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LET'S CELEBRATE!

Gay-Straight Alliances have been forming in schools and colleges across America, bringing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and straight allied people together to stop bullying, homophobia, transphobia and hate.

Now, its time to celebrate their work!

For decades, GSAs have been working to make their campuses safe places for all students regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Students who start and take part in these student groups are brave. They dare to create a dialogue to improve lives. We believe that courage deserves to be recognized and celebrated.

Please join us as we celebrate the second National Gay Straight Alliance Day!

ORGANIZING MANUAL

First things first...Develop an Organizing Outline:

Sign-Up & Get Connected

Go to gsaday.org and sign-up so you can receive information and updates on this national day of celebration! You can also **add your group or organization** to our directory, which can help you connect with others to make your celebration even more fun!

Reaching Out & Finding Support

Planning your National GSA Day celebration will be easier, more effective, and more rewarding if you are working as part of a team. Reach out to others in your school, organization, business, or community to start building a team. If your school has a GSA, or if your organization or business has a department devoted to diversity or LGBTQ issues, try to coordinate with this group.

Getting Permission

Getting permission to hold your celebration activities in your school or workplace is crucial. Talk to teachers, administrators, or supervisors well ahead of time to see if you have administrative and institutional support. For information on how to deal with unsupportive administrators, see “Addressing Resistance” (pg. 14) and “Know Your Rights” (pg. 23).

Setting Goals

When planning your activities for National GSA Day, remember to set viable goals for what you want to accomplish. How many people do you want to reach? What message(s) do you want to emphasize? What change do you want to create in your community?



Brainstorming

With your team, think of as many possible activities and approaches as possible that could help you achieve your goals. Be as creative as you can, but work within your means—keep in mind the amount of time, energy, resources, and risk you are willing or able to put toward planning and executing your activities (see the Activity Guide for ideas and strategies. pgs. 5-14).

Action Plan!

Once you have as many ideas as possible, evaluate and combine them into a plan of action: What will you do, how, and what will you need to make it happen? Divide tasks among members of your team, and remember to make a timeline for your preparations and stick to it.

Be Safe

Remember that the safety of you and your team is the most important thing to consider. National GSA Day is meant to celebrate the ways GSAs help keep students safe, not to put anyone in harm's way. If your school or work environment is hostile toward LGBTQ issues, keep this in mind in your plans, and be sure to report any harassment or administrative hostility (see "Addressing Resistance: Reporting Problems" pg. 14 and "Know Your Rights" pg. 23).

Share Your Story

A goal of National GSA Day is to raise awareness about the positive impact GSAs can have on students' lives. Share your experiences (positive and negative), ideas, successes, and challenges: Join the GSA Day Video Campaign (see the Activity Guide), talk and reflect with friends and family, spread the word about GSA Day on Facebook, Twitter, or your blog, or send us an e-mail letting us know how your activities went!

Activity Guide: How to Participate

Students Who Have a GSA

The foundation of GSA Day is YOU—LGBT students and straight allies! The following information can help you make GSA Day a time to celebrate, be visible, plan for the future, and much more!

BE VISIBLE

Let people know why you love and appreciate your GSA and how they can be involved!

- Host a party
- Make sure people know that your GSA exists and why
- **Order t-shirts!**
- Make fliers and hand them out at lunch
- Have a panel discussion or lead a staff training to discuss your GSA
- Hold a GSA meeting where you bring your friends

SHOW APPRECIATION

- Do you have a fantastic GSA advisor? Do you have supportive teachers, administrators or community members? Are there other student organizations that support your GSA? Let them know how important they are to you by giving them a card, cookies or a thank you over the announcements or in the campus paper
- Show appreciation for your group by discussing your group's history
- Take the time to research your GSA's history. Or, if you started it, write down your history and pass it on to new GSA leaders
- Understanding and appreciating where you've been will help the group feel confident in creating change for the future!

GET ORGANIZED

- Sit down with your GSA and plan for the future
 - What are your goals for the GSA?
 - What do you want to accomplish? Do you want to increase attendance, improve programming, or make your school safer?
 - Do you know who next year's leaders will be?

ORDER T-SHIRTS

Order a National GSA Day! Specifically designed without a date, proudly wear your shirt year after year to visibly celebrate the day. Check out the **GSA Day website** for more information on ordering t-shirts!

JOIN THE GSA DAY VIDEO CAMPAIGN

Tell the world about all the great things your GSA is doing by creating a video—you can be as creative or simple as you want! Check out the GSA Day website for more information on the video campaign!

CELEBRATE!

In the midst of planning for this amazing day, don't forget to have fun and really celebrate! You and your friends are part of a growing social justice movement that is laying the groundwork for equality and respect of all people while eliminating racism, homophobia, sexism and hate.

Students Who Don't Have a GSA

Any student, school or college can participate—even if you don't have a GSA. We do ask that all students, schools and colleges register on our website. If you don't yet have a GSA, participating in GSA Day is a great way to inform your administration about the need for a GSA and the benefits they bring to all students!

BE VISIBLE

Let people know why you love and appreciate GSAs and the alliance between gay and straight people—and how they can be involved!

- Host a party
- **Order t-shirts!**
- Make fliers about how gay and straight people need to stand together and hand them out at lunch

SHOW APPRECIATION

- Do you have supportive teachers, professors or administrators? Let them know you appreciate their support of you by giving them a card or thank-you note
 - Use this opportunity to talk to them about your desire to start a GSA
- If you start a GSA, write down its history and pass it on to new GSA leaders
 - Understanding and appreciating where you've been will help the group feel confident in creating change for the future!

