

“The GSA is my lifeline.” 9th grade Rhode Island student

SUPPORTING A GAY/STRAIGHT ALLIANCE

What, exactly, is the purpose of a Gay/Straight Alliance?

Gay/Straight Alliances (GSAs) are student-initiated and student-run school clubs committed to making schools safe and welcoming for everyone, and in particular for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) students. As with all school clubs, there is also an adult staff advisor.

What happens at a typical Gay/Straight Alliance Meeting?

Both LGBTQ students and straight allies usually spend a few minutes discussing any important new issues. It is often during this free discussion time that bullying problems are uncovered. Many clubs devote most of their time to planning and implementing awareness campaigns such as Ally Week, LGBTQ History Month, and Day of Silence. Additionally, some Alliances work with other school clubs to address racial, socioeconomic, religious and ability bullying occurring in the school.

Why bother? Because the research is clear: alliances make schools less hostile places.

- *Students in schools with GSAs reveal lower incidents of victimization and suicide attempts than schools without GSAs, and research indicates that suicidal behaviors are directly related to victimization and perceived adult support.*
- *The High School Journal reports that GSAs improve academic performance, school/family/community relationships, feelings of safety, belief in capacity to make societal contributions, and an enhanced sense of belonging to school community.*
- *GSAs can function as a protective resource in schools according to Social Work journal.*
- *Peer-reviewed research confirms the benefits of GSAs for ALL students, as such Alliances with social justice goals promote development of youth leaders.*

How Can School Administrators Assist GSAs?

- If your school has no GSA, announce to students and faculty that you would like one created and encourage interested individuals to see you for a list of resources.
- If your school does have an active GSA, ask to drop in on a meeting to offer your support. Help empower student leaders by inviting them to speak at a faculty meeting or help them spear-head an anti-bullying campaign at the school. Ensure that the GSA is publicized and funded in the same manner as other school clubs.
- Ensure that faculty, staff, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, etc. are attentive to and act upon peer bullying. Multiple court cases reveal that faculty and staff are often complicit in anti-gay bullying.

Resources to Assist GSAs

- **Youth Pride, Inc.** – Rhode Island’s only non-profit devoted solely to advocating for LGBTQ youth, and it runs the RI GSA Coalition. See <http://www.youthprideri.org/Programs/GSACoalition>
- **GSA Network** - A California-based, youth led organization whose website holds a wealth of information for starting and maintaining GSAs. Go to <http://gsanetwork.org/resources>
- **GLSEN** – For twenty years, the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network has dedicated itself to helping educators and students create safe schools. See www.glsen.org
- October 2010 report published by Great Lakes Center for Research and Education, National Education Policy Center, and The Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law. See <http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/LGBT-FINAL.pdf>