



Implementing and Supporting Gay-Straight Alliances

February 3, 2012

Agenda

- **Introductions**
- **What is a GSA?**
- **Statistics/Rationale/Research**
- **The GSA Advisor**
- **GSA Jump Start Guide**
- **GSAASEM Youth Panel**
- **Resources**
- **Conclusion/Questions**

Introductions

- Tracy Hobbs
- Jane Kelley
- Julia LeBrell

GLSEN & GLSEN Southeast Michigan

The Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN) believes that addressing anti-LGBT bias in schools make schools safer for all students, regardless of sexual orientation and / or gender identity and / or expression.

GLSEN welcomes participation from a diverse group of individuals, in education and out, LGBT and other allies interested in supporting students.

GLSEN Southeast Michigan (SEMI) is an local, all volunteer chapter affiliate of GLSEN National

So, what exactly is a
“GSA”?

Gay/Straight Alliance

A **Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA)** is a *student lead & student organized club* that aims to create a safe, welcoming environment for all youth, regardless of sexual orientation

Why the name, “gay-straight alliance?”

It exemplifies the purpose of the club: to build bridges among students of all sexual orientation and gender identity, whether they identify as gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual, transgender

... or anything else!



What is a GSA?

A Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) is a student-run club, typically in a high school or middle school, which provides a safe place for students to meet, support each other, talk about issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and work to end homophobia and transphobia.

There are three typical functions of a GSA club:

✦ Support ✦ Social ✦ Activism

GSA's Provide Support

Many GSAs function as a support group, providing safety and confidentiality to students struggling with their identity or are experiencing harassment at school.

These groups often provide one of the few safe spaces for students to express themselves.

GSAs Build Community

GSAs serve as a social group.

- They provide a sense of community for LGBTQ and straight ally youth
- They build a social network where their identity is *respected*
- They organize events outside of school, like movie nights, field trips, barbecues
- Some GSAs partake in local Pride events



GSAs build community within their schools, lessening the feeling of isolation that LGBTQ students may otherwise experience.

GSAs Create Change

Some GSAs work to educate themselves and their school community about sexual orientation and gender identity issues.

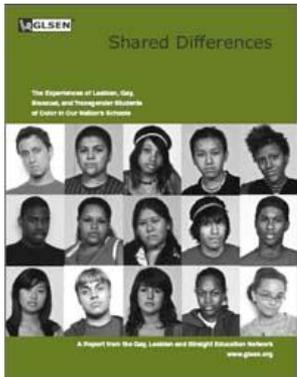
- They bring in outside speakers to cover LGBT related issues
- They may organize educational workshops

Some GSAs even organize “Teach the Teachers” staff development days – focusing on teaching staff how to be better allies to LGBTQ students .

Rationale, Research, Statistics

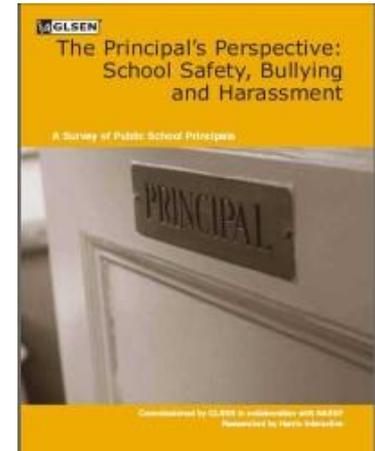
GLSEN's Research Department supports the organization's mission by conducting original research, making evaluations of GLSEN programs and initiatives, and creating resources that document anti-LGBT bias in education (K-12 schools).

They have published a wide range of articles relating to bullying and school climate, and can be downloaded for free from the national website (glsen.org).

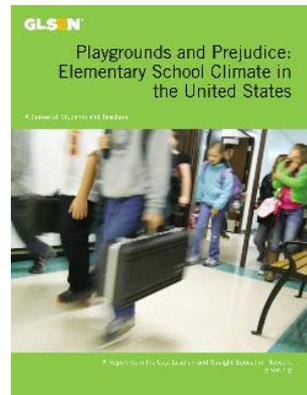


Shared Differences Examines LGBT Students of Color Experiences in School (2009)

The Principal's Perspective: School Safety, Bullying and Harassment (2008)



GLSEN Releases Groundbreaking Study of Bias, Bullying and Homophobia in Grades K-6 (2012)



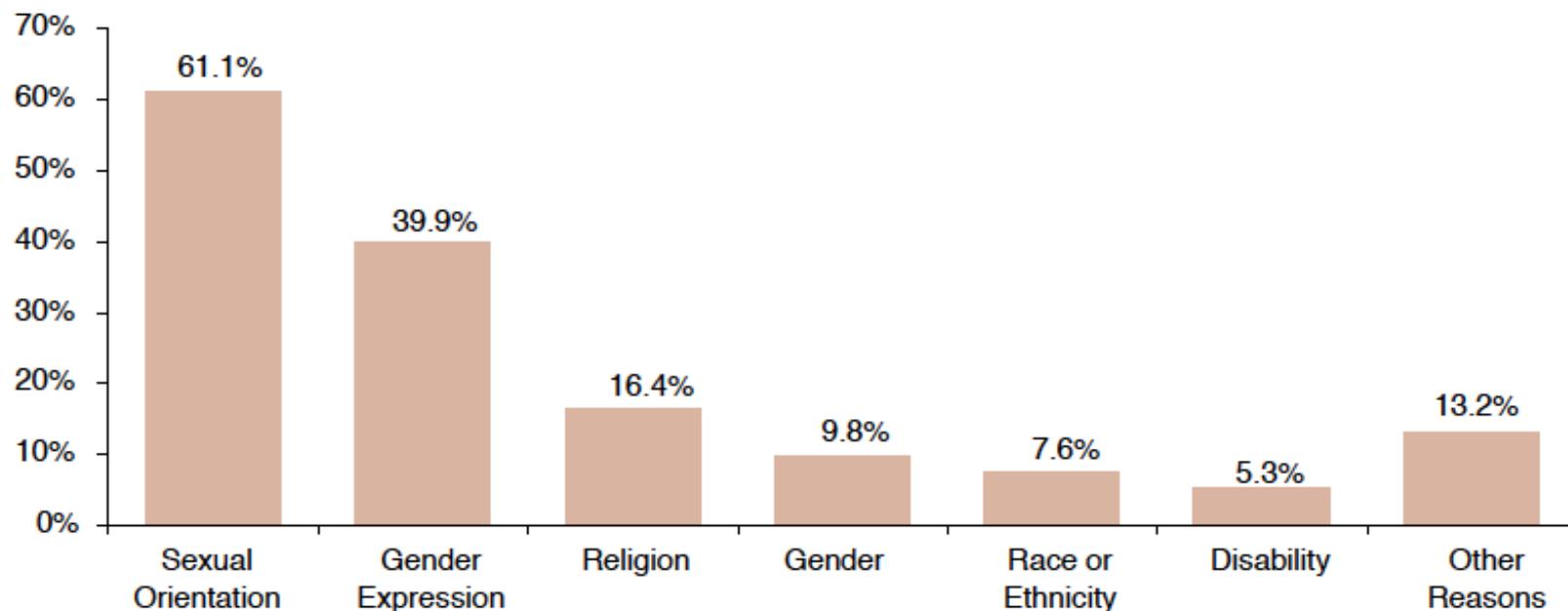
GLSEN 2009 National School Climate Survey