GET ORGANIZED

- Connect with other GSAs and resources in your state
- Sit down and plan how you will go about creating a GSA (see page 25)
 - What are your goals for the GSA?
 - What do you want to accomplish? What kind of programming and activities do you want the GSA to take part in?
 - Do you know who next year's leaders will be?

ORDER T-SHIRTS

Order a National GSA Day! Specifically designed without a date, proudly wear your shirt year after year to visibly celebrate the day. Check out the **GSA Day website** for more information on ordering t-shirts!

GET CONNECTED

Connect with local, state, and national organizations to make your celebration bigger and more effective! Check out our [resource directory](#) on the GSA Day website to learn more about GSAs and LGBT organizations in your area.

JOIN THE GSA DAY VIDEO CAMPAIGN

Tell the world about how important it is for LGBT and allied people to come together to fight homophobia, transphobia, bigotry and hate—you can be as creative or simple as you want! Check out the GSA Day website for more information on the video campaign!

CELEBRATE!

In the midst of planning for this amazing day, don't forget to have fun and really celebrate! You and your friends are part of a growing social justice movement that is laying the groundwork for equality and respect of all people while eliminating racism, homophobia, sexism and hate.

All Adults

Everyone knows or is related to someone who identifies as LGBT or as a straight ally. It could be a sibling, a parent, friend, son or daughter. Regardless of whether you are celebrating this day in support of them, or because you yourself are LGBTQIA, you, as an adult, have an important role to play in this national celebration!

BE VISIBLE

Let people know why you love and appreciate your GSA and how they can be involved!

- One of the most important things you can do to support GSA Day is to be visible. Young people need to know that there are LGBT and allied adults who support their work in creating safe schools. Friends, family members and co-workers need to know that you value the bond between LGBT people and straight allies.
- Does your company have an LGBT employee resource group? If so, have the group plan a party and make sure that people know it exists
- Have a conversation with friend about the day and tell them why you are involved.
- **Order t-shirts!**
- Make fliers and hand them out at lunch
- Have a panel discussion and invite local high school and college GSA members to participate

SHOW APPRECIATION

- Do you know a student who is in a GSA? Do you know about a fantastic GSA advisor? Do you have supportive teachers, administrators or community members? Let them know by giving them a card or thank-you note—or even a message on Facebook or email

- Show appreciation for local, state and national organizations that are supporting GSAs by donating to them, whether it be your time, talent or treasure

ORDER T-SHIRTS

Order a National GSA Day! Specifically designed without a date, proudly wear your shirt year after year to visibly celebrate the day. Check out the [GSA Day website](#) for more information on ordering t-shirts!

JOIN THE GSA DAY VIDEO CAMPAIGN

Tell the world about how important it is for LGBT and allied people to come together to fight homophobia, transphobia, bigotry and hate. Mentioning that you're a parent or family member, teacher, counselor, school or college administrator or school board member will be powerful and you can be as creative or simple as you want! Check out the GSA Day website for more information on the video campaign!

CELEBRATE!

In the midst of planning for this amazing day, don't forget to have fun and really celebrate! You are part of a social justice movement that is laying the groundwork for equality and respect of all people while eliminating racism, homophobia, sexism and hate.

Parents & Families

Parents and families play a huge role in the lives of young people. Supporting them and their efforts to reduce hate and violence in schools should be applauded. In addition to all the things adults can do, none is more important than supporting your young person's efforts in celebrating this day. Additionally:

- Letting your young person know that you are an ally (or LGBT!)
- Telling them how proud you are of them and their work
- Helping (as needed) to plan the day
- Asking them how the day went and reflecting with them
- Providing support for your young person if they are trying to start a GSA and face resistance from their school or college
- Getting educated on LGBT issues and the importance of GSAs
- Advocating for GSAs with other parents, families and schools

Teachers & Counselors

As the people who work most closely with students on a daily basis, your input, feedback and support will be crucial to students who are planning a day of celebration or trying to use this day as a way to begin forming a GSA. In addition to all the things adults can do, none is more important than supporting student's efforts in celebrating this day. Additionally:

- Getting educated on LGBT issues and the importance of GSAs
- Providing support for your students if they are trying to start a GSA and face resistance from their school or college administration (*which can include connecting students to local, state and national organizations that help students create GSAs*)
- Letting students know that you are an ally (or LGBT!)
- Advocating for GSAs with other teachers and counselors
- Telling students how proud you are of them and their work to create safe schools and helping (as needed) to plan the day

Administrators

School and college administrators and school boards set the tone. Supporting GSAs in your district and at your college can make these institutions safer, more welcoming places for ALL students. In addition to all the things adults can do, none is more important than supporting student efforts in celebrating this day. Additionally:

- Getting educated on LGBT issues and the importance of GSAs
- Serving as an advocate for students if they are trying to start a GSA and are facing resistance from other school/college administrators or school board members (*which can include connecting students to local, state and national organizations that help students create GSAs*)
- *If you are a school administrator or school board member, learning about the legal rights GSAs have in public schools*
- Letting students know that you are an ally (or LGBT!)
- Advocating for GSAs with other administrators and school board members and making clear to school officials that you encourage their formation
- Telling students how proud you are of them and their work to create safe schools



Things to Remember Before, During & After:

BEFORE

- ✓ Sign-Up & Get Connected!
- ✓ Get information & resources
- ✓ Get support & permission
- ✓ Make connections & build a team
- ✓ Set goals
- ✓ Brainstorm
- ✓ Make decisions
- ✓ Form an action plan with a timeline
- ✓ Delegate responsibilities
- ✓ Spread the word
- ✓ Educate
- ✓ Get community support
- ✓ Show appreciation for supporters

DURING

- ✓ Stay safe & know your rights
- ✓ Be visible
- ✓ Be respectful, positive, & informative

AFTER

- ✓ Evaluate & reflect
- ✓ Plan for the future
- ✓ Stay visible
- ✓ Stay connected
- ✓ Share your story

Throwing a Kick-Off Party!

