Equity and Inclusive Education Resource Kit for
Newfoundland and Labrador, Grades 7 -12

GSA GUIDE

diversity =
possibility

GSA GUIDE

STRATEGIES FOR STARTING A GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCE (GSA) OR OTHER LGBTQ-INCLUSIVE STUDENT GROUP

Sometimes starting a GSA can be a challenge, but you're not alone! Many GSAs have been successfully running for years and you can learn a great deal from the experiences of their members.

Here are 10 basic steps to help you form your school's club:

Contents cont'd

Assess whether or not you feel there will be any obstacles in developing a GSA at your school. If you think there will be opposition, who will oppose?

Check out the "School Climate Questions" and "School Climate Outlines" adapted from the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network's Jump-Start Guide (*starting on page 10*). Where does your school fit in?

For responses to parental objections, see "Answering Adults' Concerns" from Around the Rainbow (*on page 18*).

To find suggestions for potential allies, see Egale's "Becoming an Ally" (*on page 20*). This might be useful to share with students or teachers in your school who do not identify as LGBTQ.

Prepare yourself by thinking about possible allies. Which teachers, students, school staff members, including librarians, guidance counsellors, and administrators do you think will be strong supporters of your group?

What is your school's demographic? How might you reach out to all students in your school community?

You are not required to have a reason for starting a GSA, but it never hurts to have some rationale for why you want one. Ask yourself the following questions: Are heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia, and/or biphobia problems at my school? Do lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, Two-Spirit, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) students want a supportive and safe space? Are there students who want to know more about the LGBTQ community? Are there students with LGBTQ parents, other family members, or friends?

Use the statistics and information provided in this kit and on *MyGSA.ca*, Egale's national LGBTQ safer schools and inclusive education website, to construct your argument.

According to Egale's First National Climate Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia in Canadian Schools…

- Two-thirds of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirited, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) students feel unsafe at school.

- Over two thirds (70.4%) of all students hear homophobic expressions such as "that's so gay" every day in school.

- 51% of LGBTQ students have been verbally harassed about their sexual orientation and 21% have been physically harassed or assaulted about their sexual orientation.

- Almost three-quarters (74%) of trans youth have been verbally harassed about their gender expression and more than a third (37%) have been physically harassed or assaulted about their gender.

- 45% of youth with LGBTQ parents have been sexually harassed at school; over a quarter have been physically harassed or assaulted about the sexual orientation of their parents (27%) and their own perceived sexual orientation or gender identity (27%).

- Almost half (48%) of youth of colour, both LGBTQ and heterosexual, reported not knowing of any teachers or other school staff members who are supportive of LGBTQ students; only half (53%) would be very comfortable talking about LGBTQ matters even with a close friend.

FOR A MODEL OF A GSA PROPOSAL,

According to Egale's School Climate Survey Report "*Youth Speak Up about Homophobia and Transphobia*,"

- Three-quarters of LGBTQ students and 95% of trans students feel unsafe at school, compared to one-fifth of heterosexual students.

- Over a quarter of LGBTQ students and almost half of trans students had skipped school because they felt unsafe, compared to fewer than a tenth of non-LGBTQ students.

- Many LGBTQ students would not be comfortable talking to their teachers (four in ten), their principal (six in ten), or their coach (seven in ten) about LGBTQ matters.

- Only one in five LGBTQ students could talk to a parent very comfortably about LGBTQ matters.

- Over half of LGBTQ students did not feel accepted at school, and almost half felt they could not be themselves at school, compared to one-fifth of heterosexual students.

For more information, see http://MyGSA.ca/YouthSpeakUp.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education is a partner in the province's Violence Prevention Initiative. The Guiding Principles for this initiative include:

- recognizing that sexual orientation is a factor that increases someone's risk for being a victim of violence

- society reinforces violence through expressions of ...sexism, heterosexism, and other biased attitudes.

*http://www.gov.nf.ca/VPI/initiative/index.html*

The goal of the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education's *Safe and Caring Schools Policy* is to ensure that "young people have the opportunity to be successful in school – and ultimately, in life – requires safe and caring schools where teachers, students, parents and the broader community work together to respect and support each other." The Policy also acknowledges that "fair and consistently implemented school policies and codes of behaviour contribute to positive environments and reduce bullying, racism and other forms of harassment."

This Department of Education policy is meant to provide a framework for the development and implementation of provincial and district school-based practices and policies and action plans to ensure that learning and teaching can take place in a safe and caring environment. With this in mind, school districts are to have safe and caring schools teams to "help establish guidelines for the implementation of preventative and pro-active school-wide practices that foster positive behaviours by all members of the school community." *http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/studentsupportservices/ publications/scs_prov_policy.pdf*

GSAs fall under this category of preventative and proactive school-wide practices, as they help to raise awareness and understanding about LGBTQ people as well as homophobia, biphobia and transphobia and heterosexism. GSAs can help to make schools safer because they raise awareness which helps to eliminate discrimination and increase support for LGBTQ youth, staff and parents.

For more information about the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education's *Safe and Caring Schools Policy*, see: *http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/ studentsupportservices/publications/scs_prov_policy.pdf*.

Also, check your own <u>school district's website</u> for their safe and caring schools policy and <u>ask your principal</u> to discuss your school's action plan.

SCHOOL CLIMATE QUESTIONS
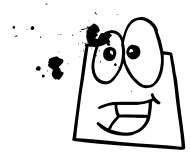
Adapted from the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network's Jump-Start Guide.

1

Does your school's Code of Conduct or its Safe and Caring Schools action plan and school district policies protect and affirm the rights of LGBTQ people? Do non-discrimination policies include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression? Is proactive education regarding LGBTQ policies a priority?

2

Is anti-LGBTQ language discouraged or encouraged? Is this language and harassment rampant in your school? Do you hear words or phrases like "fag," "dyke," or "that's so gay" often? Or is anti-LGBTQ language rare and is there opposition to it?

3

Is there a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) or other inclusive student group pertaining to LGBTQ matters at your school? If so, was there opposition to this club and do students feel safe attending meetings? If not, does this seem like something that would be encouraged or discouraged at your school?

4

Are LGBTQ themes and people fully integrated into your school's curriculum and across a variety of subject areas? Are LGBTQ topics and people discussed in other classes, such as English, History, and Social Studies? Is inclusive language used in all subject areas, including Math and Science, to make your school's classrooms safer spaces and more inclusive, respectful, and welcoming learning and working environments for all members of the school community?

5 Are there books and materials with LGBTQ content and written by LGBTQ authors in your school's library? Are there books and materials with LGBTQ content and written by LGBTQ authors in your school's classrooms?

Is there school staff support for LGBTQ students at your school? Do staff members show compassion and respect for all students? Is there guidance support for LGBTQ students? Is there information about available resources? **6**

7 Are athletic programmes welcoming spaces for LGBTQ or gender queer students? Do athletic programmes exhibit practices of gender equity? Are anti-LGBTQ attitudes an issue?

