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## Frequently Asked Questions about GSA Network



## Frequently Asked Questions & Their Answers:

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## **What is Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network (or GSA Network)?**

Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network is a national youth leadership organization that works to empower youth activists to end harassment and discrimination in schools based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Founded in 1998, Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network (GSA Network) is the only student-led organization that networks Genders & Sexualities Alliance clubs in California, and networks statewide organizations serving GSA clubs across the country.

## **What is a GSA?**

A Genders & Sexualities Alliance (GSA) is a student-initiated and student-run club in a public or private school. The goal of a GSA is to provide a safe, supportive environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning (LGBTQ) and straight ally youth to meet and discuss sexual orientation and gender identity issues, and to work to create a school environment free of discrimination, harassment, and intolerance.

## **How many GSAs are there in California?**

There are well over 900 Genders & Sexualities Alliance clubs registered with GSA Network from across California. This includes more than 53% of the public high schools in California.

## **Who are the members of GSA Network?**

Members of GSA Network are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and straight ally youth, school personnel, and supportive community members who care about stopping homophobia and transphobia in schools. GSA clubs are also registered as group members of GSA Network.

## **Why do straight youth become members of GSAs?**

Straight youth are often members of GSAs because they have lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) family or friends. Straight youth who have been perceived as LGBT join to help stop harassment and intolerance in school. Some straight youth are involved because they see ending homophobia and transphobia as an important civil rights and human rights issue.

## **How many straight youth are involved with GSAs?**

The number of straight youth involved with GSAs varies from club to club. In some cases,

straight ally youth comprise the majority of a club. Most clubs do not require student members to label or identify themselves, so it is difficult to estimate. At GSA Network's events in the last school year, approximately 28% of the participants identified as straight.

## **Does GSA Network start or sponsor GSAs in schools?**

No, because GSA clubs in schools are student-initiated and student-run. However, GSA Network offers support, technical assistance, training, and networking opportunities to students and advisors who wish to start or run a GSA to end homophobia and transphobia in schools. We offer regional trainings and summits open to students and advisors who are starting a GSA club. GSA Network also supports non-school-based GSA clubs for youth in areas (e.g. rural areas) where there are few GSAs established in schools.

## **Can GSA student clubs be banned from schools?**

No. GSAs cannot be banned if other non-curricular student clubs are allowed to exist at the school. The Federal Equal Access Act and the First Amendment of the US Constitution establish the requirement of equal treatment for all non-curriculum related clubs regardless of the content of speech at the club meetings.

## **What impact do GSAs have on school climate?**

Anecdotal evidence indicates that GSAs can greatly improve the school climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning students and their allies. GSAs that conduct student and teacher sensitivity trainings typically see a decrease in slurs, name-calling, and harassment following their advocacy efforts. GSAs also create safe spaces for students to meet and socialize in a harassment-free environment.

## **Are there GSAs in middle schools?**

As of February 2013, there are over 40 GSAs established in middle schools or junior highs in California. Harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity is also pervasive in middle schools and junior highs and data from the California Healthy Kids Survey shows that it is even more pervasive.

## **Are students protected from discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity in California schools?**

Yes, beginning on January 1, 2000 when the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act went into effect.

## **What is California AB 537?**

AB 537 is the California School Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000. The law prohibits harassment and discrimination in schools on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender. The definition of gender includes "gender identity and gender-related appearance and behavior.?"

## **Why is it important to prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender?**

Much of the harassment that occurs in schools, such as name-calling, is the result of gender non-conformity. For example, a female may get called a "dyke" or "lesbo" not because of her actual sexual orientation but because she wears boyish clothing or likes to play sports. Similarly, a male may get called a "fag" or "homo" because his mannerisms are perceived as "effeminate" or he is in a dance class. Students who are transgender-identified also get harassed in schools.

## **Where is GSA Network based?**

GSA Network is headquartered in Oakland, we have regional offices in Fresno (serving the Central Valley), Los Angeles (serving Southern California), New Orleans, LA (serving the Southeast US), and Chicago (serving the Midwest).

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