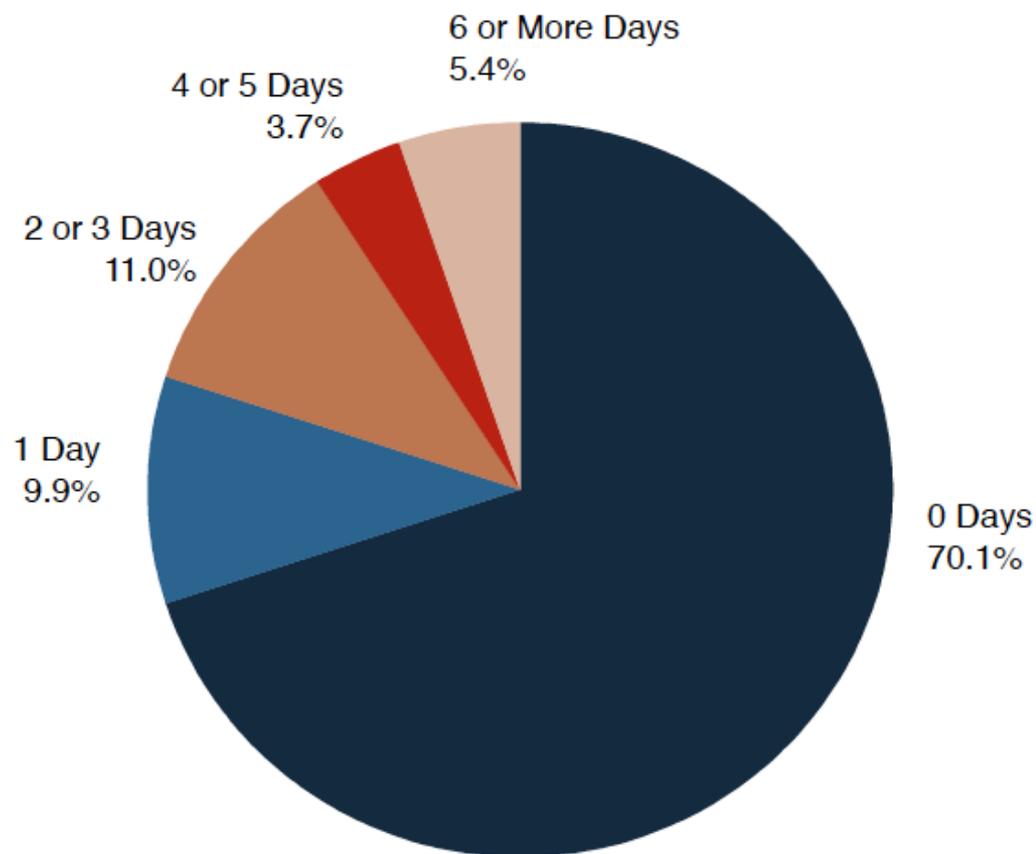
2009 National School Climate Survey: Nearly 9 out of 10 LGBT Students Experience Harassment in School (2010)

Key Findings on the Experience of
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and
Transgender Youth in Our Nation's
Schools

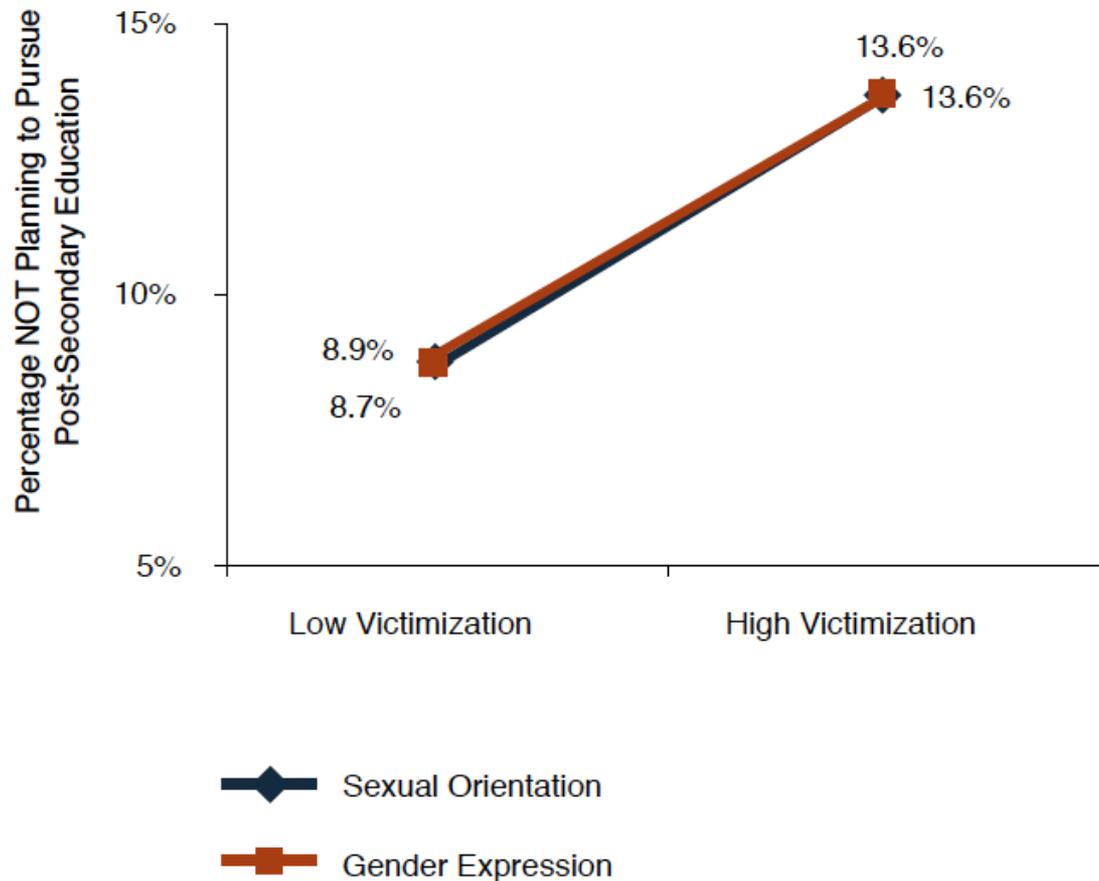
Percentage of Students Who Felt Unsafe at School Because of a Personal Characteristic



