

# 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

See previous page for tips and strategies to plan and execute any of these campaign ideas.

### Gender Identity Resources

- *About a Boy Who Isn't* [article] by Benoit Denizet-Lewis. The New York Times Magazine, May 26, 2002.
- *Call Me Kate: The Story of Katherine Marlowe, a Transsexual* [paperback] written by Nelson, edited by Eugenia Jackson. Writers Club Press [2000].
- *My Gender Workbook* [paperback] by Kate Bornstein. New York: Routledge [1997].
- "One Chromosome Too Many?" [article] by Cheryl L. Cole. The Olympics at the Millenium: Power, Politics, and the Games, edited by Kay Schaffer & Sidonie Smith. Rutgers University Press [2000].
- *Revolutionary Voices: A Multicultural Queer Youth Anthology* [paperback] edited by Amy Sonnie. Los Angeles: Alyson Press [2000].
- *A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story* [DVD] directed by Agnieszka Holland [2006]. This Lifetime original movie tells the story of Gwen Araujo, a Newark, CA teenager murdered in October 2002.
- *Ma Vie En Rose* [VHS/DVD] directed by Alain Berliner [1997]. About young person who wants to be loved regardless of his gender expression.
- *A Soldier's Girl* [DVD] directed by Frank Pierson [2003]. A soldier falls in love with a striking MTF lounge singer.



# GENDER IDENTITY ACTIVISM IN YOUR SCHOOL



## Beyond the Binary

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.

GSA Network has briefly summarized the gender identity campaign below, but encourages everyone to check out the full version by requesting a copy or viewing it online at [www.gsanetwork.org/BeyondtheBinary](http://www.gsanetwork.org/BeyondtheBinary).

### What is Gender?

Is gender just a matter of being male or female? Is gender only about the way you look and dress? Or is it also about how you see yourself and how that affects you? Gender is a combination of all these components.

Gender Identity refers to a person's internal, deeply-felt sense of being either male, female, something other, or in between. Everyone has a gender identity. Gender expression is the way that you show people your gender. Most people express their gender in some way through how they style their hair, the clothes they wear, the way they walk, or their name.

The term "transgender youth" can be used as an umbrella term for all students whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth and/or whose gender expression is non-stereotypical. Some transgender students transition or change from one gender to another. Transition often means changing the way you dress, selecting a new name, and sometimes getting help from a doctor to change your body.

### What is a Gender Binary System?

A social system that requires that everyone be raised as a boy or girl [dependent on what sex you are assigned at birth], which in turn forms the basis for how you are educated, what jobs you can do (or are expected to do), how you are expected to behave, what you are expected to wear, what your gender and gender presentation should be, and who you should be attracted to/love/marry, etc.

Check out the full version of *Beyond the Binary* online at [www.gsanetwork.org/BeyondtheBinary](http://www.gsanetwork.org/BeyondtheBinary).

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### Inspired by:

- Hiromasa Ando
- Gwen Araujo
- Mianne Bagger
- Kate Bornstein
- Judith Butler
- Patrick Califia
- RuPaul Charles
- Cheryl Chase
- Michelle Dumaresq
- Anne Fausto-Sterling
- Leslie Feinberg
- Jamison Green
- Robert Haaland
- Judith Halberstam
- Antony Hegarty
- Christine Jorgensen
- Alyn Libman
- Shannon Minter
- John Cameron Mitchell
- Jan Morris
- Renee Richards
- Sylvia Rivera
- Donna Rose
- Brandon Teena
- Riki Wilchins
- Nikki Youngblood
- Reuben Zellman

*This list represents just a few transgender, genderqueer & gender non-conforming activists. There's simply no way to list everyone in one place, so we hope you'll be inspired by some of the names you see here to do your own further research and reading!*

## TAKE A STAND



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

### 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:

- **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 up 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.

### 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.

- **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 investigation, 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 only 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.

*If you have problems during this process, do not hesitate to call the GSA Network for help!*

## ORGANIZE A CAMPAIGN

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 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 yourselves this question: "If we take this action, will it get us closer to our goal?"
- **What is your campaign?** 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 your opponents? Consider who will help you achieve your goal—who

else wants 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 what you are trying to do, asking parents to write supportive letters to the school board, or having students wear buttons or ribbons in support of your campaign. If you are trying 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.

- **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!



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