Meeting with your fellow officers regularly not only helps your GSA be stronger now, it also gives you a chance to show them how to run the club well. Some GSAs even invite non-officers to attend these meetings so they can see what it's like to be an officer.

- **Elect the officers for the next school year in the spring semester**. Many GSA clubs are starting to elect their new leadership in the middle of each school year, instead of the beginning of the year. The advantage of holding elections at the beginning of spring semester is that your new leaders can then be trained and mentored by your outgoing leaders. When the new school year starts in the fall, your new leaders are already trained and practiced at being leaders, so they can hit the ground running.**Isaias Guzman** , President of the GSA at Bell High in Los Angeles, shared how his GSA doesn't wait til the next year to turn over the leadership of the club. Isaias said, "*We get the new officers ready to take over the club right after the elections are done."*

- **Have a Co-Officer System**. Some GSAs have two people for each officer position. That way you not only get more people who can help lead your club and get its work done, you have more people who are learning to run a GSA. For example, instead of having just one President, try having two Co-Presidents. You can do the same for every officer position. This is a great idea, especially when at least one of the co-officers is a younger member. **Starla** shared her GSA's version of this - a "Shadow Council." She explained, " *After being elected, the council members for next year form a "Shadow Council" and start taking over duties from the current council members, to ensure that they're well-prepared to be leaders next year."*

- **Make trainings required for all students who want to be officers**. Some GSAs write in their constitutions the requirement that in order to run to be an officer the student has to have gotten specific trainings. In the spring semester, organize a GSA Training Day for your officers and other interested members where they can learn everything they need to know to run a strong GSA. GSA Network can help you plan this! **Hunter Reardon** , GSA President at Cabrillo High in Santa Barbara County, has made training something the new president has to do. Hunter shared what these requirements are, "*I am training the new president to take over Cabrillo's GSA through establishing requirements like she must be present at least 75% of meetings during second semester and she must attend a GSA Network Leadership Summit."*

Training

No one is born a leader. We all need help and training to get there. Now that you've been running your GSA, you know how great it is when you've been able to get any help or guidance. Make sure to pass that help along for the leaders after you!

GSA Network is here to help each and every GSA member become the best possible leader they can. The best way to get your other officers trained is to have them attend a GSA Network training. We offer tons of ways to get trained, from our 1-day**Leadership Summits** held all over California (http://gsanetwork.org/events/trainings-and-summits[1]), to our annual conferences (**Youth Empowerment Summit** in San Francisco and**Expression Not Suppression** in Fresno - http://gsanetwork.org/events/conferences[2]), to our amazing overnight**GSA Activist Camps** held in NorCal and SoCal every summer (http://gsanetwork.org/events/activist-camps[3]). GSA Network can also do trainings throughout the school year for your GSA!

Isaiasattended GSA Activist Camp in 2010 and learned how to run his GSA. Isaiassaid,

***Activist Camp**and**GSA Leadership Summits** are great ways to learn how to run a good GSA. The new leadership can get the help they need, learn from other GSA leaders like them and be able to take over when we leave.*

GSA Network also runs**Youth Councils**(http://gsanetwork.org/get-involved/join-youth-council[4]) for GSA leaders in NorCal and SoCal, where GSA leaders can get advice on their GSA, learn how to organize great events, and how to make your school safer for LGBTQ students! Youth Councils meet every month and are made up of leaders from all over the region.**Julie, Starla, Isaias** and**Hunter** are all members of the**SoCal Youth Council**!

You can also organize your own GSA Training Day. **Hunter**is graduating this year so he is training the new president to get her ready to take over when he's gone. Hunter shared what he's doing,

I've given her specific responsibilities and events to be in charge of that will show her the level of responsibility she will have as president. I also am going to give her a one-on-one Cabrillo GSA leadership training with me in May.