Frequency of Missing Days of School in the Past Month Because of Feeling Unsafe or Uncomfortable

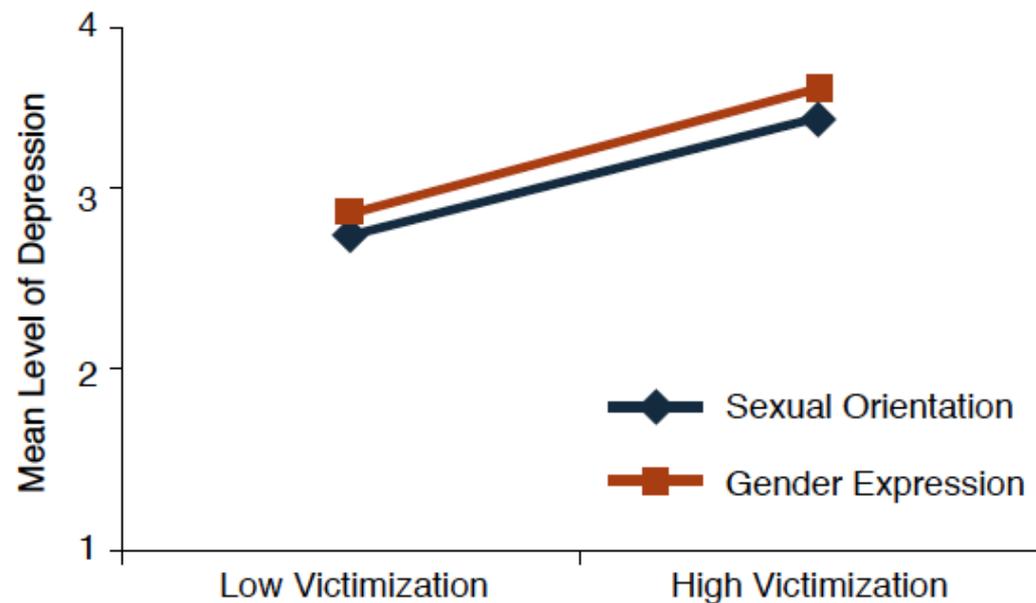


Lowered Educational Aspirations and Severity of Victimization



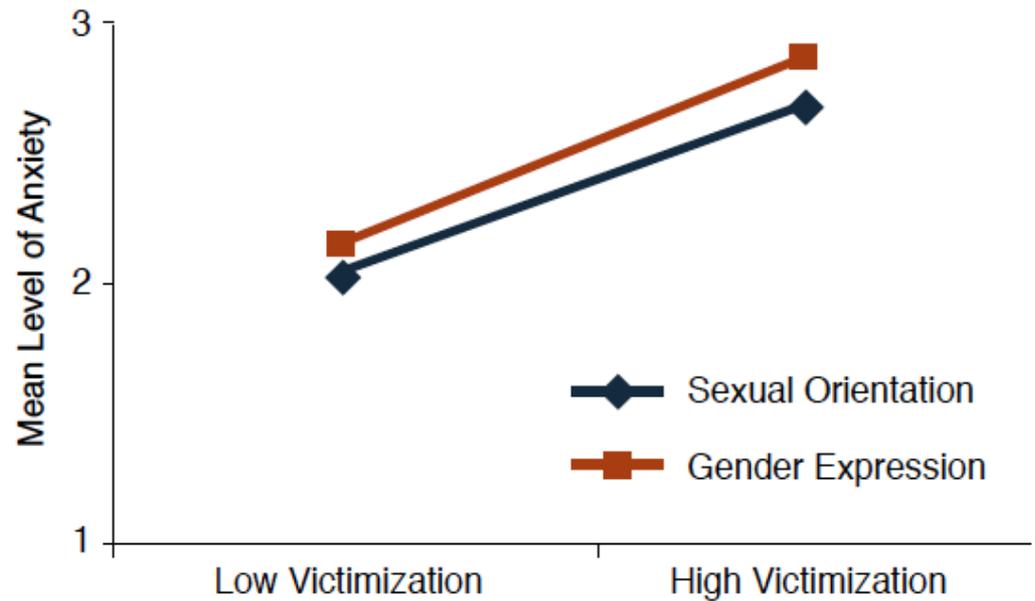
Relationship between Depression and Victimization

Increased levels of victimization were related to increased levels of depression.



