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[Home](#) > Ready, Set, Collaborate! The Safe & Healthy LGBT Youth Project goes to Atlanta

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## Ready, Set, Collaborate! The Safe & Healthy LGBT Youth Project goes to Atlanta

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**GSA Network's Safe and Healthy LGBT Youth Project** team just returned from exciting meetings in Atlanta, GA with the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** where they convened with other CDC funded organizations such as **Advocates for Youth**, the **Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)**, the **National Association of STD Directors**, and the **AIDS Alliance**. During the meetings, 13 organizations gathered with the goal of identifying the priority areas of their work for the next 18 months. With a diverse group of organizations, each with their own expertise, the overarching goal was to increase the health and well being of youth.

During the day and a half convening, GSA Network staff had the opportunity to hear from **Howell Wechsler, Director for the Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH)** in which he encouraged us to collaborate with one another in order to meet the needs of youth in each priority area. Specifically for GSA Network, we look forward to collaborating with youth and advisors in order to increase the number of safe spaces for LGBT youth by creating new GSAs and strengthening existing clubs.

Through GSA Network and our partner organizations, we hope to rally together for the support and implementation of effective policies and practices to better meet the health and mental health needs of LGBT youth. We will work with local community based organizations to increase their capacity to provide professional development to school staff in order to create safer learning environments and decrease bullying and harassment on school campuses. We will encourage schools to provide comprehensive sexual health education and/or provide referrals to local community based organizations that can provide LGBT youth-specific resources. Ultimately, we hope to provide schools, community leaders and GSAs the necessary tools to create communities that are fully invested in the health needs of their youth.

We are in the midst of very exciting times as we plan to kick-off our five year project. **In the end, the Safe & Healthy LGBT Youth Project will reach over 10,000 youth across the nation!** Our visit to CDC in Atlanta provided a key reminder that when people come together, ready to

collaborate, we can create the change we wish to see.

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