Why:

Throwing a GSA Day Kick-Off party is a great way to get attention, generate interest and enthusiasm in your group and your community, and even fundraise.

Who:

Invite members of your school's GSA and/or those of nearby schools, representatives from supportive organizations and businesses, LGBTQ and allied individuals and families from your community, and supportive teachers, administrators, and public servants.

When:

The night before the big day! (Or, if that is not feasible, the weekend prior.)

Where:

Find a venue that is convenient, affordable, friendly and supportive—a coffee shop, business or organization's office, school facility, park, private home, etc.

What:

Whatever suits your goals and your budget! Serve food (potluck?); sell t-shirts, buttons, or stickers; dance (to the music of LGBTQA & supportive artists?), play games (LGBTQ trivia?), make connections, build networks, and even plan for the future and brainstorm for next year's event.



How to Participate: Examples

During last year's first-ever National GSA Day, organizations from around the nation discovered their own unique ways to celebrate this special day. As you participate this year, feel free to use our suggestions or come up with something completely different. Just remember to be creative and—most importantly—have fun!

- Wingspan & Eon Youth Lounge in Arizona hosted a party to celebrate National GSA Day that included:
 - Live DJ
 - Stilts walker
 - Spoken word performances
 - Limbo and hula hoop contests
 - Food
 - Dancing
- LGBT Coalition of Western Massachusetts hosted an area-wide celebration at the Springfield High School of Commerce that included:
 - Speakers
 - Musical guests
 - Presentations by GSAs
 - Each group discussed its activities and how it enhances their lives
 - 150 students, 25 allies, advisors, and community leaders involved



Photos: LGBTCoalitionWMA.org



- Have a bake sale
 - Funds can support your GSA's activities or an LGBT charity of your choice
- Write an article about National GSA Day for your school newspaper

- The nation's first GSA Youth Chorus, Diverse Harmony, performed in Seattle, Washington on KING-TV's morning program, New Day Northwest. [Click here](#) to watch the performance!



Photos: KING5.com



- “Like” National GSA Day [on Facebook](#), follow [@gsa_day](#), and post/tweet about the day and your celebration!
- Contact other multicultural or ethnic clubs that advocate for diversity
- Make a GSA History Timeline for your school's halls (visit [our website](#) for more information!)
- Make and sell stickers and buttons or National GSA T-shirts from the [National GSA Day website!](#)
- Make daily announcements on the PA system in the week leading up to February 6 about the day and any events you have planned
- Set up a table with information and resources about GSAs and LGBT youth
- Post and pass out fliers about GSAs and [how they create safe schools](#)

Feedback

Keep notes on feedback received from participants of your National GSA Day celebration. Consider having each person who uses your resources or attends your event to sign a message board in order to document how many individuals were involved. Use any comments you gather about participants' experiences to measure how successful your event was in spreading the word about the importance of GSAs and in garnering the interest of students. This information will provide more ideas for how to enhance the effectiveness of future celebrations and events not only on National GSA Day but throughout the entire year. Keep the following questions in mind when evaluating your day:

- How many students received/heard your information/resources or attended your event?
- Compare the level of student interest in your GSA before and after National GSA Day; did more students become involved/express interest in it after National GSA Day?
- What was the overall response from students and teachers?

Addressing Resistance

Attitude

Having a positive attitude is so important when dealing with people who are hostile toward your cause or may doubt your integrity. Remember to present an open-minded and flexible position when faced with faculty, administrators, or community members who do not support your cause. Practicing sincerity, maturity, passion, patience, and a willingness to educate and negotiate will not only make people more willing to work with you, but will also help you shape your argument and communication styles for discussing controversial issues in the future. If all else fails, remember that there are many possible ways to celebrate GSA Day and you may have to change your plans if you do not feel safe.

Communication Strategies

There are several ways to approach an unsupportive administration:

- **Send them a letter** with information about National GSA Day, your plans for the event, and supportive people and groups in your community. Be sure to indicate a willingness to discuss the issue further and to compromise, and thank them for their time and understanding (see “Sample Letter to the Administrator” pg. 18).
- **Request a meeting** with appropriate staff and administrators. Include supportive faculty, students, and community members. Stay calm, listen to their concerns, do your best to answer questions (see “FAQs” pgs. 15-17), and make reasonable compromises if their concerns are valid.
- Remember to **stay calm and respectful**, and **know your rights and facts!**

Reporting Problems

Research (and use if necessary) your school’s reporting procedures for harassment and discrimination, and know the national and state laws that protect you (see “Know Your Rights”). If you encounter consistent discrimination from your school administration, contact a local, state, or national LGBTQ organization, such as the ACLU or Lambda Legal, for support (see “Resources” pg. 26).

TOOLKIT

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Knowing how to answer these questions clearly and concisely will help you spread the word and confront opposition to your event.

What is a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA)?

A gay-straight alliance (GSA) can be defined as a youth-led, school- or community-based group that provides a safe, welcoming, and affirming physical and emotional space for LGBT students, as well as those who are perceived as LGBT, those who are questioning their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, children from LGBT families, and heterosexual students who want to be allies of their LGBT peers.