Is there organized and vocal opposition to LGBTQ inclusion at your school? For example, have you heard things such as homosexuality being characterized as "sickness and sin"? Is there adult compassion, respect, and advocacy for LGBTQ inclusion? Do adults exhibit a commitment to social justice? **8**

9 Are LGBTQ people visible or invisible at your school? Are there students or staff members with LGBTQ parents, other family members, or friends? Do they feel safe being open about their sexual orientation and gender identity or about their loved ones? Are LGBTQ students fully integrated into school life? Are LGBTQ students and other members of the school community treated equitably?

The UNWELCOMING School

1. School and school district policies do not protect the rights of LGBTQ people.

2. Anti-LGBTQ language and harassment are rampant.

3. A GSA or other inclusive student group pertaining to LGBTQ matters is nonexistent and strongly discouraged.

4. Curricula are devoid of LGBTQ themes, people, and matters and inclusive language is not being used.

5. Books and materials with LGBTQ content or written by LGBTQ authors are nonexistent.

6. School staff support, including guidance, for LGBTQ students, families, and allies is nonexistent.

7. Athletic programmes are unwelcoming spaces for LGBTQ or gender queer students.

8. Organized and vocal opposition to any LGBTQ inclusion exists; homosexuality is characterized as "sickness and sin."

9. LGBTQ people are invisible and feel unsafe being open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity; members of the school community with LGBTQ family members and friends also feel unsafe.
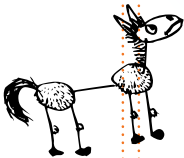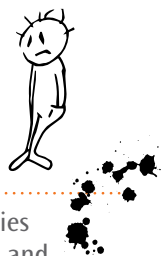
The **RESISTANT** School

1. School and school district non-discrimination policies may include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

2. Anti-LGBTQ language is common in hallways and locker rooms and on the school grounds, though not in classrooms.

3. There is resistance to the formation of a GSA or other inclusive student group pertaining to LGBTQ matters and, in the case that there is one, students feel unsafe attending.

4. Curricular inclusion of LGBTQ matters is limited to clinical references in Health classes and inclusive language is rarely used.

5. Access to books and materials with LGBTQ content or written by LGBTQ authors is limited.

6. School staff show compassion, but not necessarily respect, and information and support regarding LGBTQ matters, including guidance, are not generally accessible.

7. Athletic programmes are moving toward gender equity, but anti-LGBTQ attitudes remain an issue.

8. Adults feel discomfort and may believe there is danger in exposure to LGBTQ matters or people.

9. A "don't ask, don't tell" atmosphere exists for LGBTQ people.

The **PASSIVE** School

1. School and school district non-discrimination policies are inclusive of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression and students and school community members are made aware of this.

2. There are few instances of intentional harassment against LGBTQ students, students perceived as LGBTQ, or students with LGBTQ parents, other family members, or friends.

3. The GSA or other inclusive student group pertaining to LGBTQ matters is tolerated and attended by a core group of people.

4. LGBTQ themes, people, and matters are occasionally included in English, History, and Health classes and inclusive language is generally used.

5. A variety of books and materials with LGBTQ content and written by LGBTQ authors are available.

6. School staff members, including Health teachers and guidance counsellors, have had training in LGBTQ matters and offer information and support in a respectful manner.

7. Coaches interrupt anti-LGBTQ behaviour; LGBTQ athletes are relatively safe, though not very visible.

8. The adult community is open to LGBTQ inclusion, but may not be sure how to achieve it.

9. LGBTQ people are moderately visible; they may be seen as "different," but a relatively safe and respectful atmosphere exists.

The **INCLUSIVE** School

1. School and school district policies protect and affirm LGBTQ people; proactive education about such policies exists.

2. Anti-LGBTQ language and behaviour are rare and dealt with swiftly and decisively; anti-bias education that embraces respectful, inclusive language is common in classrooms.

3. The GSA or other inclusive student group pertaining to LGBTQ matters is visible, regularly attended, and considered as valid as any other club.

4. LGBTQ themes, people, and matters are fully integrated into curricula across all subject areas and grade levels and inclusive language is always used and openly discussed.

5. Books and materials with LGBTQ content and written by LGBTQ authors are visible and available to all students and school staff members.

6. School staff members, including Health teachers and guidance counsellors, work with outside agencies to provide outreach, support, and education to LGBTQ people as well as members of the school community with LGBTQ parents, other family members, and friends.

7. Education around anti-LGBTQ bias is a part of athletic programming; LGBTQ athletes are treated as equals on and off the playing field.

8. The adult community has prioritized LGBTQ inclusion as part of a larger commitment to social justice.

9. LGBTQ people and those with LGBTQ friends and family members are visible and fully integrated into school life; there is a high degree of comfort and acceptance regarding LGBTQ people.

Adapted from the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network's Jump-Start Guide. This document, as well as other resources for GSAs, can be found at *http://www.glsen. org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/2226.html?state=tools&type=student*.

9 REASONS COMMUNITIES SHOULD SUPPORT ANTI-HOMOPHOBIA & ANTI-TRANSPHOBIA EDUCATION

Adapted from a TEACH (Teens Educating And Confronting Homophobia) resource.

1. Anti-homophobia & anti-transphobia education works toward ensuring every student is physically safe and has a safe environment in which to learn. It is a legal and moral responsibility. Homophobia and transphobia foster, condone, and turn a blind eye to violence and hate.

2. Every faith contains a tradition of peace, love, tolerance, and compassion. Many religions have incredible histories of involvement with social justice and protest movements, activism, and a sense of duty to marginalized peoples.

3. The Golden Rule is absolute.

4. Homophobia and transphobia hurt us all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Often, anyone who is perceived to be LGBTQ is subjected to harassment and victimization. Homophobia and transphobia enforce rigid gender roles and norms, denies individual expression, and perpetuates stereotypes, myths, and misinformation.

5. Homophobic and transphobic harassment can take the forms of verbal, physical, and sexual harassment.

6. Gays and lesbians (like all human beings) are protected by the human rights code, and sexual orientation is a prohibited ground of discrimination under Canadian law. Gender identity is covered under sex.

7. Anti-homophobia education is NOT sex education. It is not about discussing or describing sexual activities. Support groups that gather in schools are safe places that allow students to meet and discuss issues relevant to their lives and circumstances.

8. Anti-homophobia & anti-transphobia education does not teach that someone's religious values are wrong.

9. There are many students and staff who are not heterosexual or cisgender and who deserve the love, support, and spiritual comfort of their neighbours and faith community.

Adapted from a document by Nadio Bello for T.E.A.C.H.

Adults within the larger heterosexual school community may have concerns and fears of their own. It is important to think through how to answer these questions in ways that are respectful of the diversity of opinions and values that adults share, that speak positively about glbttq families and that reflect our role in providing safe, nurturing space for all children.
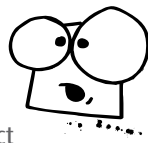
MY CHILD WILL BE INFLUENCED TO BE GAY OR TRANS.

Your child will become who they are "hard-wired" to be. Recognizing GLBTTQ families and playing with children from glbttq families will not change your child's sexuality or gender identity in any way.

MY CHILD WILL BE TAUGHT VALUES WITH WHICH I DISAGREE.

