Implementing and Supporting Gay-Straight Alliances
March 9, 2013

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- What is a GSA?
- Statistics/Rationale/Research
- The GSA Advisor
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- Resources
- Conclusion/Questions

Introductions
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- Lia Fabbri
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- Julia LeBrell
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- Sabrina Lee

GLSEN & GLSEN Southeast Michigan

The Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN) believes that addressing anti-LGBT bias in schools makes schools safer for all students, regardless of sexual orientation and/or gender identity and/or expression.

GLSEN welcomes participation from a diverse group of individuals, in education and out, LGBT and other allies interested in supporting students.

GLSEN Southeast Michigan (SEMI) is an local, all volunteer chapter affiliate of GLSEN National

Gay/Straight Alliance

A Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) is a student led & student organized club that aims to create a safe, welcoming environment for all youth, regardless of sexual orientation.

Why the name, “gay-straight alliance?”

It exemplifies the purpose of the club: to build bridges among students of all sexual orientation and gender identity, whether they identify as gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual, transgender...
or anything else!
What is a GSA?
A Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) is a student-run club, typically in a high school or middle school, which provides a safe place for students to meet, support each other, talk about issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and work to end homophobia and transphobia.

There are three typical functions of a GSA club:
* Support
* Social
* Activism

GSAs Provide Support
Many GSAs function as a support group, providing safety and confidentiality to students struggling with their identity or are experiencing harassment at school. These groups often provide one of the few safe spaces for students to express themselves.

GSAs Build Community
GSAs serve as a social group.
- They provide a sense of community for LGBTQ and straight ally youth
- They build a social network where their identity is respected
- They organize events outside of school, like movie nights, field trips, barbecues
- Some GSAs partake in local Pride events

GSAs build community within their schools, lessening the feeling of isolation that LGBTQ students may otherwise experience.

GSAs Create Change
Some GSAs work to educate themselves and their school community about sexual orientation and gender identity issues.
- They bring in outside speakers to cover LGBT related issues
- They may organize educational workshops

Some GSAs even organize "Teach the Teachers" staff development days – focusing on teaching staff how to be better allies to LGBTQ students.

Rationale, Research, Statistics

GLSEN’s Research Department supports the organization’s mission by conducting original research, making evaluations of GLSEN programs and initiatives, and creating resources that document anti-LGBT bias in education (K-12 schools). They have published a wide range of articles relating to bullying and school climate, and can be downloaded for free from the national website (glsen.org).

GLSEN Releases
Groundbreaking Study of Bias, Bullying and Homophobia in Grades K-6 (2012)

GLSEN Releases
The Principal’s Perspective: School Safety, Bullying and Harassment (2008)

GLSEN Releases
Shared Differences Examines LGBT Students of Color Experiences in School (2009)
GLSEN 2011 National School Climate Survey

2011 National School Climate Survey: Nearly 9 out of 10 LGBT Students Experience Harassment in School (2011)

Key Findings on the Experience of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools

EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND SEVERITY OF VICTIMIZATION

Percentage of Students Not Planning to Pursue Post-Secondary Education

- Sexual Orientation: 5.6% Lower Victimization, 5.1% Higher Victimization
- Gender Expression: 9.3% Lower Victimization, 10.7% Higher Victimization

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXPRESSION AND SEVERITY OF VICTIMIZATION

- Low self-esteem: Sexual Orientation: 75.1%, Gender Expression: 47.7%
- High self-esteem: Sexual Orientation: 37.7%, Gender Expression: 57.4%

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-ESTEEM AND SEVERITY OF VICTIMIZATION

Percentage of Students Not Planning to Pursue Post-Secondary Education

- Sexual Orientation: 28.1% Lower Victimization, 38.1% Higher Victimization
- Gender Expression: 38.5% Lower Victimization, 35.5% Higher Victimization