The inclusion of straight youth in the group mission and sponsored activities of GSAs is an important distinguishing factor from early support groups for LGBT teens, and recognizes the need for a comprehensive approach to youth safety. This strategy assists LGBT youth in building a diverse network of support, teaches heterosexual youth how to be effective allies to their LGBT peers, and teaches all youth about the effects of discrimination and prejudice. GSA participation also seems to shield youth from the negative influence of verbal and physical violence, alienation, and other forms of oppression based in homophobia and heterosexism.

How many GSAs exist in the US?

Today there are 4,000+ GSAs around the country¹ although the exact number is hard to determine as not all GSAs register with state or national organizations, such as GLSEN or the National Association of GSA Networks.

What is National GSA Day?

GSA Day is a time to strengthen the bond between LGBT people and straight allies and in particular recognize and honor student organizations called Gay-Straight Alliances (also known as a GSA). These student led groups work to educate their peers to stop homophobia, transphobia and violence in schools and colleges throughout the country. The day is coordinated and sponsored nationally by Iowa Pride Network (IPN). National GSA Day will be held on February 6, 2013.

This national event serves as a “day of action” for these student groups who employ creative ways to: Be visible; Honor those who have shown dedication in ensuring all students feel safe and supported; and, Prepare for the future. Ultimately, National GSA Day lets lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and straight allied (LGBTQA) students know that they aren’t alone and that their work in creating safe learning environments is important to our schools, our communities and our country.

¹ <http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/news/record/1970.html>

What are the specific goals of National GSA Day?

The specific goals are to:

- Honor GSAs across America that work to end violence, homophobia, transphobia, and hate in schools and colleges.
- Honor students, teachers and community members that have shown dedication for keeping all students safe, and insuring a quality education for all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Raise awareness of the need for GSAs in schools and colleges and how they are a proven, effective tool in combating hostile and unsafe learning environments for all students.
- Encourage GSAs to think about their future and ensure they are sustained
- Help educate students on how to create a GSA, encourage GSAs to network with each other and connect supporters to organizations that work to support GSA organizing
- Increase the visibility of the important bond between LGBT people and their straight friends and family.

Who started National GSA Day?

National GSA Day first began as a statewide Iowa Pride Network event in Iowa in 2006. Then Governor Tom Vilsack declared October 25, 2006, “Iowa Gay-Straight Alliance Day” in honor of the gay-straight alliances (GSAs) around the state that work to end violence and homophobia in Iowa schools and colleges.

For six years, Iowa Pride Network has held “Iowa Gay-Straight Alliance Day” to celebrate student-led groups in high schools and colleges (there are now even some in middle schools) that are working to stop homophobia, transphobia, bullying and hate. Over the years, more and more states have been asking us about how they, too, can host a day to celebrate these courageous groups. At Iowa Pride Network, we wanted to assist other states who wanted to do a similar event—so with this in mind, we launched National Gay-Straight Alliance Day!

When is National GSA Day?

The second National Gay-Straight Alliance Day will be held on Wednesday, February 6, 2013.

Why is the event in February?

The event is designed to serve as a mid-year energizer. Most students are coming back from winter vacations. The winter months can sometimes be dreary. This is one way to keep students energized leading into second semester.

Where do National GSA Day events take place?

Most GSA Day events will take place on middle school, high school and college campuses. However, showing your support and being visible about your commitment to an alliance of LGBT and straight allied people is itself an event and should be celebrated! For example, straight people telling co-workers they support LGBT equality or LGBT people thanking their straight friends for supporting them over a cup of coffee—all are examples of how and when events can take place!

Why do we need National GSA Day?

Violence and discrimination against LGBT students is the rule—not the exception in American schools. It is a national disgrace that students feel threatened in school simply because of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. While Americans need to know that thousands of students each day go to school or college and endure anti-LGBT violence and harassment, they must also know that GSAs are a tool in helping end violence and that these student groups save lives. (see “Support for GSAs” pg. 22).

How Can I or my GSA participate?

There are many ways for students, teachers, administrators, organizations, and businesses to get involved! (See Organizing Manual pgs. 3-14.) However, we do ask that all students, schools and colleges register on our website.

Why does my GSA or I have to Sign-Up in order to participate?

Signing-up allows sponsors to measure how successful National GSA Day is and helps us plan for the future. You'll also be asked to take part in a voluntary survey to provide us with feedback on how you think the day went. You and/or your GSAs opinions will help determine the direction of this national celebration!

What happens if my school doesn't support the effort? What are my rights?

See “Addressing Resistance” (pg. 14) and “Sample Letter to the Administrator” (pg. 18) and “Know Your Rights” (pg. 23).

What things can I do to create an effective event?

Coordinate with other individuals or groups in your area to create a plan that suits your circumstances. There are countless ways to be visible and celebrate GSAs (see the Activity Guide for ideas and strategies. pgs. 5-14).

What about potential opponents?

You may encounter people or institutions that do not see the value in what you are doing or who strive to promote intolerance. However, by keeping a positive attitude and demonstrating a willingness to educate others, engage in thoughtful discussion, and make reasonable compromises, you can represent yourself, your group, and your community in a way that reflects the values of inclusiveness and tolerance that National GSA Day seeks to promote (see “Addressing Resistance” pg. 14).

Working with administrators

Working collaboratively with school administrators will help make your celebration and visibility efforts that much more successful. Communicate with them by sending them a letter.

Sample Letter to the Administrator

[DATE]

Dear [NAME OF PRINCIPAL/ADMINISTRATOR],

I am writing to request a meeting with you to discuss your support of students' participation in National Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) Day.