Your child will learn the values of care and respect of others, as well as safety and peace for everyone, all values that are compatible with your core values.

MY SON WILL BECOME A "SISSY."/MY DAUGHTER WILL BECOME A "TOMBOY."

Your children will become who they are intended to be, regardless of their exposure to friends whose parents may be GLBTTQ. Indeed, the exposure may help them to grow into adulthood as open-minded human beings with a broader, more inclusive view of the world.

THE "TRADITIONAL" FAMILY WILL BE DEVALUED.

The "traditional" family is only one of a variety of family structures. Families are created in loving relationships. Many families are made up of single parents who are alone through divorce, death of a spouse, or by choice; other families are supported by grandparents, aunts and uncles, or foster parents. Still others are blended families created by bringing children from other relationships. There are families with GLBTTQ parents. In essence, all kinds of families can be valued, supported and respected without threatening one particular form of family.

Photo credit: Damien D

Brian Burke
b. June 30, 1955

Brian Burke is the President and General Manager of the Toronto Maple Leafs and was publicly supportive when his late son, Brendan—student manager and video assistant of the RedHawks, the National Collegiate Athletic Association's top-ranked hockey team—came out in 2009. He marched in the Toronto Pride Parade in 2010 with PFLAG in memory of his son.

Burke also presented a moving keynote speech on International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia, May 17, 2010, at the launch of Egale's national LGBTQ safer schools and inclusive education website, *MyGSA.ca*.

Joy Kogawa
b. June 6, 1935

Joy Kogawa (born Joy Nakayama) is an award-winning author and poet and a recipient of both the Order of Canada and the Order of British Columbia as well as numerous honorary degrees for her extensive body of writing as well as for her community activism. Kogawa's most famous work, *Obasan* (1981), explores the horrifying tragedy of Japanese internment in Canada during World War II. As an Honorary Advisory Board Member of the Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, Kogawa is one of the notable Canadians who supports Egale's work towards helping to make Canadian schools safer and more inclusive, respectful, and welcoming learning and working environments for all members of school communities.

Photo credit: Franco Folini

Cyndi Lauper

b. June 22, 1953

Cyndi Lauper is an internationally renowned artist who has sold over 25 million records worldwide. As a self-described "unwavering advocate" for LGBTQ rights, she created the True Colours Tour which brought together Erasure, the B-52s, the Indigo Girls, Debbie Harry, and Joan Jett & the Blackhearts to raise awareness around issues facing queer communities. Lauper is also the Honorary Chairperson of the True Colours Residence: a permanent, supportive, and secure home for formerly street-involved LGBTQ youth in New York City. More recently, she formed the Give a Damn web campaign to draw attention to the persistence of inequalities based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

WHY SHOULD I BECOME AN ALLY?

There are many reasons to become an ally! One of them is to help create safer spaces for all people in your school or work environment. According to Egale's *First National Climate Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia in Canadian Schools*.

A high percentage of LGBTQ students feel unsafe at school, experience harassment, and feel a lack of support from school personnel, as evident in the following statistics:

- Two-thirds of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirited, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) students feel unsafe at school.

- Over two thirds (70.4%) of all students hear homophobic expressions such as "that's so gay" every day in school.

- 51% of LGBTQ students have been verbally harassed about their sexual orientation and 21% have been physically harassed or assaulted about their sexual orientation.

- Almost three-quarters (74%) of trans youth have been verbally harassed about their gender expression and more than a third (37%) have been physically harassed or assaulted about their gender.

- 45% of youth with LGBTQ parents have been sexually harassed at school; over a quarter have been physically harassed or assaulted about the sexual orientation of their parents (27%) and their own perceived sexual orientation or gender identity (27%).

- Almost half (48%) of youth of colour, both LGBTQ and heterosexual, reported not knowing of any teachers or other school staff members who are supportive of LGBTQ students; only half (53%) would be very comfortable talking about LGBTQ matters even with a close friend.

According to Egale's School Climate Survey Report *Youth Speak Up about Homophobia and Transphobia*,

"Studies have suggested that there is a link between bullying and suicide, and that there is a correspondingly high rate of 'suicidality' (suicide attempts and suicidal thinking) among LGBTQ students…[and] there is some suggestion that school attachment—the feeling that one belongs in the school community—is a crucial issue in this regard because of its connection to lower suicidality rates in the general school population and among LGBTQ students."

More than half of LGBTQ students, compared to one-fifth of heterosexual students, agree that they do not feel accepted at school.

For more information, see *http://MyGSA.ca/YouthSpeakUp.*

HOW DO I BECOME AN ALLY?

➜ **Examine Your Own Biases**

•Ask yourself questions. Do I feel uncomfortable around people who are LGBTQ? Is there more I need to learn about heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and intersectionality? How can I get the information, help, support, advice, guidance, etc. that I need to overcome any biases I might have?

Do I tend to assume that people I encounter are *not* LGBTQ?

➜ **Educate Yourself!**

•Read. There is no one all-encompassing LGBTQ manual that explains everything and can apply to all situations and perspectives, but there is a fair amount out there, both fiction and non-fiction, depending on what you like and what interests you.

Good places to start are *http://MyGSA.ca/BookList* and Egale's Equity and Inclusive Education Resource Kits, which can be downloaded from the MyGSA website.

•Ask questions. Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know or understand something, but remember to be considerate. Also remember that one person's opinion or perspective cannot stand in for everyone else's in the LGBTQ community. (Do you think the same way as all other heterosexual people?)

➜ **Pay Attention to Discrimination and Harassment and Speak Up!**

If you hear someone use derogatory language about sexual orientation or gender identity or gender expression, engage the person in conversation about discrimination and harassment: ask why the person chose to use those words and if the person even knows what the words mean and that they are abusive.

Don't laugh at offensive "jokes" about sexual orientation or gender identity or gender expression.

Use gender-neutral and inclusive language, such as folks, people, everybody, crushes, couples, partner, spouse, parents and guardians, chairperson/chair, firefighter, server, and actor, which do not contain assumptions about sexuality or gender.

WHETHER OR NOT YOU KNOW IT—and they might not even know it yet!—there are very likely **LGBTQ** individuals, or people with **LGBTQ** parents or other family members, in your school or workplace who will appreciate your implicit support.

Accept and Support Actively

Take part in Ally Week or create one if your school doesn't have one! *http://MyGSA.ca/Campaigns*

Participate in your school's GSA or start one if your school doesn't have one! *http://MyGSA.ca/GSAGuide*

Find out if your school, school district, and/or workplace policies and guidelines explicitly mention sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression—if not, work towards changing them! *http://MyGSA.ca/SchoolBoardPolicies*

Volunteer at an LGBTQ human rights organization! *http://MyGSA.ca/Support*

Be sure *MyGSA.ca* isn't blocked at your school!

Some schools use filtering software to block access to websites that include keywords pertaining to certain matters, such as sex, and rely on the companies that develop the software to maintain the list of unacceptable sites. Although this might be done in the interests of blocking pornographic content, an unfortunate consequence of such protocols is that many useful websites regarding important matters such as health and sexual orientation are also blocked. If MyGSA is blocked at your school, ask your principal if this site can be permitted.