PRESENCE OF GAY-Straight ALLIANCES AND FEELINGS OF SAFETY AND MISSEING SCHOOL

- School Has gay-Straight Alliance: 64.9%
- Gay-Straight Alliance: 64.9%
- Gay-Straight Alliance: 64.9%
- Gay-Straight Alliance: 64.9%
Rationale, Research, Statistics

Study: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Youth at Schools with Gay-Straight Alliances Have Better Mental Health

Other research also has found that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth who attend middle or high schools with Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) have better mental health as young adults, are less likely to drop out of high school, and more likely to attend college. Published in the current issue of Applied Developmental Science, this is the first study to show that GSA participation is related to long-term benefits. The study, High School Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) and Young Adult Well-Being, is based on data from the Family Acceptance Project’s survey of LGBT young adults, which examined the school-related experiences of 245 LGBT young adults, ages 21 to 25.

Noted co-author Stephen T. Russell: “This study adds to the mounting evidence that youth-led clubs are important for healthy development—especially for youth at risk. For LGBT youth, high school gay-straight alliances make a significant positive difference.”

Considerations for a GSA Advisor

The GSA must be student led:
- Student members drive the mission
- Students should run the group, you advise
- Help students address other things you see as important

Make sure your GSA is sustainable:
- Making sure your club is inclusive of all students is important
- Work for intra-group conflicts and bullying
- Set a few big goals, both fun and action-based, but don’t overextend your group
- Meet frequently enough to create a sense of cohesiveness within the group
- Make sure your group has a consistent space

Create a sense of community within your school:
- Build a supportive network of adults within the school environment
- Publicize meetings to school wide audiences
- Collaborate with other like school clubs

Things you Might Hear/ Top 10 Reasons Why Your School Doesn’t Need A GSA

- “Our school environment is already inclusive”
- “We already have a diversity club” / “We already have an anti-bullying club”
- “Gay is just a phase” / “Kids are not ready to make this choice”
- “The parents will complain” / “The community won’t support it”
- “A GSA is just a club about sex”
- “GSA’s recruit kids and make them gay”
- “The kids who join will be teased”
- “The Board of Education will never agree to this”
- “Our school will get a bad name”
- “We don’t have any gay kids at our school”

What advisors need to know:
Important Legal Information

Any school that receives government funding and has at least one non-curricular club must allow a GSA.

The Federal Equal Access Act states that:
“...shall be unlawful for any public secondary school which receives Federal financial assistance, to deny equal access or a fair opportunity to, or discriminate against, any students who wish to conduct a meeting...on the basis of the religious, political, philosophical, or other content of the speech at such meetings...”

The law also says that your school must treat all clubs the same and let them use school resources in the same way.

If your school lets other clubs meet in classrooms, put up posters and organize school events, then they have to let your GSA do the same.

GLSEN Jump-Start Guide for GSAs

GLSEN Jump-Start Guide

An 8 part guide that can be downloaded from glsen.org to guide the organization and set-up of your GSA.
Part 1: Building and Activating Your GSA or Similar Student Club
Part 2: Tips and Tools for Organizing an Action Campaign
Part 3: Strategies for Training Teachers
Part 4: Understanding Direct-Action Organizing
Part 5: Examining Power, Privilege and Oppression
Part 6: Creating Youth-Adult Partnerships
Part 7: Making Your Student Club Trans-Inclusive
Part 8: Evaluation, Continuation, Celebration

Part 1: Building and Activating Your GSA or Similar Student Club - 10 Steps

1. Follow School Guidelines for Club Formation
2. Find a Faculty / Teacher Advisor
3. Find other Students
4. Inform Administration
5. Pick a Meeting Place
6. Advertise
7. Plan Your Meeting
8. Hold Your Meeting
9. Establish Ground Rules
10. Plan for the Future
What To Expect

1. Like any other club, this is an opportunity for students to gain organizational and leadership skills.
2. Group Agreements or Ground Rules set at the beginning of the meeting will give a structure of respect and cooperation within the group.
3. Assist students to determine why they are at the meetings and where their priorities lie.
4. Although having a peer leadership team is important, encourage facilitation rather than presentation in the meetings.
5. Help students write a Mission Statement.
6. If you make a commitment to meet with the students, make sure you honor that. There are other ways to be able if you do not have the time to devote to being advisor.
7. It is rewarding to see the students become empowered within their school.