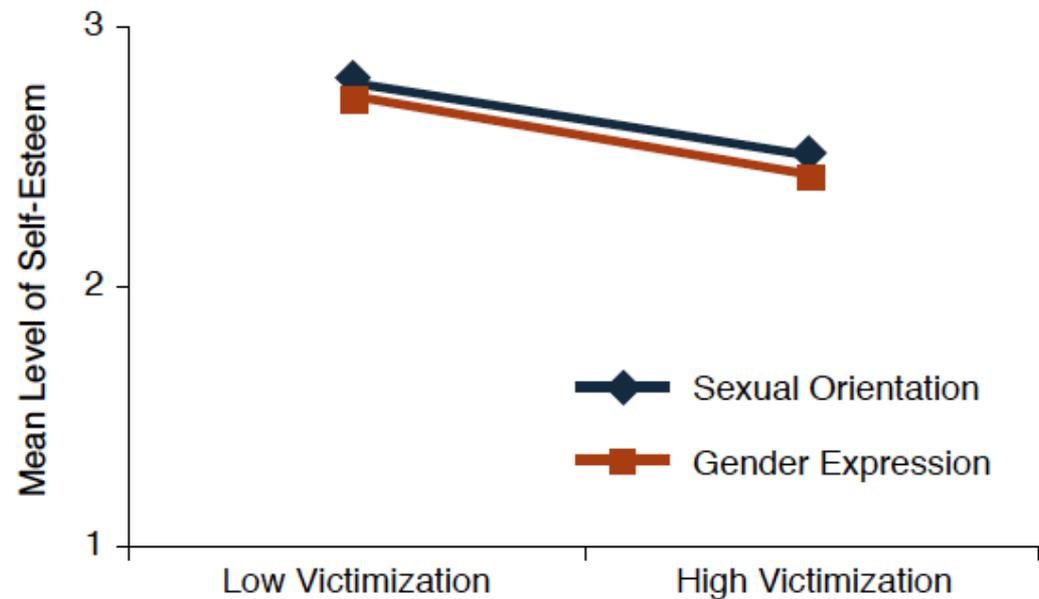
Relationship between Anxiety and Victimization

Increased levels of victimization were related to increased levels of anxiety.