Come Out as an Ally!

Mention your friends and family members who are LGBTQ if you have any…but only if they are already out!

Bring up LGBTQ matters, events, and news items in a positive way in class and in conversations. Check out the News on *MyGSA.ca*!

If coming out as an ally makes you at all uncomfortable, remember that LGBTQ individuals who are open about their sexual orientation/gender identity must come out again whenever they meet new people and imagine how that feels: knowing that one is in a supportive, inclusive environment or at least in the company of an ally really makes a difference!

Do you have more tips about becoming or being an ally? Share them on *MyGSA.ca* or send them to *mygsa@egale.ca*!

GSA GUIDE

Submitted by: Joey Wright
Submitted to: Greater Essex County District School Board

Mission Statement

A Gay-Straight Alliance is a youth leadership organization that is devoted to education, human rights, and the human dignity of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth, the development of positive relationships, and to raise awareness. The goal of this group is to:

1. Positively impact academic performance, school/social/and family relationships, comfort level with sexual orientation, sense of physical safety, student and teacher attitudes, perceived ability to contribute to society, and an enhanced sense of belonging to the school community;

2. Form alliances and positive relationships between gay and straight students to fight homophobia, isolation, marginalization, violence, and exclusion in the community;

3. Promote acceptance, respect, and tolerance of all individuals regardless of racial background, socio-economic status, gender, religion, or sexual orientation;

4. Raise awareness and promote education about homophobia and other forms of oppression; and

5. Offer support and resources for students in need.

What is a Gay-Straight Alliance?

A GSA is a student-run group that provides a safe place for any and all students to meet and learn about all different orientations, to support each other while working together to end homophobia, and to raise awareness and promote equality for all human beings. In addition to being a group dedicated to support, it also strives to educate the surrounding areas and the community on different gender and equality issues.
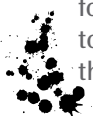
Why do all schools need to establish a GSA if requested?

I believe that it is vital to establish a GSA for numerous reasons, but most importantly, for education purposes. Additional justifications for the establishment of a GSA are to empower and educate the school community, advocate for just and equal policies that protect youth from harassment and violence, and organize in coalition with other school-based clubs and groups across identity lines to address broader issues of oppression. As young people, we possess the power to lead the fight against homophobia, transform our environment into one of peace and safety, and change the lives of countless individuals. Research indicates that homophobia interferes with the health development of all young people, particularly those who are dealing with issues of sexual orientation. One of the many places gay and lesbian youth feel the effects of homophobia is within their schools.

Youth in Canada desperately require more support and resources in their educational institutions in order to make them safe, secure, and inclusive learning environments.

As the results of the First National Survey on Homophobia and Transphobia in Canadian Schools, conducted by Egale Canada, demonstrate, LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, questioning) youth in Canada desperately require more support and resources in their educational institutions in order to make them safe, secure, and inclusive learning environments. There is a clear indication that this is the case: according to almost 1700 participants from every province and territory in the country, of the self-identified LGBTQ students, 60% have been verbally harassed, and over a quarter have been physically harassed, because of their sexual orientation and three-quarters feel unsafe at school. These upsetting results can no longer be ignored and the establishment of a GSA could reverse these alarming statistics.

How will this be an educational group?

Throughout the year we will be collecting resources and researching methods on how to help educate not only the students but also the teachers here at Walkerville. A lot of students are unaware of how gay-bashing affects the lives of the people around them. Terms like "faggot" and "dyke" are used daily in the halls of Walkerville. When this type of discriminatory behaviour is ignored the school consciously or unconsciously encourages this harassment. They need to be informed of ways to prevent this type of radical bullying against gay, lesbian, questioning, bisexual, transgendered, or straight students.

First-hand account

I never actually thought that coming out as a lesbian after being out as bisexual would be a huge deal. I didn't get bullied for being bisexual, so what is the difference for being a lesbian?

I then realized that homophobia is everywhere around me. I get a tight feeling in my chest when calling myself a lesbian because only last year I was dating a boy. I'm afraid when people question my sexuality saying "but you've had boyfriends". I didn't know myself then like I do now. I didn't wake up one day and decide "Hey world, I'm gay".

I always felt like an outcast since grade 1. I was getting crushes on girls and not boys. I would tell every boy I loved them because I was scared and thought that's what was supposed to happen in a heterosexual relationship.

I hate talking about my sexuality. I'm afraid of being judged.

I want to represent LGBTQ forever. I want to be on every team that has anything possible to go with LGBTQ groups because it feels like home. I know not all LGBTQ people are comfortable with their sexuality and a lot of them have an "I'm gay and proud, I don't need to yell it out" kind of attitude, but that's not me. When I believe in something or think something is not humane, I will stand up for myself and fight for what is right.

I realized today that although I don't get bullied to my face, I get bullied when people are calling each other gay and fags and queer and using those words with hate. When someone gets called gay and yells out, "EW NOT I'M NOT GAY! THAT'S JUST GROSS!" that's when I am bullied; that's what hurts me the most. I feel completely rejected when this happens. I'm afraid to even be out of the closet when this happens because it hurts me to know that people think loving the same sex is disgusting. It makes me feel disgusting.

I want to take the word fag, dyke, gay, tranny, etc. and make them words proudly said by the LGBTQ communities instead of the homophobes. I want to take those words and make them mean wonderful things, not slurs of hatred.

I want to end homophobia, not everywhere because I'm only one person, but at least in my community.

I'm standing up for what is right from now on.

– Student from Newfoundland & Labrador

Establish a GSA in the same way that any other group or club in your school would be formed. Follow the guidelines or district policies of your school. Students may need an administrator's or a teacher's permission. Enlisting the help of other students may be beneficial.

The Newfoundland & Labrador Department of Education's *Safe and Caring Schools Policy* calls for the creation of school action plans that include school-wide prevention initiatives and professional development and training of school personnel.

To find out more, see *http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/studentsupportservices/publications/scs_prov_policy.pdf*.

As a partner in the Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI), the Department of Education has developed the *Safe and Caring Schools Policy* (2006).

The VPI recognizes that the social and cultural roots of violence are based in inequality, and that sexual orientation is a factor that can put someone at greater risk for experiencing violence. *http://www.gov.nf.ca/VPI/initiative/index.html*

The *Safe and Caring Schools Policy*, therefore expects "all members of the school community to promote safe, caring and inclusive practice by doing their best to engage in activities and behaviour that promotes health and personal well being, and embrace the diversity of all peoples, regardless of economic status, race, colour, national or ethnic origin, language group, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age or ability." *http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/studentsupportservices/publications/scs_prov_policy.pdf*
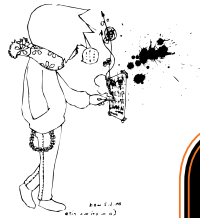
The *Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Act* also prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Sexual orientation is listed as a prohibited ground, and gender identity is covered under "sex". *http://www.justice.gov.nl.ca/hrc/act/index.html*

The Nunatsiavut Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (as it refers to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms). It also states that "Every Labrador Inuk has inherent dignity and the right to have his or her dignity respected and protected; and every Labrador Inuk has a responsibility to treat others with respect and to contribute to the wellbeing, safety and freedom of all members of Labrador Inuit society." *www.nunatsiavut.com/index.php/en/constitution*

Some provincial Human Rights Commissions in Canada have specific policies around discrimination and harassment because of sexual orientation or gender identity. For an example see:

http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en

IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO FIND YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT'S Safe and Caring Schools Policy on their website, ask your principal for a copy of it.

