BEYOND THE BINARY

Ideas, Tactics and Days of Action for a Gender Identity Campaign in Your School

- Change your school policy regarding gender identity
- Challenge the administration during prom, dances, graduation
- Organizing a Transgender Day of Remembrance
- Student trainings regarding gender issues
- Teachers and staff trainings on gender awareness issues
- Gender Neutral Bathrooms
- Visual activism or poster campaigns

Gender Identity Resources

- Ma Vie En Rose [VHS/DVD] directed by Alain Berliner [1997]. About young person who wants to be loved regardless of his gender expression.

GSA Network’s gender identity campaign manual, Beyond the Binary: A Tool Kit for Gender Identity Activism in Schools, is a tool to help your GSA raise awareness regarding gender through education of students and staff about gender non-conformity and transgender issues. This outline has been designed for student leaders, activists, and gender non-conforming people who want to challenge the gender binary system in schools by ensuring gender-inclusive policies exist in schools.

For more ideas on how to fight homophobia and transphobia in your school, visit www.gsanetwork.org.

Check out the full version of Beyond the Binary online at www.gsanetwork.org/BeyondtheBinary.
CAMPAIGN GUIDE

Making sure your school does not discriminate against transgender and gender non-conforming students is something everyone can help do. Here are just some of the things that can be done.

• Make a complaint at your school. Document the incident: description of the incident, the name of any witnesses, and whether any faculty members were present and how they responded. Take the complaint to the school principal. Under the law, your school is legally responsible for protecting you from harassment and discrimination. Follow up and make copies of all documents.

• Take it to the next level. If the problem does not stop, consider taking your complaint to your school district. It is important to file the complaint with the district within six months of the original incident. Mail your complaint to the designated compliance officer or compliance coordinator for the school district. They have 60 days to conduct and investigate, make a decision and send you a report.

• Decide whether or not you want to appeal. If you are not satisfied with a decision made by your district, you have 15 days to appeal to the CA Department of Education. Send [by registered mail] a copy of all of your documents, statements from witnesses, a description of your meeting with your principal, the papers you sent to the school district, the district’s response, and your explanation of why this response is not enough, to: Office of Equal Opportunity, CA Department of Education; Attention: Director; 1430 N Street, Room 6019; Sacramento, CA 95814; or call them at (916) 445-9174. The Department of Education will give your school district 10 days to solve the problem. Then the department will investigate and reach a decision within 60 days.

What can you do about discrimination? Making sure your school does not discriminate against transgender and gender non-conforming students is something everyone can help do. Here are just some of the things that can be done.

• What is your overall goal? Think Big! What would your school look like if all students were safe and free from harassment and discrimination? Your goal is what you are fighting to accomplish. Everything you do in your campaign should work toward your goal. Then, when you begin considering specific tactics and actions, you can ask yourself this question: “If we take this action, will it get us closer to our goal?”

• What is your campaign plan? A plan that focuses on one or two winnable gains toward your overall goal. A typical school-based campaign will take between six and nine months to complete.

• What do you know about your problem? Research, research, research! What do you need to know about your issue? Think about student surveys or collecting student stories, getting statistics, etc. The more you know about your issue, the better chance you have of choosing the best strategy.

• What are your strengths and weaknesses? Honesty is key in this section of your planning. Think about the number of people working on your campaign, access to transportation, money, and also your group’s morale. The more honest and thorough you are, the easier it will be for you to get organized.

• Who are your supporters? Who are the people who want to stop discrimination and harassment? Teachers? Student groups? Community members? Remember that people may organize against you. Figure out who they are and create a list. Your opponents can never be your targets.

• Targets? Your target is who has the power to give you what you want. If your target appears to be a group of people [example: School Board / Student Governing Body], concentrate your efforts on a particular person or two people rather than the whole group. Determine who in the group is undecided about letting you carry out your campaign and focus your efforts on them. Their votes of approval will make the difference.

• Tactics: What actions will help you reach your goal? When brainstorming tactics, ask yourselves how each tactic will help you meet your campaign goal. Examples of tactics may include: getting students to sign a petition supporting your cause; getting students to write supportive letters to the school board, or having students wear buttons or ribbons in support of your group. Your group may organize against you; always be prepared to change students’ attitudes, consider participating in Transgender Day of Remembrance.

• Develop a timeline. A timeline will help you keep track of what needs to be done, who needs to do it, and when it will be done. It’s also a great way to keep track of your progress and to make sure that no details get lost along the way.

Besides filing complaints, your GSA can also work on creating and carrying out a campaign to change your school. Before you start a campaign to change your school, you need a plan. When taking on any campaign, it helps to be organized and strategic.

What do you do after the campaign is over? Once your campaign is over, it is important to spend some time evaluating what happened and what impact your group had on your community. If you won a victory such as changing school policy or getting teachers trained on campus, be sure to celebrate your success. If you weren’t successful, think about what prevented you from succeeding.

Finally, ASK FOR HELP! Reach out to a supportive teacher, parent/guardian, and especially us here at GSA Network for help at any stage in your campaign. We’re here to help and will do anything we can to make sure your campaign is successful.

GENDER IDENTITY ACTIVISM IN YOUR SCHOOL

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ORGANIZE A CAMPAIGN

TAKING A STAND

If you face gender identity discrimination at school, use the law to make a formal complaint.

• Names/Pronouns: If you change your name to one that better matches your gender identity, a school needs to use that name to refer to you. The same is true when a different pronoun needs to be used. It can sometimes take time for teachers, staff or other students to get used to using your new name and pronoun. But it is not acceptable or legal for teachers, staff, or students to use your old name or pronoun as a way to harass you.

• Restroom Use: If you want to use a restroom that matches your gender identity [for example, if you have transitioned from female to male, you may want to use the boys restroom], you should be allowed to do so. And everyone should be able to use the restroom safely. Restrooms are often places where gender non-conforming students are harassed by other students. If this happens, you should report it and school staff should do something to protect you or other students.

• Sex Segregation: Restrooms may be the most common place where students are divided up based on gender, but they are not the only place. Whenever students are divided into boys and girls, you should be allowed to join the group or participate in the program that matches your gender identity as much as possible.

• Dress Codes: Some schools have specific dress codes for boys and specific dress codes for girls. If your school does, it is important that you be allowed to wear clothes that match your gender identity. It is also important that school staff does not enforce a school’s dress code more strictly against transgender and gender non-conforming students than other students. For example, if your school has a policy about skirt lengths, transgender girls can’t be held to stricter rules than other girls.

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What does gender identity discrimination look like?

Under California law, transgender and gender non-conforming students are protected from being expelled from school, kicked out of class, held after school, treated differently, or in any other way punished simply because of their gender identity and/or expression. For the most part, school administrators and teachers understand this part of the law. However, transgender and gender non-conforming students raise some newer issues as well. They are highlighted below:

- What is the role of the student?
- What is your overall goal?
- What is your campaign plan?
- What do you know about your problem?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Who are your supporters?
- What do you do after the campaign is over?

Also see next page for campaign ideas & tactics that have worked for other GSAs.