GSA Day is a time to strengthen the bond between LGBT people and straight allies and in particular recognize and honor student organizations called Gay-Straight Alliances. These student-led groups work to educate their peers to stop homophobia, transphobia, and violence in schools and colleges throughout the country. This day will serve as a "day of action" for these student groups to employ creative ways to be visible, honor those who have shown dedication in ensuring all students feel safe and supported, and prepare for the future. On February 6, 2013, students will be [DESCRIBE PLANNED ACTIVITY/EVENT].

GSA Day at our school is particularly relevant because [BRIEF EXPLANATION]. We hope that you and the rest of the administration will join the following groups in supporting the event: [NAMES OF OTHER SUPPORTING CLUBS OR ORGANIZATIONS]. GSA Day is an opportunity for students to take the initiative to let lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and straight allied (LGBTQA) students know that they aren't alone and that their work in creating safe learning environments is important to our schools, our communities and our country. By participating in this event, students will gain [POSITIVE OUTCOMES OF PARTICIPATION].

I look forward to speaking with you soon, and will call you within the week to confirm your receipt of my meeting request. Should you wish to contact me sooner, I may be reached at [CONTACT INFORMATION].

[You may also want to request that the school host a follow-up activity or event.]

Thank you,

[YOUR NAME]

[SPONSORING CLUB/ORGANIZATION]

[YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION]

Obtaining a Proclamation from Your Governor

Getting the governor of your state to make a proclamation in support of National GSA Day will send a strong message that your state government values the safety of all students and recognizes the work that GSAs do to make schools safe and accepting. Start early—request a proclamation at least two months in advance.

Sample Letter to the Governor

[DATE]

Dear Governor [NAME],

I am writing to ask that you consider making a proclamation expressing your support for [YOUR STATE] students' participation in National Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) Day.

GSA Day is a time to strengthen the bond between LGBT people and straight allies and in particular recognize and honor student organizations called Gay-Straight Alliances. These student-led groups work to educate their peers to stop homophobia, transphobia, and violence in schools and colleges throughout the country. This day will serve as a "day of action" for these student groups to employ creative ways to be visible, honor those who have shown dedication in ensuring all students feel safe and supported, and prepare for the future. On February 6, 2013, students will be [DESCRIBE PLANNED ACTIVITY/EVENT].

GSA Day in [YOUR STATE] is particularly relevant because [BRIEF EXPLANATION]. We hope that you will join the following groups in supporting the event: [NAMES OF OTHER SUPPORTING CLUBS OR ORGANIZATIONS]. GSA Day is an opportunity for students to take the initiative to let lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and straight allied (LGBTQA) students know that they aren't alone and that their work in creating safe learning environments is important to our schools, our communities and our country. While participating in this event, students will gain [POSITIVE OUTCOMES OF PARTICIPATION]. For additional information about GSA Day, please contact me or visit gsaday.org.

I look forward to hearing from your office in the near future.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

[SPONSORING CLUB/ORGANIZATION]

[YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION]

Obtaining a Proclamation from Your Governor

Having language for the Governor's office to use can help speed up the process and help staff have a better understanding of what you're looking for.

Sample Proclamation

NATIONAL GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCE DAY PROCLAMATION

- Whereas,** [Your organization] was founded in [Year you were founded] to help [Your state]'s lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) high school and college students build successful futures; and
- Whereas,** The foundation of any successful future is a quality education; and
- Whereas,** A healthy, safe and affirming learning environment is often out of reach for many of [Your state]'s LGBT students as they face hostility and unsafe environments daily; and
- Whereas,** This hostile learning environment has a direct impact on [Your state] LGBT students' ability to learn their academic performance as they pursue their educational aspirations; and
- Whereas,** All students should have access to a safe and accepting learning environment, including those that are or are perceived to be LGBT; and
- Whereas,** Gay-Straight Alliances, student run organizations that seek to end violence, harassment, discrimination and isolation of LGBT and Allied students are an effective way to work to keep schools safe and increase the academic performance of LGBT students; and
- Whereas,** [Your state] has over [Enter the number of how many GSAs your state has] Gay-Straight Alliances in [Your state]'s high schools and colleges, that have helped provide resources and support and have provided a voice for thousands of LGBT students throughout [Your state]:

Now, Therefore, I [Governor's Name], Governor of the State of [Your state], Do Hereby Proclaim Wednesday, February 6th, As [Your state]'s day to recognize

NATIONAL GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCE DAY

in honor of the students, teachers, community members and organizations in [Your state] who have shown their dedication for keeping all students safe, and insuring a quality education for all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Getting Publicity

It is important that your community is aware that you are celebrating GSA Day and why. One of the goals of GSA Day is to draw attention to the great work done by GSAs and their role in creating safe schools. A great way to make people aware of the facts about GSAs and GSA Day (and increase participation in your celebration) is to generate press coverage by sending a press release to local media. You can also write an op-ed for your local newspaper about the importance of GSAs to create public interest.

Sample Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[DATE]

CONTACT:

[YOUR NAME]

[SPONSORING CLUB/ORGANIZATION]

[YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION]

STUDENTS AT [LOCAL SCHOOL] PLAN CELEBRATION OF NATIONAL GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCE DAY

[CITY, STATE] – (Students at [LOCAL SCHOOL]/supporters from [ORGANIZATION]) will be [DESCRIBE PLANNED ACTIVITY/EVENT] in celebration of National Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) Day on February 6, 2013. GSA Day is a time to strengthen the bond between lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and straight allies (LGBTQA) and in particular recognize and honor student organizations called Gay-Straight Alliances. These student-led groups work to educate their peers to stop homophobia, transphobia, and violence in schools and colleges throughout the country. This day will serve as a “day of action” for these student groups to employ creative ways to be visible, honor those who have shown dedication in ensuring all students feel safe and supported, and prepare for the future. [Be sure to include DATES, TIMES, & LOCATIONS OF PLANNED ACTIVITIES].