3 FIND A SCHOOL STAFF ADVISOR /SPONSOR

Most school clubs require one or two faculty advisors or school staff sponsors. Even if this is not the case at your school, it will likely be beneficial to have one. Find a teacher or staff member that you feel will be supportive and a good ally for your group. Try to include both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ advisors in your group if at all possible.

4 SPEAK TO YOUR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Encourage your school administration to become an ally, even if it is not required that you involve them in the establishment of your group. They can help validate your GSA as an important part of the school and help with things like planning special events or bringing in speakers for school assemblies. Administrators can be important liaisons between students, teachers, parents, the outside community, and schools or district officials. It can also be beneficial to provide administrators with information about GSAs or details about your group.

REVIEW THE STATISTICS AND POLICY INFORMATION in "Assess your School's Environment" (Section 1).

5 INFORM GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS, LIBRARIANS, AND OTHER RESOURCE PEOPLE

School staff may know students who would be interested in attending meetings and can help with getting more group participants. Having staff involved can also be beneficial because they may have professional knowledge and valuable resources for your group and may help facilitate discussions and meetings.

6 FIND A MEETING PLACE

Have your meetings in a safe and comfortable location in your school that is somewhat private. Some students may feel a little reluctant or nervous about attending a GSA meeting because they may fear being harassed or having assumptions made about their sexuality or gender identity. Remember that safety and confidentiality should always be primary concerns.

★ ESTABLISH A PLAN AND GUIDELINES

Select a meeting time that that will be most convenient for the participants. Decide whether or not your GSA should hold meetings on a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly basis. It is always good to create group rules/norms with all members of the GSA, but it can also help to think of or draft some preliminary guidelines. For example:

See "How to Run a GSA Meeting— Meeting Formats and Ideas" (*on page 35*).

• What tools or supplies will be needed (e.g., paper, pens, films, etc.)?

• What ground rules will help reaffirm responsible and respectful behaviours?

• Will the meeting be held in a formal or casual way (i.e., seating, speaking in turn, etc.)?

Establish your meeting space as a safe space, create a mission statement, and brainstorm possible activities and topics of discussion for future meetings.

See the "Sample Safe Space Protocol" from Supporting Our Youth (SOY) (*on page 40*) **and "Icebreakers" from the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network's Jump-Start Guide** (*on page 43*) **as well as the "Activities"** (*on page 47*) **for help and suggestions!**

There are numerous ways to facilitate a meeting. Your GSA meetings can be formal (e.g., similar to a classroom structure) or informal (e.g., sitting in a circle). They can be very structured and planned or they can be spontaneous and open to change, and so forth. It is a good idea to get input from all GSA members regarding how meetings will be structured and what the guidelines or group rules will be. A survey/questionnaire accompanied by an open discussion during the first meeting is a good way of figuring out how your GSA meetings will operate.

Consider the following examples for some help:

If you want a *formal structure…*

- people raise their hands when they want to speak (one person at a time, with no interruptions);

- everyone introduces themselves (e.g., their names and 1 or 2 things about themselves);

- a student acts as a leader/facilitator who does most of the speaking and guides the conversation and questions;

- use a structured and timed schedule (e.g., meetings are 1 hour long, with 15 minutes of introductions and an outline of the agenda, another 15 minutes of discussion on a particular topic, another 15 minutes for games, and so on);

- sign in to monitor participation;

- assign different tasks to various members for the next meeting (e.g., one person will bring in a favourite LGBTQ film and another person will bring snacks); and

- take meeting minutes and document what was discussed/done.

Meeting Minutes

Meeting minutes are a written record of a meeting. Your GSA can appoint a person to record the meeting minutes. This can be one person who does the minutes for all the meetings or you can change the person from meeting to meeting. Your GSA can choose to audio-record the meeting, in which case all participants would have to agree to this, or someone can write or type the meeting minutes. Remember that minutes are just the highlights or a summary and don't need to be lengthy.

Your meeting minutes might include the following:

- The date, time, and location of the meeting
- A list of those present
- The meeting agenda (what your GSA plans to do this meeting)
- A list of the issues your GSA wants to resolve (e.g., a heated debate that occurred at the last meeting; how to battle homophobia/transphobia/biphobia/ heterosexism in your school; and so on)
- Any events/discussions that were important to the GSA's members
- Any group decisions that were made (e.g., group rules, future activities, and so on)
- The end time of the meeting

Your GSA can choose to audio-record the meeting, in which case all participants would have to agree to this.

Sample Meeting Minutes

GSA Meeting Minutes for Egale High School
(Feb. 4, 2011)
(3:00 p.m., school library)

MEETING MEMBERS:

Present: Rita Bhatacharia, John White Bear, Douglas Smith, Elizabeth Drucker, Jen Kyumoto, Marc Porter, Jasmine Chan, Geneva Peschka, and Sayid Alizadeh

OTHERS PRESENT:

Librarian: Sheila Jackson
Guidance Counsellor: Mr. Touhy

MEETING AGENDA:

• Small start-up discussion (recent events, how is everyone, etc.)

• Film: *Better than Chocolate*

• Discussion: transphobia, trans-specific matters, gender-neutral washrooms

PROCEEDINGS/EVENTS:

• John and Elizabeth mentioned the idea of having a school bake sale to raise money for more LGBTQ literature for the school library—group thought it was a good idea

• Rita expressed her concern about the GSA's posters being defaced—each member will brainstorm ideas for next meeting to have a discussion about it

• Watched film

• Debriefing after movie—all group members shared that they liked the film; Jen mentioned she wants to learn more about trans people and their various experiences; Sayid recommended checking out YouTube for personal videos made by transmen and transwomen and their experiences

• Group discussed plans for next meeting: Douglas wants to talk about the possibility of a gender-neutral washroom in the school; Sheila said she could compile a list of LGBTQ books for the group members; the group decided to have a poster party at the next meeting to have more posters to put around the school

• Meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

• Minutes submitted by Bhata Bhatacharia

➲ **If you want an *informal structure*…**

people sit in a circle or in a way that they all feel as though there is no hierarchy in the meeting;

people speak in turn (e.g., clockwise around the circle) or use a talking stick (anything that is passed around to indicate who has the floor--only someone holding the object should be speaking) or there is open dialogue (and everyone is respectful of other people's right to speak);

try some fun icebreakers as a way to get people to introduce themselves and get to know one another (for examples, see page 41);

you don't need to have a group facilitator; the meeting events and activities can be agreed upon by everyone or the majority (e.g., there can be various things planned and the order in which they occur can be decided on by the group; participants may choose to have open dialogue surrounding an issue for an entire meeting or to break up the meeting into various activities and tasks they would like to do); and

everyone can come up with one group rule/ norm and see if all members agree.

