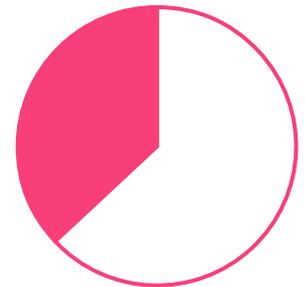


Student-Led Clubs (GSAs)

LGBTQ-focused student-led, school-based clubs (often called gay-straight alliances, or genders and sexualities alliances, i.e., GSAs), are organizations composed of students and advisors that operate like other student extracurricular clubs. In GSAs, LGBTQ students and non-LGBTQ student allies work together to promote social inclusion and a positive school climate for LGBTQ and all students. In 2014, GSAs were established in over 37% of high schools in the United States, with growing numbers in middle schools (17%) and elementary schools (5%).²⁷



37% of U.S. high schools in 2014 established GSAs.



Not all GSAs are the same. Depending on the climate of a school or on students' needs, objectives and activities may significantly vary. GSAs may be involved in a range of activities, including providing a platform for education and safety, interpersonal support, leadership development, school-wide advocacy training, and recreational activities.^{28,29}

HOW CAN STUDENTS START A GSA IN THEIR SCHOOL?

GSAs can rely on the support of national nonprofit organizations, such as GSA Network and GLSEN, or local GSA networks such as Texas GSA Network that assist students in the creation and implementation of their GSAs. These organizations provide useful resources that GSA members and advisors can use to make their clubs more effective.

GSA NETWORK

 gsanetwork.org

GLSEN

 glsen.org

TEXAS GSA NETWORK

 texasgsanetwork.org

CAN GSAS BE PROHIBITED IN SCHOOLS?

In general, some schools and school personnel believe that GSAs can be prohibited in schools, or may treat them differently from other student clubs and organizations. However, under federal law, a school that permits non-curricular student-led clubs may not prohibit students from forming a GSA. Students have clear legal rights to form GSAs and to use school facilities during non-instructional time.

To learn more visit:

ACLU GSA RESOURCE GUIDE

 aclu.org/other/how-start-gay-straight-alliance-gsa

NATIONAL GSA NETWORK

 gsanetwork.org

THE BENEFITS OF GSAS APPLY TO ALL STUDENTS

An important and consistent research finding is that participating in a GSA benefits students. Specifically, GSA participation is linked to academic performance (higher grade point average),^{30,31} more school belonging,³⁰ and feeling safe at school.³² More recent studies suggest that the positive impact of GSAs on their members may be influenced by several different factors, including the type and amount of students' participation, and also by characteristics of GSA advisors, such as how much time they have served as an advisor and their perceptions of support from the school.³³

It makes sense that GSAs would make a difference for their members. However, research also consistently shows that regardless of GSA membership, simply having a GSA at school is linked to a number of benefits for LGBT^{13,19,34,37,38,9,31} and heterosexual students.³⁸⁻⁴⁰ In a national survey of LGBT students in high schools, those in schools with GSAs reported less homophobic language, less bullying based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and a greater sense of belonging to their school environment.⁹

A statewide study³⁸ in Massachusetts from more than 15 years ago found that in schools with GSAs, 52% of students reported that school personnel were supportive of LGB students compared to only 37% of students in schools without GSAs. The same study found that 75% of students in schools without GSAs reported anti-gay slurs every day compared to 57% of students in schools with GSAs.³⁸ In addition to these influences on school-related factors, another growing line of research has shown the connection between having a GSA at school and better mental health and health behavior for LGBT students, including reductions in smoking, drinking and drug use, sex with casual partners,^{40,41} psychological distress and depressive symptoms,^{36,42} suicidal ideation and behavior,^{13,39,42-45} and increased self-esteem.^{42,46}

For example, in a study of 245 LGBT young adults, those who said that they had a GSA at their school when they were teens had higher self-esteem, less depression, and less lifetime suicide attempts compared to those that didn't have GSAs.⁴² Another recent study was the first to examine the role of GSAs by following LGB and questioning students over time: It showed that having a GSA was associated with decreasing homophobic bullying and increasing feelings of safety one year later.³² Finally, a new statistical review of all published studies of GSAs (a "meta-analysis") showed that, across studies, LGBT students with GSAs in their schools are 30% less likely to be victimized and 36% more likely to feel safe compared to LGBT students in schools without GSAs.⁴⁷

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✔ Professional education associations (e.g., the Texas Classroom Teachers Association, or the Texas Association of School Administrators) should raise awareness of GSAs and other student organizations that support LGBTQ and other marginalized students, and provide training and support to school personnel.
- ✔ School personnel should:
 - Identify and eliminate barriers to the formation and operation of GSAs, and treat them like any other student organization or club.
 - Seek training on how to support GSAs.
 - Provide resources and support to GSAs and other student organizations.
- ✔ Students can advocate for, start, and participate in GSAs in their schools.

DOWNLOAD THE FULL POLICY BRIEF, INCLUDING END NOTES THAT PERTAIN TO THIS SECTION



storiesandnumbers.org/stories-and-numbers-policy-brief-full-report.pdf