GSA Day in [YOUR AREA] is particularly relevant because [BRIEF EXPLANATION]. [YOUR GROUP] will join the following groups in supporting and celebrating the event: [NAMES OF OTHER SUPPORTING CLUBS OR ORGANIZATIONS]. “GSA Day is an opportunity for students to take the initiative to let LGBTQA students know that they are not alone and that their work in creating safe learning environments is important to our schools, our communities and our country,” said [MEMBER OF YOUR GROUP].

For additional information, visit gsaday.org or contact [YOUR NAME & CONTACT INFORMATION].

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Support for GSAs

Arne Duncan Letter

On June 14, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan sent a “Dear Colleague” letter to public K-12 and postsecondary educators reminding them that under the Equal Access Act, GSAs have a right to exist and be treated equally to other student organizations. [Click here](#) to view the entire letter.

Harassment and bullying are serious problems in our schools, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students are the targets of disproportionate shares of these problems ...

High levels of harassment and bullying correlate with poorer educational outcomes, lower future aspirations, frequent school absenteeism, and lower grade-point averages. Recent tragedies involving LGBT students and students perceived to be LGBT only underscore the need for safer schools.

Gay-straight alliances (GSAs) and similar student-initiated groups addressing LGBT issues can play an important role in promoting safer schools and creating more welcoming learning environments.

GLSEN GSA Research Brief

The following is a summarization of a study conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) analyzing the effectiveness of GSAs in enhancing student safety and creating a safe and accepting environment conducive to learning. [Click here](#) to view the entire brief.

LGBT students in schools with GSAs are less likely to hear biased language, such as homophobic remarks, are less likely to feel unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation and gender expression, and are less likely to miss days of school because they are afraid to go. In addition, GSAs may play an important role in helping students identify staff who may be supportive and to whom they can report any incidents of victimization. The presence of a GSA may offer evidence of a school’s commitment to LGBT students and their allies, creating a source of perceived support for students even if they are not actively engaged with the GSA themselves. The presence of GSAs may also help to improve the school experiences of LGBT students, by increasing access to education and having a positive impact on LGBT students’ academic achievement and aspirations.

School communities should support the formation of GSAs so that all students can learn and pursue an education in a positive and supportive school climate. It is also important to note that GSAs are only one part of what helps to make schools safer for LGBT students and their allies.

As part of a comprehensive safe schools initiative, GSAs can create positive changes in school climate that endure over time, outlasting changes in the student body, faculty or administration.

National GSA Day Media

The first-ever National GSA Day on January 25, 2012 earned nationwide press coverage from prominent media outlets and LGBT organizations.

Let's Celebrate Gay-Straight Alliances!

Huffington Post, Hayley Gorenburg

Gay-straight alliances are student-powered, school-based noncurricular groups associated with **healthier school environments, tolerance, and understanding**. GSAs are also associated with decreased harassment, which is associated with better school engagement and achievement.

Today, on the first National GSA Day, let's move beyond the requirements of a venerable old law. Let's establish, celebrate, and renew climates that respect all our youth and help keep them learning and flourishing in every school.

A Special Message on National Gay-Straight Alliance Day

The White House, Gautam Raghavan

On the first-ever National Gay-Straight Alliance Day, I want to say thank you to all of the student leaders and faculty advisors who are doing the courageous work of making campuses safe places that are free of bullying and harassment.

This day is an opportunity to recognize the importance of Gay-Straight Alliances in schools across America. On behalf of President Obama, I want to thank you for your hard work, your leadership, and your courage. Your work makes a difference – so keep it up.

- Secretary of Education Arne Duncan video transcript

First National Gay-Straight Alliance Day Set for January 25

GSA Network

"Through Gay-Straight Alliance clubs, student leaders across the country are making their schools and communities safer for all young people, and we're proud to see their courageous leadership nationally recognized," remarked Carolyn Laub, Executive Director of GSA Network.

LGBT And Ally Groups Observe National GSA Day

GLAAD

"GSAs regularly demonstrate how students can transform their own school community based upon the principle of respect for difference. Even with the documented benefits of having a GSA in school, some school districts have tried to prevent students from establishing these student clubs. Not only does the school send the wrong message to students, but it is also illegal as outlined under the Federal Equal Access Act."

Celebrating National Gay Straight Alliance Day

Think Progress, Jerome Hunt

LGBT Progress and ThinkProgress are glad to be among the partner organizations that are supporting this day and the work that GSAs are doing all across this nation. For decades, GSAs have been creating safe spaces for all students regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity and have **helped** make schools safer for LGBT students.

GSAs also foster a positive school environment and allowing LGBT to students identify supportive teachers, administrators, and staff, who can positively impact their academic achievements and school experiences.

Franken Tells GSAs He Needs Votes for Anti-Discrimination Measure

The Advocate, Nick Visser

"National GSA Day is a time to celebrate the contributions made by Gay Straight Alliance clubs all over the country," said Franken in a statement sent to The Advocate. "GSA clubs make schools safer and provide a supportive community for LGBT students, who are bullied far more frequently than other students."

First National GSA Day to be held in Springfield

The Rainbow Times

"GSA Day is a time to strengthen the bond between LGBT youth and their straight allies, and also honor these student organizations for what they accomplish," states LGBT Coalition Board Member and event coordinator Emily Scagel. "This day will let students know that they are not alone, and that their work is incredibly beneficial in creating safe environments in schools."