Other things to consider:

- It is important to get input from group members not just during the first meeting, but also throughout all of the meetings. You could use a box for suggestions or hold weekly or monthly "how are we doing" discussions.

- It is important to appeal to all group members. This can be difficult because everyone has different interests and likes different activities. It is best not to have a narrow focus, e.g., only talking about gay and lesbian matters and concerns and not talking about trans, questioning, bisexual, or Two-Spirit communities.

- Remember that it may be hard for people to open up and talk about certain subjects immediately. It may help to avoid controversial and sensitive issues/topics at first. Wait until group members get to know one another and express a sense of comfort in the group.

- It can really help to review or debrief at the end of meetings. Talking about what has been discussed can be especially important if conflicts arise, sensitive issues are touched upon, or if members have questions about certain things.

SAMPLE SAFE SPACE PROTOCOL

What do we mean by a safe space? A safe space is free of any type of discrimination for queer, trans, and questioning youth. Everyone has the right to feel safe and included. A safe space is an environment in which everyone feels comfortable expressing themselves and participating fully, without fear of attack, ridicule, or denial of experience. For the comfort of other group members, it is expected that public displays of affection be brief and respectful.

– From Supporting Our Youth (SOY)
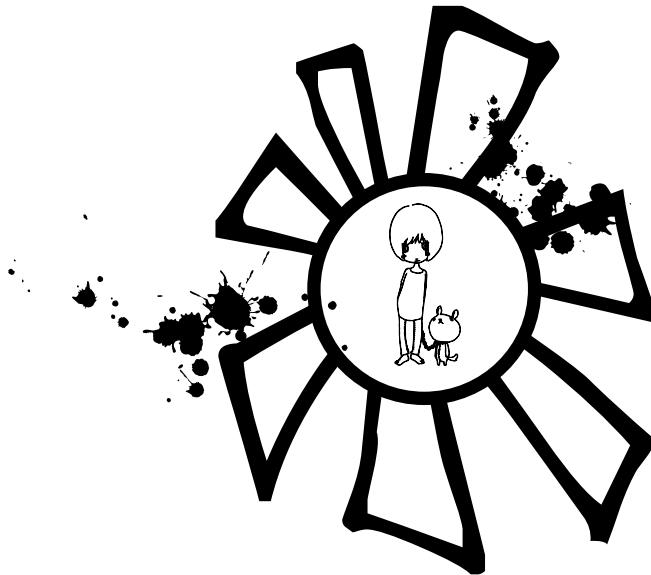
From the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network's Jump-Start Guide

Common Ground
Source: Kerry Ashworth

Students and faculty advisors stand in a circle. One person begins by saying "I've got a younger sister" or some other statement that is true for them. Everyone for whom this is also true steps into the center of the circle. Everyone who doesn't have a younger sister stays on the outside. You can always choose not to step into the circle. The game often brings up personal and important issues that students may not want to discuss in a more formal setting. This also allows everyone to recognize their differences and similarities.

Gender Stereotypes

Trace a male and a female body type on butcher paper, then have a free-for-all where everyone writes as many gender stereotypes as they can think of on the bodies where they would apply (for example, "boys are good at math" would be placed on the head of the male body). From here, you can talk about how gender stereotypes and traits relate to perceptions about gay, lesbian, bisexual , Two-Spirit and transgender people, as well as how these stereotypes limit our possibilities, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. These exercises can also be done using stereotypes of LGBT people, helping us recognize that everyone has different traits that don't define our sexual orientation or gender.

Concentric Circles, Inner/Outer Circles
Source: Jason Fleetwood-Boldt

This exercise works well to open dialogue. It requires an even number of people, with a minimum of six or eight. It works best with 20 or more. Have people count off by twos (1, 2, 1, 2…). Tell the ones to make an inner circle and the twos to form the outer circle. The inner circle should face outward and the outer circle should face inward, so that each person has a partner in that circle. The facilitator instructs that they will ask a question and the outer circle is to talk for one minute as the inner circle listens. If it is a group whose members don't know one another, you can have people introduce themselves to their partners before they begin answering the question asked. After the minute is up, the inner circle answers the same question. Then the outer circle moves clockwise two people over, so everyone has a new partner. A new question is asked of the outer, then inner, circles. When finished, participants should discuss their conversations as a large group.

Sample Questions:

- Growing up, what were all of the names (positive, negative and neutral) that you heard related to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people?

- Growing up, what were some of the stereotypes you heard about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people? What were some of the things you heard about these groups that you have found to be inaccurate?

Work with your GSA's advisor/sponsor and other members to discuss the best ways to advertise your group. Posters are an effective means of getting more participation as they can be displayed around the school for all students to see. They are also an important part of helping students feel safer at school as they are a visible sign of acceptance. Having a poster party can be a fun way to design and make the flyers. You can also consider making a Facebook group or a webpage if you really want to get creative! You want to continuously monitor participation and see what tactics work to find and keep members.

Remember, if posters get torn down or defaced, do not get discouraged! The posters are likely to stimulate school-wide discussion and may lead staff and students to express their personal feelings, opinions, and questions surrounding the GSA. Not all comments will be queer-positive, but breaking the silence is a vital step in addressing and challenging the many stereotypes and myths about LGBTQ individuals. Keep putting posters up if they are destroyed. It is a good idea to put them in busy areas as well as to encourage supportive staff members to place them on their doors and in staff areas. You might want to consider putting your posters behind glass in order to discourage people from destroying them.

Once your group makes posters, take a picture of them and submit it to appear at the top of Egale's national LGBTQ safer schools and inclusive education website, *MyGSA.ca*!

Things to consider when advertising:

- Make sure your posters set a positive tone for your group.
- Reinforce the fact that all students are welcome, including allies and all students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, Two-Spirit, queer, and questioning and who come from any ethnic, cultural, or religious background.
- Include meeting times, locations, and dates.
- Think about including a short description about what goes on at your meetings and be sure to highlight that supportive allies are welcome to attend.
- Emphasize that student confidentiality and safety are guaranteed.
- If your GSA creates a Facebook group, advertise it.
- Use LGBTQ-affirming symbols on your posters, such as the rainbow flag or pink and black inverted triangles.

See the section on Symbols (page 43 of Role Models & Symbols section) in this kit or on *MyGSA.ca* for more ideas!

Additional tips for finding new members:

- Personally asking people to come to your meetings can really help, especially if they don't know what your club is about and want to know more before going. Try starting a conversation with someone who you think might be interested in attending a meeting.
- Make sure to make use of any of your school's print publications, such as newspapers, magazines, yearbooks, and newsletters.

Having sign-in sheets can help you stay in contact with members (e.g., ask people to put down their emails or to join your Facebook group). Sign-in sheets are also great ways to keep track of how many people are attending your meetings.

Working with other school clubs to plan shared events and activities is a great way to network. Think about some other groups at school that deal with related matters. Try asking your advisor if she or he knows of any other clubs that might be interested in collaborating.

Setting up a table or bulletin board for your group can be a great way to give out information about your club and its events. Consider tabling during school events or finding another time to reach out to the student body.