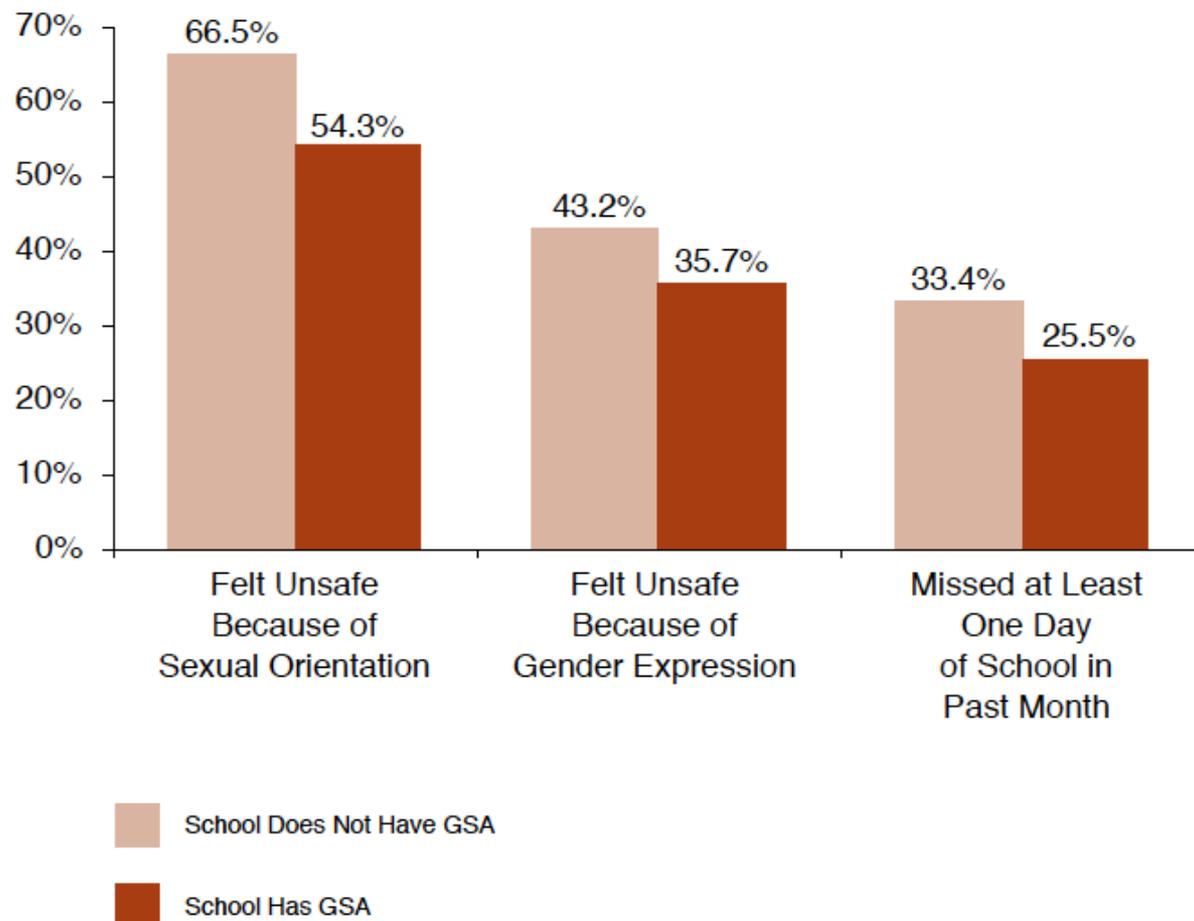


Relationship between Self-Esteem and Victimization

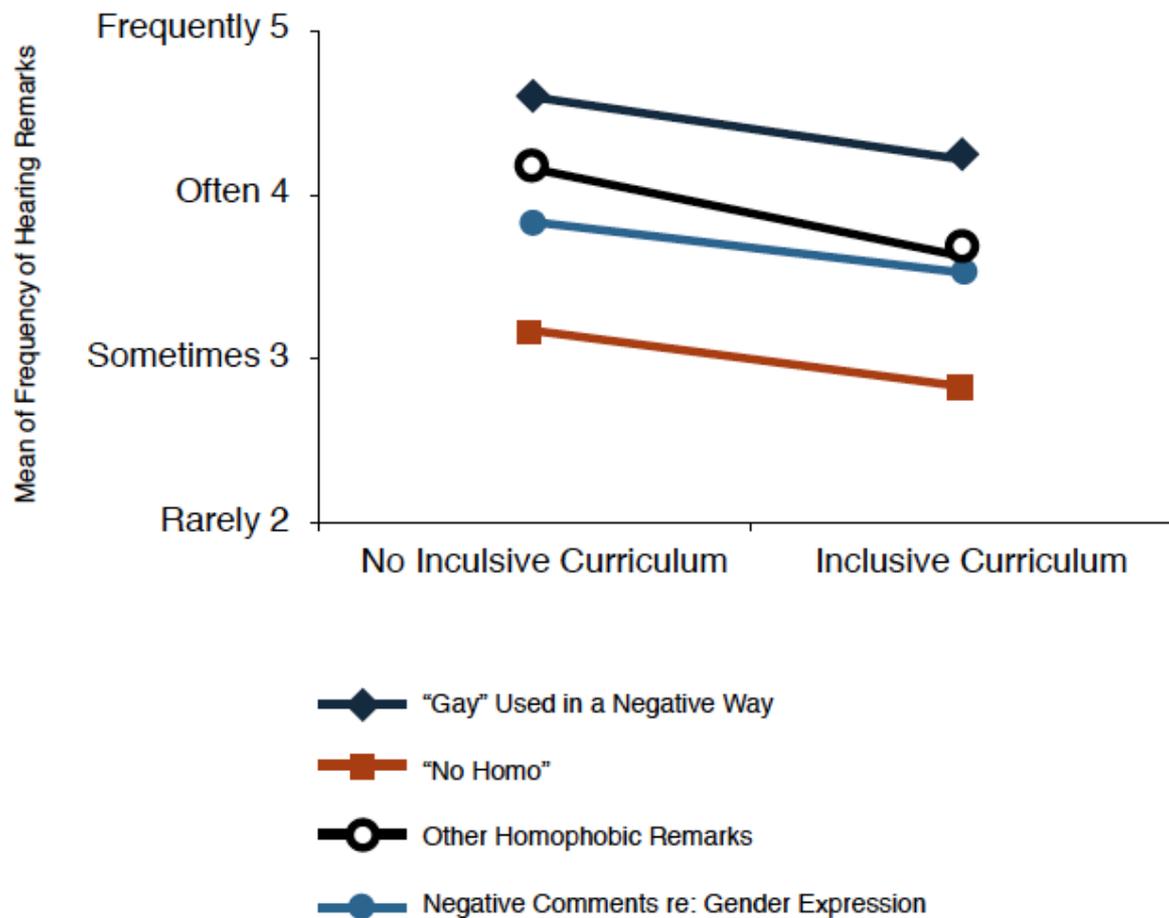
Increased levels of victimization were related to decreased levels of self-esteem.



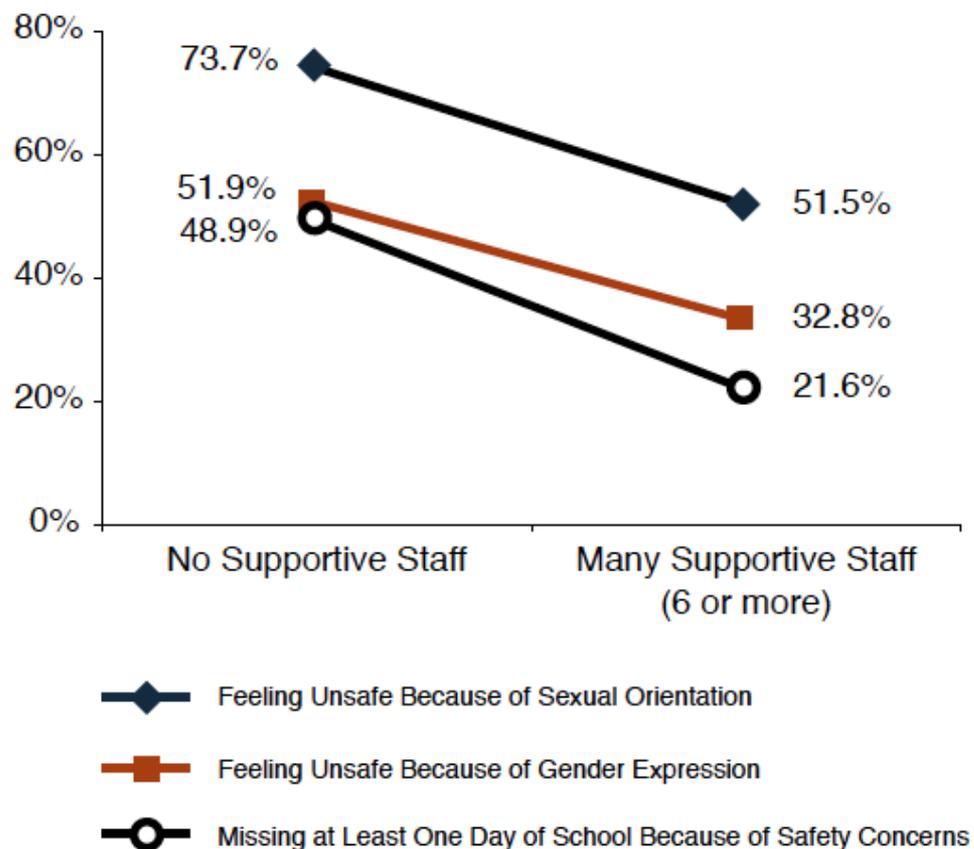
Presence of Gay-Straight Alliances and Feelings of Safety and Missing School



