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Des Moines, Iowa - On January 25, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and straight allied (LGBTA) students, adults and organizations across America will celebrate the first National Gay-Straight Alliance Day. A project of Iowa Pride Network (IPN), the day is meant to strengthen the bond between LGBT people and straight allies, and in particular recognize and honor student organizations called Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs). These student-led groups work to educate their peers to stop homophobia and transphobia in schools and colleges.

A key GSA Day partner is the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) which has registered more than 4,000 GSAs across the country and documented the experiences of LGBT youth in schools since 1999. According to the GLSEN 2009 National School Climate Survey, LGBT students in schools with a GSA:

- heard fewer homophobic remarks than students in schools without GSAs;
- were more likely to report that school personnel intervened when hearing homophobic remarks;
- were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation and experienced less victimization related to their sexual orientation and gender expression.

“GLSEN is proud to work with the thousands of GSAs across the country, Iowa Pride Network and fellow National GSA Day partners to recognize the tremendous impact these student clubs have on creating safe and affirming learning environments for all students,” said GLSEN Executive Director Dr. Eliza Byard.

GSA Day first began as a state event in Iowa in 2006. “Over the years other states were

contacting us asking how they could replicate the event, so we decided to coordinate on a national level," explained Ryan Roemerman, IPN Executive Director. "The response from partnering state and national organizations has been extraordinary."

Gay-Straight Alliance Network, a national youth empowerment organization, is preparing to celebrate through its California state network of 850 GSA clubs and 35 state member organizations that make up its national association.

"Through Gay-Straight Alliance clubs, student leaders across the country are making their schools and communities safer for all young people, and we're proud to see their courageous leadership nationally recognized," remarked Carolyn Laub, Executive Director of GSA Network.

Trio Harris, a GSA Network Board Member and Carlsbad High School GSA President, described, "GSA activism has dramatically improved the climate at my school, in my community, and in my state by empowering me and other students to speak up against bullying, harassment, and discriminatory policies."

While many schools and colleges have embraced GSAs, some have not.

"GSAs regularly demonstrate how students can transform their own school community based upon the principle of respect for difference. Even with the documented benefits of having a GSA in school, some school districts have tried to prevent students from establishing these student clubs. Not only does the school send the wrong message to students, but it is also illegal as outlined under the Federal Equal Access Act," stated Dr. Byard.

For this reason, last summer U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan issued a "Dear Colleague Letter" that was sent to every school administrator in the United States reminding them of students' right to form a GSA.

The struggle to form these student groups has also occurred on college and university campuses. To highlight college campus groups, GSA Day has partnered with Campus Pride, the national organization for student leaders and campus groups working to create a safer college environment for LGBT students.

"In many ways, Campus Pride has seen how high school GSA leaders continue activism into college and then on into the workplace and their communities," said Shane Windmeyer, Executive Director of Campus Pride. "It is immeasurable the positive impact that our LGBT and ally youth leaders have had over the years. We're excited to finally have a national event to acknowledge these students and campus LGBT and ally groups."

Among the national organizations joining GLSEN, GSA Network, and Campus Pride are: Matthew Shepard Foundation; The Trevor Project; Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation; Think Progress; Parent, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays National; Make it Better Project and the National Association of GSA Networks. In addition, nearly two dozen states, stretching from Oregon, to Nebraska to Georgia are participating.

"It's a strong coalition that deeply believes brave young people who create safe learning

environments deserve to be celebrated." stated Roemerman. "If this awareness initiative helps encourage students to start GSAs and schools and colleges to support them, we've made an impact."

Community members and organizations of all backgrounds are encouraged to organize and participate in local events on January 25, 2012. For more information, please visit: www.gsaday.org [1] or www.facebook.com/gsaday [2]

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http://gsaday.org [3]

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