Encourage members and visitors to invite their friends. One idea is to schedule a "Bring a Friend Day" when every member brings a friend to the meeting!

Consider holding special events for members of the GSA. Inviting a guest speaker or watching topical movies can be great conversation starters and are often effective in engaging group members. Think about what topics or questions you might want to explore at these events and then search for speakers and films that could address these areas.
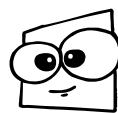
Check out the "Activities" (Section 10 page 47) for movie suggestions!

PROVIDE INCENTIVES (E.G., FOOD!)

Food can be a great icebreaker. It can give nervous attendees something to look forward to and for some it can be an excuse to attend. You can foster a sense of community by encouraging group members to bring in snacks to share with everyone or by planning events, activities, or campaigns around food, such as potlucks and bake sales.

potlucks

bake sales

★ 10 ACTIVITIES

Remember to take pictures of your club's activities to post them on *MyGSA.ca*!

➲ HAVE AN OPEN MIC NIGHT

Do you have an untapped talent? Play an instrument? Ever wanted to try stand-up comedy? Want to read your poetry or somebody else's? Can you juggle? Do acrobatics or magic tricks? Sing? Can't sing? (Karaoke is always a good time!)

Find a stage at your school, community centre, or a local theatre organization. Ask someone to host your event and remember to prepare a sign-up sheet ahead of time. Have fun!

➲ CREATE A MISSION STATEMENT

Does your group have a vision for itself, the school community, the world? What is it?

Your GSA's mission statement might focus on your club's goals and values as well as principles related to human rights, diversity, and social justice. It can also be beneficial to enlist the help of all the members since the statement should reflect everyone's perspectives. Mission statements tend to be 2 to 3 sentences and should say who you are, what you do, what you stand for, and why you do it.

Examples of Mission Statements

Pride Alliance supports and affirms the diverse identities and lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning (LGBTQ), Two-Spirit, and same gender loving people as individuals and as groups. We support their families, friends and allies, by the cultivation of a safe space, educational outreach, advocacy, visibility of LGBTQ issues, information and referral, as well as academic and leadership opportunities.

The Gay Straight Alliance group exists to help foster understanding and support for lesbian, gay, transgender, and bisexual youth in our school. We hold regular meetings through the school year and plan a number of special activities to help raise awareness of issues faced by LGBT youth in our community. Our GSA is a safe space for students to meet, socialize, and support one another no matter what their sexual identity. Come join us—all are welcome.

What We Represent:
- Breaking down barriers promoting respect, positive awareness, equality, and fair treatment for people of all sexual orientations
- Diversity

The aim of the club is for young people to support each other in understanding their sexuality, offer friendship and a place where they can gather information or access relevant material to other supporting networks.

As well as providing support and a chance to make friends, we also plan social events and discuss sexual health issues. Remember, there is no need to feel isolated.

➔ HAVE A MOVIE NIGHT

Watch LGBTQ movies and discuss them afterwards. E.g.,

A Jihad for Love	14A (Canada)
Apples and Oranges	NFB (National Film Board)
Beautiful Thing	14A (Nova Scotia)
Big Eden	
Billy Elliot	14A (Nova Scotia)
Breakfast with Scot	PG (Nova Scotia)
But I'm a Cheerleader	14A (Nova Scotia)
C.R.A.Z.Y.	14A (Ontario)
Cure for Love	NFB
D.E.B.S.	PG (Nova Scotia)
Deb-we-win Ge-kend-am-aan, Our Place in the Circle	NFB
From Criminality to Equality	Canadian Documentary
Georgie Girl	Documentary
Get Real	14A (Nova Scotia)
Girl Inside	Canadian Documentary
Gray Matters	PG (Nova Scotia)
Hedwig and the Angry Inch	14A (Nova Scotia)
I Can't Think Straight	14A (Ontario)
If These Walls Could Talk 2	AA (Ontario)
Il était une fois dans l'est (Once Upon a Time in the East)	13+ (Quebec)
Imagine Me and You	PG (Nova Scotia)
In Other Words	NFB
The Incredibly True Adventure of 2 Girls in Love	14A (Ontario)
It's Elementary	Documentary
J'ai tué ma mère (I Killed My Mother)	PG (Ontario)
Johnny Greyeyes	
Just Call Me Kade	Documentary
Kissing Jessica Stein	14A (Nova Scotia)

Les amours imaginaires (Heartbeats)	PG (Ontario)
Living with Pride: The Ruth Ellis Story	Documentary
Ma vie en rose (My Life in Pink)	PG (CHVRS)
Mambo Italiano	14A (Nova Scotia)
Milk	14A (CHVRS)
Naissance des pieuvres (Water Lilies)	14A (Canada)
Nina's Heavenly Delights	14A (Ontario)
No Dumb Questions	
One of Them	NFB
Open Secrets (Secrets de polichinelle)	NFB
Quand l'amour est gai (When Love is Gay)	NFB
Saving Face	14A (CHVRS)
School's Out	NFB
Secrets de polichinelle (Open Secrets)	NFB
Serving in Silence: The Margarethe Cammermeyer Story	AA (Ontario)
Shaking the Tree	AA (Ontario)
Show Me Love	14A (Nova Scotia)
Sticks and Stones	NFB
Taking Charge	NFB
Talk to Me	14A (CHVRS)
That's a Family!	Documentary
The Business of Fancydancing	
TransAmerica	14A (CHVRS)
TransGeneration	Documentary
Trevor	18A (Nova Scotia)
Two Spirits	Documentary
When Love is Gay (Quand l'amour est gai)	NFB

Newfoundland and Labrador does not maintain a film and video classification system. Ratings shown are either from the Canadian Home Rating System (CHVRS) *http://www.mpa-canada.org*, the Nova Scotia Film and Video Site *http://www.gov.ns.ca/lae/agd/film*, the

Ontario Film Review Board *http://www.ofrb.gov.on.ca*, or Québec's Régie du Cinéma *www.rcq.qc.ca*.

Some movies have not been rated. Regardless, it is recommended that your teacher-advisors preview any films before they are viewed, so that they are familiar with the content.

Do you want to recommend other great LGBTQ movies to youth and educators throughout Canada? Send them to *mygsa@egale.ca*!

FIND/CHANGE SCHOOL AND SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICIES

What is your school's policy on LGBTQ matters? Your school district's policy? Are they inclusive and do they explicitly address sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression? If not, or if they are not satisfactory, as a group and using the information, policies, and legislative information provided in this kit and on *MyGSA.ca*, work towards changing them!

What is your school's policy on LGBTQ matters?

In May 2006, Newfoundland and Labrador's Department of Education issued the *Safe and Caring Schools Policy*. The Code of Conduct in this policy states that, "All members of the school community have the right to feel safe and secure in all school-related activities and share in the responsibility of ensuring this is the case...It is expected that all members of the school community will promote safe, caring and inclusive practice by doing their best to:

- effect and orderly, productive work and learning environment free from aggression or disrespectful behaviour;

- engage in activities and behaviour that promote health and personal well-being;

- relate to one another in a positive and supportive manner, with dignity and respect;

- embrace the diversity of all peoples, regardless of economic status, race, colour, national or ethnic origin, language group, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age or ability; and

- support non-violent conflict resolution."