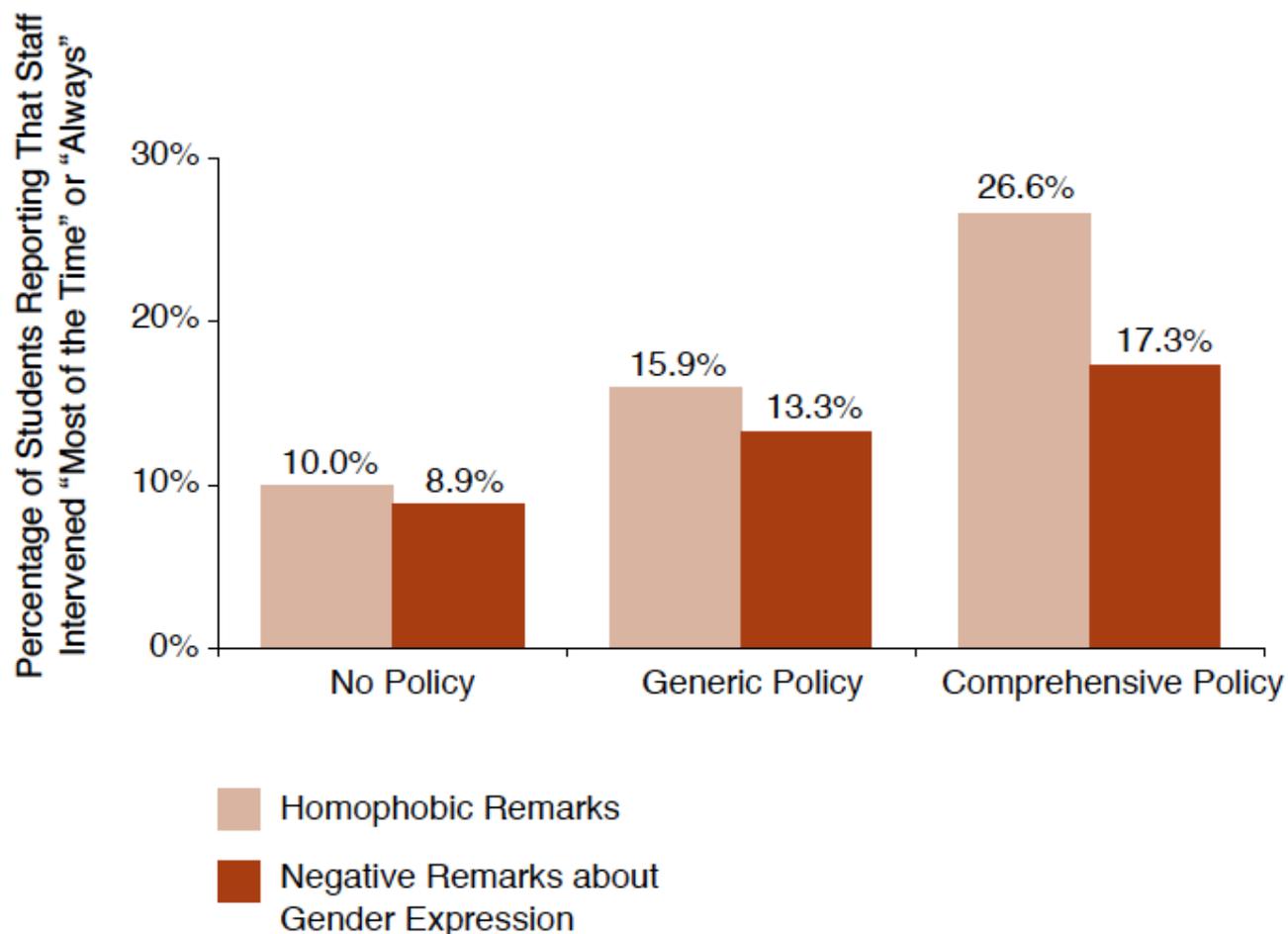
Inclusive Curriculum and Frequency of Hearing Biased Remarks



Feelings of Safety and Missing School and Number of Supportive School Staff



Staff Intervention with Biased Remarks by Type of School Harassment/Assault Policy



Rationale, Research, Statistics

Study: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Youth at Schools with Gay-Straight Alliances Have Better Mental Health

New research has found that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth who attend middle or high schools with Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) have better mental health as young adults, are less likely to drop out of high school, and more likely to attend college. Published in the current issue of *Applied Developmental Science*, this is the first study to show that GSA participation is related to long-term benefits. The study, *High School Gay–Straight Alliances (GSAs) and Young Adult Well-Being*, is based on data from the Family Acceptance Project’s survey of LGBT young adults, which examined the school-related experiences of 245 LGBT young adults, ages 21 to 25.

Noted co-author Stephen T. Russell: “This study adds to the mounting evidence that youth-led clubs are important for healthy development – especially for youth at risk. For LGBT youth, high school gay-straight alliances make a significant positive difference.”

Toomey, R. B., Ryan, C., Diaz, R. M., & Russell, S. T. (2011). High school gay-straight alliances (GSAs) and young adult well-being: An examination of GSA presence, participation, and perceived effectiveness. *Applied Developmental Science*, 15(4),1-11.

The GSA Advisor

Considerations for a GSA Advisor

The GSA must be student lead

- Student members drive the mission
- Students should run the group, you advise
- Help students address other things you see as important

Make sure your GSA is sustainable.

- Making sure your club is inclusive of all students is important
- Watch for intra-group conflicts and bullying
- Set a few big goals, both fun and action based; but don't over extend your group
- Meet frequently enough to create a sense of cohesion within the group
- Make sure your group has a consistent space

Create a sense of community within your school

- Build a supportive network of adults within the school environment
- Publicize meetings to school wide audience
- Collaborate with other like school clubs

Things you Might Hear/ Top 10 Reasons Why Your School Doesn't Need A GSA

10. "Our school environment is already inclusive"
9. "We already have a diversity club"/ "We already have an anti-bullying club"
8. "Gay is just a phase"/ "Kids are not ready to make this choice"
7. "The parents will complain" / "The community won't support it"
6. "A GSA is just a club about sex"
5. "GSAs recruit kids and make them gay"
4. "The kids who join will be teased"
3. "The Board of Education will never agree to this!"
2. "Our school will get a bad name"
1. "We don't have any gay kids at our school"

What advisors need to know: Important Legal Information

Any school that receives government funding and has at least one non-curricular club must allow a GSA.

