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?GAYLA and Queer Youth Advocacy Day with GSA Network was an incredibly empowering experience for me. It's been a privilege to be able to train youth from all over California to become advocates for bills and policies that affect students statewide.? ? Anthony Barros, Antelope Valley High School senior and Queer Youth Advocacy Day MC



[GSA Advocacy and Youth Leadership Academy](#) ^[1] and [Queer Youth Advocacy Day](#) ^[2] (GAYLA/QYAD) 2013 was an amazing weekend of ?echandole ganas como siempre! After many



advocates, our fabulous college mentors, the kick-butt legislative staff, our awesome local Sacramento volunteers, and our dedicated statewide partner organizations in Sacramento. Together, GSA Network, the ACLU of California, Transgender Law Center, Equality California, the Trevor Project, and California National Organization for Women put on a successful three-day youth leadership training and a lobby day for educational justice for over 50 LGBTQ and straight ally youth from every corner of the state.

In workshops at the California Museum, youth learned about policy-making, implementation of laws, and how to tell their story. They also got to tour the Capitol and for the first time get an insiders? look into the Assembly and Senate floors, where decisions that affect them and their education are made. On Facebook, I saw a picture taken by some participants of themselves, their new friends and activist peers in the seats of the Senate Education committee room. I immediately remembered sitting in those same seats and feeling a sense of power and responsibility wash over me when I attended the Chicano/a Youth Leadership Program in high school. Now it was their turn to step into their power and advocate for safe schools and quality education for all students.

And on Monday, rallying on the Capitol Steps, these queer and ally youth activists shone. Surrounded by TV crews, the youth stood together chanting loudly in unison, friendship, and solidarity. Anthony Barros, a senior from the Antelope Valley and the Queer Youth Advocacy Day Master of Ceremonies, introduced the Speaker of the Assembly John A. Pérez to open the rally and press conference:



Just four years ago, Anthony was afraid and in the closet. Now he was introducing a phenomenal line up of youth and legislators, including ? after the Speaker ? Senators Mark Leno and Ricardo Lara and Assemblymembers Tom Ammiano, Roger Dickinson, Rich Gordon, and Susan Eggman.

Their message? Schools should be places where all students can succeed. But right now, many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students are excluded from school activities and lose valuable learning time just because of who they are. Schools suspend LGBT students for things like holding hands with their partner or wearing gender nonconforming clothes, and often don't allow transgender students to fully participate in programs and even classes required for graduation, like PE. Queer Youth Advocacy Day created an opportunity for students to advocate in support of two bills ? AB 420 (Dickinson) and AB 1266 (Ammiano) - that would change these conditions and allow all students to have the opportunity to stay in school and graduate with their classmates. Check out [GSA Network's YouTube channel](#) ^[3] to watch some of the speeches!

The youth shouted it best:

GAYLA/QYAD participants have won 11 pieces of safe schools legislation in the last decade and they will continue to champion educational rights for all with the generous support of all donors and sponsors involved. Thank you for making this year's GAYLA/QYAD a HUGE success and the tradition's best yet!

Find photos from GAYLA/QYAD 2013 on [GSA Network of California's Facebook page](#) ^[4].

GAYLA/QYAD 2013 was organized and sponsored by:





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Links

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