10 Tips for Running an Effective Meeting

1. Opening every meeting with a check-in
2. Having a few minutes to de-brief at the end of the meeting
3. After the check-in, start off with a quick game, ice-breaker, or physical activity
4. Remain conscious of people's participation
5. If you are having trouble coming up with a consensus, decide on two or three different options and experiment with them over the next weeks
6. Decide on a strategy for handling individual breaches of the group's ground rules
7. Document your meetings
8. The advisor should participate as an equal
9. Start and end meetings on time
10. Provide snacks

Working Agreements

Working agreements set a clear and positive tone that allows students to interact comfortably and safely with each other.

Examples:
- Respect Others
- Speak from the I
- Be Open to New Ideas
- Ask Questions
- Respect Confidentiality
- Step-up; Step-back
- Respect Commitments

Hang your list of Working Agreements in a visible spot to remind everyone of their commitments.

Why Am I Here? Setting Priorities

To determine the motivation of your GSA's participants:
- Use large group brainstorming sessions
- Use large and small group discussion
Using consensus or voting, decide on the goals of the group.

Writing a Mission Statement

Your GSA's Mission Statement should lead your group's efforts in planning its goals and projects.

The mission statement should answer these questions:
- Who are we?
- What do we stand for?
- What do we do?
- How do we do it?

Organizing Your Leadership

Understanding participants' motivations and aspirations will help your group set common goals.

- "Using both Large Group Brainstorming and Group Discussion comes up with a list of what makes an effective leader.
- Determine if a fixed leadership or rotating leadership is the best fit for your group.
- Discuss your group's leadership needs related to your goals and priorities.
- Utilizing Consensus or Election, select a leadership for your group."
Finding New Members

- Publicity, coalition building, and visible action help build membership.
- Designate leadership positions.
- Find out what new members strengths are and where their interests lie immediately.

Assessing Your School's Climate

Creating a School Climate Survey for your school is a way to assess how often students hear anti-LGBT, racist, and sexist remarks within your own school.

- The survey is available online.
- Your administration must be involved.
- Active or Passive permission may be required.
- The survey must be distributed to all students, not just LGBT.
- Report your findings to school community.

Sample Survey Questions:
- "How often do you hear the expression "That's so gay" or "Homophobe" at your school?"
- "If the principal of your school is a lesbian or gay, would you think this case would be more or less concentrates or made in a fair case?"
- "When you hear sexist comments at your school, how does the middle and female student treated differently?"
- "When a teacher is involved in a lesbian or gay sex, what is the middle and female student treated differently?"

Identify Anti-LGBT Bias at Your School

School climates can be Hostile, Resistant, Passive, or Inclusive.

- Knowing your school climate helps you identify your goals and other groups for collaboration.
- Being informed guides your direction and allows you to track your effectiveness.

Appendix of Jump-Start Guide

Awesome Activities and Icebreakers

Guidelines for Active Listening

Running an Effective Meeting

The Five Practices and Ten Commitments of Leadership

10 Cool Tips for Finding New Members

School Climate

GSAASEM

Contact Information for GSA Alliance of Southeast Michigan
Facebook: GSA Alliance of Southeast Michigan
Website: mgsanetwork.org
Gsa.alliance.sem@gmail.com

Resources
**Resources:**

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<td>Phone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>405 Livernois Ferndale, MI 48220</td>
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<tr>
<td>GSA Alliance of Southeast Michigan</td>
<td>mgpanetwork.org</td>
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