The **Federal Equal Access Act** states that

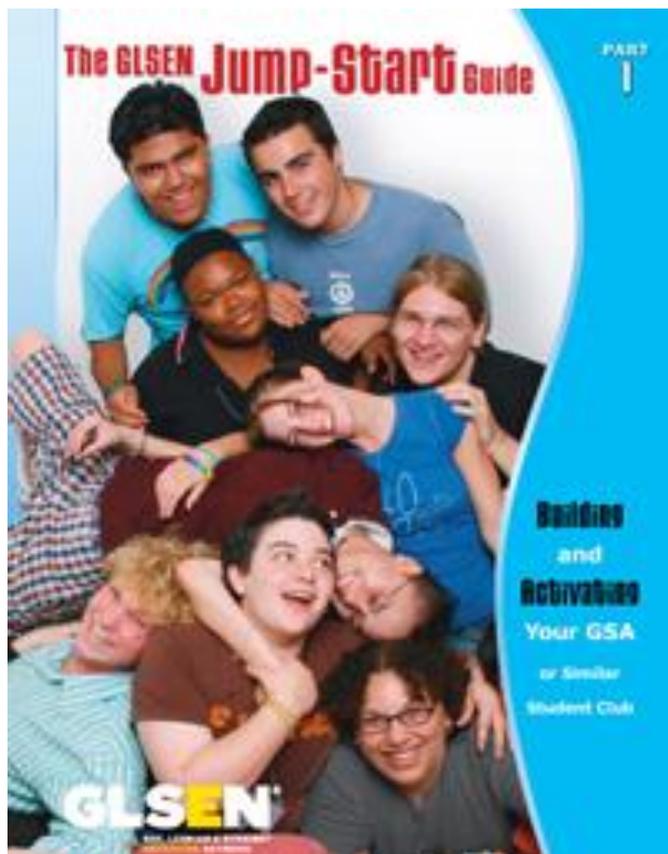
"It shall be unlawful for any public secondary school which receives Federal financial assistance...to deny equal access or a fair opportunity to, or discriminate against, any students who wish to conduct a meeting ...on the basis of the religious, political, philosophical, or other content of the speech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

The law also says that your school must treat all clubs the same and let them use school resources in the same way.

If your school let's other clubs meet in classrooms, put up posters and organize school events, then they have to let your GSA do the same.

GLSEN Jump-Start Guide for GSAs

GLSEN Jump-Start Guide



An 8 part guide that can be downloaded from glsen.org to guide the organization and set-up of your GSA

Part 1: Building and Activating Your GSA or Similar Student Club

Part 2: Tips and Tools for Organizing an Action Campaign

Part 3: Strategies for Training Teachers

Part 4: Understanding Direct-Action Organizing

Part 5: Examining Power, Privilege and Oppression

Part 6: Creating Youth-Adult Partnerships

Part 7: Making Your Student Club Trans-Inclusive

Part 8: Evaluation, Continuation, Celebration

Part 1: Building and Activating Your GSA or Similar Student Club - 10 Steps

1. Follow School Guidelines for Club Formation
2. Find a Faculty / Teacher Advisor
3. Find other Students
4. Inform Administration
5. Pick a Meeting Place
6. Advertise
7. Plan Your Meeting
8. Hold Your Meeting
9. Establish Ground Rules
10. Plan for the Future

Everyone
should have
the opportunity
to contribute to
a discussion of
what **safety,**
focus, fun
and respect
actually look like

What To Expect

1. Like any other club, this is an opportunity for students to gain organizational and leadership skills.
2. Group Agreements or Ground Rules set up at the beginning of the meeting will give a structure of respect and cooperation within the group.
3. Assist students to determine why they are at the meetings and where their priorities lie.
4. Although having a peer leadership team is important, encourage facilitation rather than presentation in the meetings.
5. Help students write a Mission Statement.
6. If you make a commitment to meet with the students, make sure you honor that. There are other ways to be allies if you do not have the time to devote to being advisor.
7. It is rewarding to see the students become empowered within their school.



10 Tips for Running an Effective Meeting

Sample Meeting Agenda

Welcome and check-in
Icebreaker: Common Ground
Review minutes
Goal-setting for this year
Plan upcoming activities:
• Ally Week - October
• Transgender Day of Remembrance - November
• Martin Luther King Jr. Organizing Weekend - January
• Day of Silence - April
Presentation by guest speaker
Working with Diversity Center and other clubs
Reports from committees
New business
Debrief

1. Opening every meeting with a check-in
2. Have a few minutes to de-brief at the end of the meeting
3. After the check in, start off with a quick game, icebreaker, or physical activity
4. Remain conscious of people's participation
5. If you are having trouble coming up with a consensus, decide on two or three different options and experiment with them over the next weeks
6. Decide on a strategy for handling individual breeches of the group's ground rules
7. Document your meetings
8. The advisor should participate as an equal
9. Start and end meetings on time
- 10. Provide Snacks**

Working Agreements

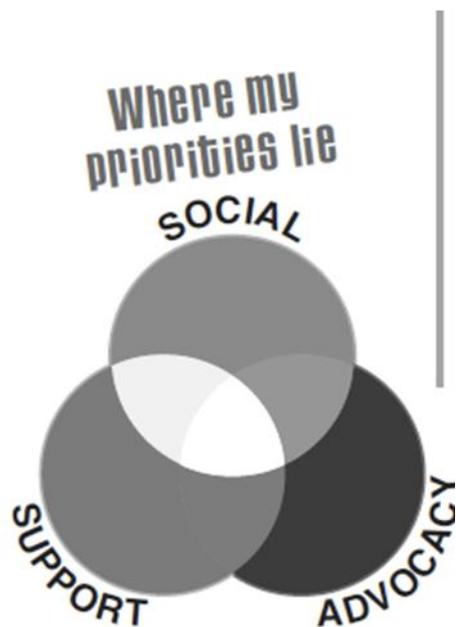
Working agreements set a clear and positive tone that allows students to interact comfortably and safely with each other.

Examples:

- Respect Others
- Speak from the I
- Be Open to New Ideas
- Ask Questions
- Respect Confidentiality
- Step-up, Step-back
- Respect Commitments

Hang your
list of
**Working
Agreements**
in a
Visible spot
to remind
everyone of their
commitments

Why Am I Here? Setting Priorities



To determine the motivation of your GSA's participants

- Use large group brainstorming sessions
- Use large and small group discussion

Using consensus or voting, decide on the goals of the group.

Writing a Mission Statement

Your GSA's Mission Statement should lead your group's efforts in planning its goals and projects.