"In light of the many recent suicides in our area, this brave work deserves to be recognized and celebrated," Scagel continued. "This is a crucial step in ending the bullying that is brought about by homophobia and transphobia."

Lynne Conchieri, GSA advisor for the High School of Commerce, knows firsthand how positive an impact GSA clubs have on the students. “Our GSA offers our members unconditional acceptance, friendship, and support. This has created a safe community where all members feel valued and respected.”

On National GSA Day, Tell Congress to Stand Up for LGBT Students

ACLU Washington Legislative Office, Ian S. Thompson

GSAs are student-run extracurricular clubs that bring together LGBT and straight students to support each other, promote acceptance and are common in public school districts throughout the nation. They are crucial to providing a safe, supportive environment for LGBT students to educate the school community about homophobia, gender identity and sexual orientation issues.

National GSA Day is also a powerful reminder of the challenges that continue to confront LGBT students nationwide.

First National Gay-Straight Alliance Day Set for January 25, 2012

GLSEN

“GLSEN is proud to work with the thousands of GSAs across the country, Iowa Pride Network and fellow National GSA Day partners to recognize the tremendous impact these student clubs have on creating safe and affirming learning environments for all students,” said GLSEN Executive Director Dr. Eliza Byard.

Know Your Rights

In public high schools, GSA's can't be discriminated against or held to different standards than other student clubs—it's the law.

High schools that receive federal money and allow other non-curricular student clubs (clubs that don't directly relate to classes at your school) to meet are prohibited from discriminating against any student group based on its viewpoint.

Public high schools are covered by the Federal Equal Access Act if they allow any non-curricular club (even one) to meet at the school.

If your school is covered (most public high schools are), then you have a legal right to form a GSA and a legal right to be treated just like any other student club at your school. So, if other clubs at your school are allowed to post displays on the bulletin boards, make announcements and use classrooms for meetings, your GSA can too.

Many school districts have policies emphasizing that schools can't prohibit student groups from forming just because teachers, parents or others disagree with a group's purpose or topic.

This, too, is the law. If a public school refuses to allow you a GSA—even after being informed of their legal responsibilities, then litigation may be required. In many cases, this is a last resort.

Students are encouraged to use existing channels and procedures to create their GSA.

Working cooperatively with your administration makes it much more likely administrators will learn to value the GSA's presence, leading to easier working relationships in the future. We believe that most teachers and administrators want to do the right thing and what is legally required of them. As some of our students have witnessed, some teachers and administrators are unaware of their legal responsibility, but once informed by students act quickly in accordance with the law.

While suing a school may be the last resort, seeking legal support is not.

If necessary for legal support, seek help by researching the legal issues from organizations such as Lambda Legal or the ACLU. Legal advisors may also be able to provide a letter of support, a basic document informing administrators that a GSA does have a legal right to meet.

(Adapted from Lambda Legal: www.lambdalegal.org and GLSEN: www.glsen.org)

20 USC 4071

TITLE 20--EDUCATION CHAPTER 52--EDUCATION FOR ECONOMIC SECURITY SUBCHAPTER VIII--EQUAL ACCESS

Sec. 4071. Denial of equal access prohibited

(a) Restriction of limited open forum on basis of religious, political, philosophical, or other speech content prohibited

It shall be unlawful for any public secondary school which receives Federal financial assistance and which has a limited open forum to deny equal access or a fair opportunity to, or discriminate against, any students who wish to conduct a meeting within that limited open forum on the basis of the religious, political, philosophical, or other content of the speech at such meetings.

(b) ``Limited open forum" defined

A public secondary school has a limited open forum whenever such school grants an offering to or opportunity for one or more noncurriculum related student groups to meet on school premises during noninstructional time.

(c) Fair opportunity criteria

Schools shall be deemed to offer a fair opportunity to students who wish to conduct a meeting within its limited open forum if such school uniformly provides that--(1) the meeting is voluntary and student-initiated; (2) there is no sponsorship of the meeting by the school, the government, or its agents or employees; (3) employees or agents of the school or government are present at religious meetings only in a nonparticipatory capacity; (4) the meeting does not materially and substantially interfere with the orderly conduct of educational activities within the school; and (5) nonschool persons may not direct, conduct, control, or regularly attend activities of student groups.

(d) Construction of subchapter with respect to certain rights

Nothing in this subchapter shall be construed to authorize the United States or any State or political subdivision thereof--(1) to influence the form or content of any prayer or other religious activity; (2) to require any person to participate in prayer or other religious activity; (3) to expend public funds beyond the incidental cost of providing the space for student-initiated meetings; (4) to compel any school agent or employee to attend a school meeting if the content of the speech at the meeting is contrary to the beliefs of the agent or employee; (5) to sanction meetings that are otherwise unlawful; (6) to limit the rights of groups of students which are not of a specified numerical size; or (7) to abridge the constitutional rights of any person.

(e) Federal financial assistance to schools unaffected

Notwithstanding the availability of any other remedy under the Constitution or the laws of the United States, nothing in this subchapter shall be construed to authorize the United States to deny or withhold Federal financial assistance to any school.

(f) Authority of schools with respect to order, discipline, well-being, and attendance concerns

Nothing in this subchapter shall be construed to limit the authority of the school, its agents or employees, to maintain order and discipline on school premises, to protect the well-being of students and faculty, and to assure that attendance of students at meetings is voluntary.

(Pub. L. 98-377, title VIII, Sec. 802, Aug. 11, 1984, 98 Stat. 1302.)

