

PEACE POWER TOOLS

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Gay-Straight Alliances

Summary:

Gay-Straight Alliances are student initiated and student run school-based support groups for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, queer, questioning, and heterosexual students. There is growing evidence that students in schools with GSAs rate the level of school safety, tolerance, and atmosphere with respect to sexual minority students higher than students in schools without GSAs. GSAs have been established in many high schools across the nation and are growing in popularity in middle schools as well.

Resources Needed:

- None

Implementation Steps:

- Because a primary goal of GSAs is to protect students, it is important that students that decide to initiate GSAs have one or more teacher allies and role models. In addition, students should work with school administrators to ensure that school policy and curriculum adequately addresses inclusion, respect, anti-discrimination, anti-gay bullying, and anti harassment.
- Students and supportive staff should examine school rules (i.e. student handbook) for guidelines on how to establish a school club or organization. This may include getting permission from a school administrator, finding an advisor (teacher, counselor, nurse, or librarian) and/or writing a constitution.
- Find a faculty advisor who has proven to be an ally surrounding sexual orientation issues.
- Inform the school administration of plans. Administrators are important liaisons between teachers, parents, school board and community members. If administrators show resistance to forming a GSA inform them that GSA formation is protected under the Federal Equal Access act.
- Inform guidance counselors and social workers because they may know of students who would be interested in joining your group, and can provide important support among staff.
- Establish a GSA meeting place that is both private and confidential.
- Announce GSA meetings using a combination of school bulletins, flyers and word of mouth. It is possible that flyers will be torn down, but don't be discouraged! Just post more!
- Host meetings and be sure to provide food!
- Establish ground rules so that group discussions are safe for all participants regardless of sexual orientation.
- Plan for the future by developing an action plan that includes goals, activities, and opportunities to network with other GSAs.

Variations:

- None

Rational and Evidence Base:

High rates of sexual prejudice and heterosexism are associated with physical violence, psychological stress, low school performance, and drop out among sexual minority students. In the last decade, the establishment of GSAs has emerged as the flagship tool used to help eliminate violence against sexual minority students. When compared to three other

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approaches to support safe schools for gay and lesbian students programming (personnel training, anti-gay/lesbian school policy, and family counseling), the presence of a GSA is the strongest predictor of school safety for minorities of sexual orientation. There is also evidence that the presence of GSAs leads to higher school safety ratings among heterosexual students. However, research shows that GSA establishment goes hand in hand with personnel training and changes to and/or enforcement of school policy surrounding respect, inclusion, and anti-violence associated with sexual orientation.

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