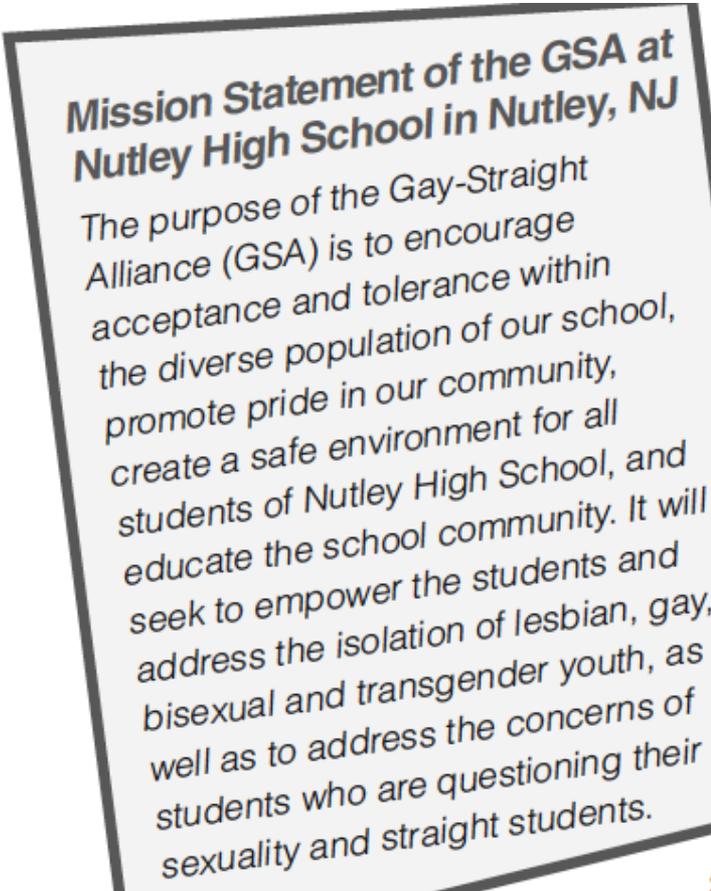
The mission statement should answer these questions:

Who are we?

What do we stand for?

What do we do?

How do we do it?



Mission Statement of the GSA at Nutley High School in Nutley, NJ

The purpose of the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) is to encourage acceptance and tolerance within the diverse population of our school, promote pride in our community, create a safe environment for all students of Nutley High School, and educate the school community. It will seek to empower the students and address the isolation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth, as well as to address the concerns of students who are questioning their sexuality and straight students.

Organizing Your Leadership

Understanding
participants'
**motivations
and
aspirations**
will help your
group set
**common
goals**

- Using both Large Group Brainstorming and Group Discussion come up with a list of what makes an effective leader.
- Determine if a fixed leadership or rotating leadership is the best fit for your group.
- Discuss your groups leadership needs related to your goals and priorities.
- Utilizing Consensus or Election, select a leadership for your group.

Finding New Members

- Publicity, coalition building and visible action help build membership.

- Designate leadership positions.

- Find out what new members strengths are and where their interests lie immediately.

Publicity,
coalitions
and **Visible**
actions can
expand your
group's
membership

- Involve new members in all aspects of your group meeting including leadership during activities.

- Send members to trainings and conferences.

- Remember: current members are your future group leaders.

Assessing Your School's Climate

Creating a School Climate Survey for your school is a way to assess how often students hear anti-LGBT, racist and sexist remarks within your own school.

- The survey is available online.
- Your administration must be involved.
- Active or Passive permission may be required.
- The survey **must** be distributed to all students, not just LGBT.
- Report your findings to school community.

Sample Survey Questions

- How often do you hear the expression "That's so gay" or "You're so gay" in school?
- In the past month, how many times have you skipped a class because you felt uncomfortable or unsafe in that class?
- When you hear racist remarks at your school, how often does another student intervene?
- When sexist remarks are made at your school and a teacher or other school staff person is present, how often does the teacher or staff person intervene?

Identify Anti-LGBT Bias at Your School

Schools climates can be Hostile, Resistant, Passive, or Inclusive.

- Knowing your school climate helps you identify your goals and other groups for collaboration.
- Being informed guides your direction and allows you to track you effectiveness.

Imagine how
much **more**
effective
your work will
be if you can tell
administrators
exactly
where your
school needs
improvement

Appendix of Jump-Start Guide

Awesome **Activities** and **Icebreakers**

Guidelines for Active Listening

Running an Effective Meeting

The **Five Practices** and **Ten Commitments**
of **Leadership**

10 Cool Tips for **Finding New Members**

School Climate outlines

GSAASEM Panel

GSAASEM Panel

Introductions:

Facilitator:

Julia LeBrell

Panelists:

Chase

Dylan

Gabi

Heather

Lia

Mairen

Sabrina

GSAASEM Panel

Panel Questions:

1. How did you start your GSA/keep your GSA going?
2. What obstacles did you have getting started? (Administration, Advisors, Students)
3. What's your GSA's structure? (social, support, advocacy)
4. How has it responded to the needs of its members?
5. What are some positive experiences that have come from being part of a GSA?
6. What are some negative experiences and have you been able to resolve them?
7. Have you experienced any changes in your school climate since starting/joining your GSA?
8. Does your school have an anti-bullying policy? If so, what is it?
9. Has your advisor experienced any consequences/pushback from other staff/administration/students?

GSAASEM Panel

Contact Information for GSA Alliance of
Southeast Michigan

Facebook: GSA Alliance of Southeast Michigan

Website: lgbtsummit.weebly.com

Gsa.alliance.sem@gmail.com

Resources

Resources:

GLSEN National

glsen.org

GLSEN Southeast Michigan

glsen.org/southeastmichigan

Email:

glsensemi@gmail.com

Phone:

248-716-0106

Address:

1511 Jarvis #2

Ferndale, MI 48220

GSA Alliance of Southeast Michigan

lgbtsummit.weebly.com

Email:

gsa.alliance.sem@gmail.com

Jump Start Guide for GSAs

[http://www.glsen.org/cgi-](http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/news/record/2226.html)

[bin/iowa/all/news/record/2226.html](http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/news/record/2226.html)

Conclusion and Questions