Short Title

Section 801 of title VIII of Pub. L. 98-377 provided that: ``This title [enacting this subchapter] may be cited as `The Equal Access Act'."

How to Start a Gay-Straight Alliance:

1. Determine if your school is public, private, or religiously affiliated. In most cases, legal protection to form a GSA only applies to public schools and does not apply to religiously affiliated schools. A parochial school opposed to homosexuality can probably deny formation of a GSA, because they are a private organization. For those schools, you can only try to change the prevailing culture by educating the leaders on LGBT issues.

2. Follow Guidelines: Establish a GSA the same way you would establish any other group or club. Look in your Student Handbook for the rules at your school. This may include getting permission from an administrator, finding an advisor, and/or writing a constitution.

3. Document the steps you are taking to create a GSA. Write down dates, times, and names of teachers who you had met with and what was discussed. We highly encourage all students to work cooperatively with their school in forming a GSA. However, if you feel they are resisting or are making you jump through extra hoops that other student groups don't have to go through—contact your local ACLU chapter (see page 26)!

4. Find a Faculty Advisor: Find a teacher or staff member whom you think would be supportive or who has already shown themselves to be an ally around sexual orientation issues. It could be a teacher, counselor, nurse, or librarian.

5. Inform Administration of Your Plans: Tell administrators what you are doing right away. It can be very helpful to have an administrator on your side. They can work as liaisons on your behalf with other teachers, parent groups, community members, and the school board. If an administrator is resistant to the GSA, let them know that forming a GSA club is protected under the Federal Equal Access Act (see page 24). If they still refuse you, contact your local or state ACLU chapter (see page 26).

6. Inform Guidance Counselors and Social Workers About The Group: These individuals may know students who would be interested in attending the group.

7. Pick a Meeting Place: You may want to find a meeting place which is off the beaten track at school and offers some level of privacy or confidentiality.

8. Advertise: Figure out the best way to advertise at your school. It may be a combination of school bulletin announcements, flyers, and word-of-mouth. If your flyers are defaced or torn down, do not be discouraged. Keep putting them back up. Eventually, whoever is tearing them down will give up. Besides, advertising for your group and having words up such as "gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning" or "end homophobia" or "discuss sexual orientation" can be part of educating the school and can actually make other students feel safer -- even if they never attend a single meeting.

9. Get Food: This one is kind of obvious. People always come to meetings when you provide food!

10. Hold Your Meeting! You may want to start out with a discussion about why people feel having this group is important. You can also brainstorm things your club would like to do this year.

11. Establish Ground Rules: Many groups have ground rules in order to insure that group discussions are safe, confidential, and respectful. Many groups have a ground rule that no assumptions or labels are used about a group member's sexual orientation. This can help make straight allies feel comfortable about attending the club.

12. Plan For The Future:

Develop an action plan. Brainstorm activities. Set goals for what you want to work towards. Then, get connected to other GSA's in your area and in your state!

Resources

The following national organizations can provide you with ideas, information, and support in discussing LGBTQA issues, forming or improving your GSA, and dealing with discrimination and resistance. For local and state and national resources, visit [gsaday.org](http://www.gsaday.org).

American Civil Liberties Union

The ACLU is our nation's guardian of liberty, working daily in courts, legislatures and communities to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties that the Constitution and laws of the United States guarantee everyone in this country. <http://www.aclu.org/lgbt-rights/youth-schools>

Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)

GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students. <http://www.glsen.org/>

Campus Pride

Campus Pride represents the only national nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization for student leaders and campus groups working to create a safer college environment for LGBT students. The organization is a volunteer-driven network "for" and "by" student leaders. The primary objective of Campus Pride is to develop necessary resources, programs and services to support LGBT and ally students on college campuses across the United States.

<http://www.campuspride.org>

Lambda Legal Defense & Education

Lambda Legal is a national organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people and those with HIV through impact litigation, education and public policy work.

<http://www.lambdalegal.org/>

National Sponsors

In its inaugural year, National GSA Day experienced incredible support from organizations nationwide in advancing the celebration. The following nine national organizations sponsored National GSA Day and assisted in its success:

Campus Pride

Campus Pride represents the only national nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization for student leaders and campus groups working to create a safer college environment for LGBT students.

Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)

GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students.

Gay-Straight Alliance Network

Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA Network) is a national youth leadership organization that empowers youth activists to fight homophobia and transphobia in schools by training student leaders and supporting student-led Gay-Straight Alliance clubs throughout the country.

Make it Better Project

GSA Network launched the Make It Better Project to let students, parents, teachers, school administrators, and adult allies know that there are concrete actions they can take right now to make schools safer for all students.

The Matthew Shepard Foundation

The Matthew Shepard Foundation was founded by Dennis and Judy Shepard in memory of their 21-year old son, Matthew, who was murdered in an anti-gay hate crime in Wyoming in October 1998.

The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)

The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) amplifies the voice of the LGBT community by empowering real people to share their stories, holding the media accountable for the words and images they present, and helping grassroots organizations communicate effectively.

Think Progress (Center for American Progress)

LGBT Progress, housed at the Center for American Progress, works to expand LGBT legal, social, and economic equality through timely policy analysis, and rapid-response communications.

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) is the original ally organization. Made up of parents, families, friends, and straight allies uniting with LGBT people, PFLAG is committed to advancing equality through its mission of support, education and advocacy.

The Trevor Project

The Trevor Project is here for young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning people to help whenever you or a friend might need to talk to someone, or if you are considering suicide. With lifesaving programs and information, The Trevor Project works every day to make the future better for all LGBTQ youth.