Some important topics to train your GSA on:

- **Facilitation.** Running a meeting so that everyone participates and the GSA's work gets done can be a tricky thing to do, but with the right training anyone can become a good facilitator. For ideas on what to cover when teaching your GSA officers and members how to facilitate, check out our resource How to Facilitate a Meeting (http://gsanetwork.org/resources/building-your-gsa/how-facilitate-meeting[5])
- **Days of Action.**ADay of Action is a BIG event that is designed to make a visible impact on your school or community. Actions often take more preparation time and even more strategy than events. Common Days of Actions GSAs organize include the Day of Silence, Harvey Milk Day, the Transgender Day of Remembrance, LGBTQ Black History Month, and National Coming Out Day. For great resources on Days of Actions, check out our great resources (http://gsanetwork.org/resources/gsa-actions-events[6]).
- **Campaigns.**These are the long terms plans that will change your school. They usually involve changing your school's rules, student culture, and training your staff on how to be allies to LGBTQ youth. GSA Network can train your GSA on how to organize a campaign at your school (http://gsanetwork.org/get-involved/change-your-school[7]).
- **How Your School Works.** Help the officers that come after you learn how your school works and who decides what. Explain to them which offices on campus do what, introduce them to the staff members they'll need to know, and make sure they know the school rules on bringing outside visitors, fundraising, depositing money, holding events, posters, and announcements.
- **Students' Legal Rights.**GSA leaders have to know what laws out there protect LGBTQ students from harassment and discrimination. Make sure your new leaders know these laws and who they can go to for help. For an overview of these laws, check out our legal resources (http://gsanetwork.org/resources/legal-resources[8]).

- **Planning Events.**Whether it's Harvey Milk Day or a fundraiser, GSAs are constantly planning events. New leaders need to know how to successfully plan events. For ideas on how to plan great events, check out our resource (http://gsanetwork.org/resources/gsa-actions-events/planning-events[9]).
- **Coalition Building.**In order to make your school safer for LGBTQ students, you'll need to build alliances with other clubs, teachers, administrators and folks in your community. Knowing how to do this takes some thinking and practice. For some good tips on how to build coalitions, check out our resource (http://gsanetwork.org/resources/coalition-building[10]).

Resources

Resources are the tools that your GSA uses everyday to make your school safer for LGBTQ students! They are the guides that GSA Network has sent, the posters you've created, the agendas from your past meetings, and even the copies of your school's rules!

The best way to organize all the resources you've been using and that your new GSA leaders will need is to create a GSA Resource Binder that has all the information in it.

Huntercreated a GSA Resource Binder when he first started his GSA. Hunter said,

I have a collection of all our GSA's documents (like the constitution), hundreds of pages of GSA Network's materials, and various other GSA-related information materials compiled in a 3-inch ***"Great Big Gay-Straight Alliance Binder****."*

Isaias's GSA also has a GSA Resource Binder that has helped the new leaders learn from the success and mistakes of previous leaders. Isaias shared,

"*Our GSA has a GSA binder where we record all meetings and events that we do. We use this to make sure the new leadership has an idea of how things are done and what they need to do in the future. It has helped us avoid the mistakes the past leadership made doing events."*

You can also make an electronic back up version of this using a flashdrive or storing everything on Google Docs. Some GSAs also make two GSA Resource Binders, one that the officers use and one that the Advisor keeps and updates.

Important things to include in your GSA Resource Binder:

- **GSA Network's Resources**: You can get these from our website (http://gsanetwork.org/resources[11]) or from our staff at a training, Summit, conference, Activist Camp or Youth Council.
- **GSA Constitution**
- **GSA Mission Statement**
- **Past Meeting Agendas**
- **Ground Rules for your meetings**
- **Past Event Planning Sheets**
- **Past Flyers**

- **GSA Facebook & email account passwords**
- **All School Policies & Complaint Forms**
- **Old Officer Contact Info**
- **Officers' Statement:**These are written summaries of how the year went for the GSA, written together by all of the officers. In the statement, the officers describe what the GSA did, what were its successes, what things could have been done better, and what projects they were working on. This is basically your chance to write down everything you wish you would have known before you started being an officer for your GSA. Overtime, these statements will record the history of your GSA for everyone to know.

Successfully passing the torch of leadership for your GSA will take some work and planning, but it's well worth it! Doing these simple steps throughout the school year, will help your GSA be strong and ready for the next leaders who will take it over. Remember that GSA Network is here to help!

For more ideas and tips, check out our Transitioning Leadership Resource Guide (http://gsanetwork.org/resources/building-your-gsa/transitioning-leadership[12])

Source URL: http://www.gsanetwork.org/news/blog/passing-torch-getting-your-gsa-ready-new-leaders/03/16/11

Links:
[1] http://gsanetwork.org/events/trainings-and-summits
[2] http://gsanetwork.org/events/conferences
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