As part of this policy, each district is required to create a safe and caring schools policy, and each school is required to create an action plan for a safe and caring school. *http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/studentsupportservices/publications/scs_prov_policy.pdf*

Check your school district's website for its *Safe and Caring Schools Policy*. If the policy is comprehensive and inclusive regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, submit it to Egale's national LGBTQ safer schools and inclusive education website, *MyGSA.ca*, as an example of a good school district policy.

If your school District policy or school guidelines do not address LGBTQ matters, or are not comprehensive enough, approach your GSA's school staff advisor/sponsor, another staff member at your school, or your principal to ask for support in changing it.

If you are unable to find your school District's *Safe and Caring Schools Policy* on its website, ask your principal for a copy of it. If your principal doesn't have a copy, phone your school district to find out what its policy is regarding LGBTQ matters.

Ask your principal if you can discuss your school's action plan for safe and caring schools.

With the help of a teacher and the information included here, such as the statistics from Egale Canada's First National School Climate Survey Reports (*http://MyGSA.ca/YouthSpeakUp*), the information from the Department of Education, and the sample school board policies, approach your principal and ask her or him to amend the school's action plan and to go to the school district and request that the policy be changed to be inclusive of LGBTQ matters.

The Toronto District School Board's Gender-Based Violence Policy

Policy P071
Adopted: April 14, 2010

Here is an example of a school district policy that has included LGBTQ issues within the context of gender-based violence. The result is that issues like homophobia, biphobia and transphobia and harassment related to real or perceived gender identity or sexual orientation are included in an already important discussion. This makes it more likely that school staff will be able to detect these forms of bullying, discrimination and harassment, understand their gravity, and to know how to intervene.

1.0 OBJECTIVE

To establish the Board's commitment to eliminating gender-based violence in its school

2.0 DEFINITIONS

Gender-based violence is any aggressive action that threatens safety, causes physical, social or emotional harm and denigrates a person because of his or her gender identity, perceived gender, sexual identity, biological sex or sexual behaviour.

> ✴ It is important that policies also include references to *perceived* gender, sexual identity, biological sex or sexual behavior. Straight and cisgender students (and adults) may also be experiencing homophobia, biphobia or transphobia because of society's stereotypes of masculine and feminine behaviour and appearance.

Gender-based violence includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Sexual assault (perpetrator aged 12 years and over)
- Inappropriate, problematic and intrusive sexual behaviour (perpetrator under age 12 years)
- Sexual exploitation (perpetrator an adult employee/ victim a student)
- Sexual misconduct
- Sexual harassment
- Sexist discrimination
- Domestic violence
- Emotional abuse
- Psychological abuse
- Forced prostitution
- Homophobia
- Transphobia
- Harmful gender-based social practices, e.g. female genital mutilation
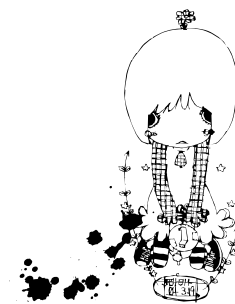
Gender-based violence operates on a societal imbalance of power and control based on social constructions of sexual identity, sexual orientation, gender, perceived gender and sexual behaviour. This imbalance may manifest in multiple forms as aggressive and discriminatory behaviours and expressions of hatred. (See the next page for information on gender-based violence.)

3.0 RESPONSIBILITY

Executive Superintendent, School Services, East

4.0 POLICY

4.1. Reporting Incidents of Gender-based Violence

(a) All employees of the Board shall report any concerns about or incidents of gender-based violence in the school community to the school principal.

(b) All allegations of sexual assault perpetrated by persons 12 years of age and older and/or sexual misconduct by children under 12 years of age shall be reported to the appropriate Board employee.

(c) Any act or concern of gender-based violence that takes place off school property, including use of electronic media, and has a negative impact on a school's environment shall be reported and responded to.

> **This policy reaches beyond what might happen in the halls or on school property, which is crucial especially with the advent of cyberbullying.**

4.2. Notification and Investigation

(a) In situations where a student has been physically or emotionally harmed, the appropriate supervisory and School Services staff shall be notified.

(b) Employee Services shall be notified of any incidents of gender-based violence involving Board staff. Where staff have a complaint against students or other staff, the Human Rights office shall be notified.

(c) Principals shall be the first point of contact for investigating incidents.

4.3. Compliance and Accountability

As with all Board policies, all staff are expected to be compliant with this policy and its related procedures. Failure to comply may lead to disciplinary action.

4.4. Prevention Strategy: Staff Development

(a) Gender-based violence policy and procedure training shall be mandatory for all staff.

(b) All school-based staff shall receive annual training on responding to incidents of gender-based violence.

(c) Professional learning opportunities for administrators, superintendents, teachers and support staff shall focus on the causes of gender-based violence, prevention strategies and Board policies and procedures for responding to gender-based violence.

Training – and ongoing training – are key to creating an environment that is safe. Not all violence is obvious, and sometimes homophobic, biphobic and transphobic comments can be missed because they often play into the stereotypes society has about gender that we are constantly bombarded with in the media.

4.5. Prevention Strategy: Professional Supports

(a) An interdisciplinary team shall be established to deliver both policy implementation training and programs that focus on the development of student, staff and parental involvement related to raising awareness, developing school-based action plans and coordinating system-wide student-led activities.

This gets the whole school community involved and makes this policy a living, breathing document.

(b) Superintendents and principals shall work with the appropriate staff to access professional support staff on a priority basis for incidents of gender-based violence involving students.

(c) Resources shall be realigned to establish programs at both the high school and junior-intermediate levels for students who have engaged in repeated acts of gender-based violence in order to support the re-integration and re-engagement of these young people into society and prevent future incidents.

4.6. Student Engagement

(a) Students will have the opportunity to participate in gender-based peer education programs that examine the roots of gender-based violence and its impact on females and males, healthy relationships and equality among marginalized groups.

> Some of these roots of violence are listed in the Newfoundland and Labrador Violence Prevention Initiative's guiding principles. Sexual orientation is listed as a factor that increases the risk of being a victim of violence, and it is also acknowledged that "society reinforces violence through expressions of sexism, ageism, classism, heterosexism, and other biased attitudes." For more information visit *http://www.gov.nf.ca/VPI/initiative/index.html*

(b) Issues related to gender-based violence such as healthy relationships, sexuality, gender stereotyping and homophobia shall be integrated and reinforced in subjects across the curriculum. *Integrating these issues into the curriculum signal their importance as well as ensuring that all students learn about them.*

(c) Primary prevention programs for students in elementary and secondary schools shall be designed to be comprehensive, coordinated, sequential, developmental, and that create both an awareness of, and a framework for dealing with, gender-based harassment and violence. *Starting in elementary school is appropriate because we are exposed to stereotypes that perpetuate violence and discrimination in the media from an early age.*

4.7. Coordination

    (a) Establish a position where the sole responsibility is the co-ordination and oversight of all initiatives relating to gender-based violence.

    (b) Establish an advisory body consisting of representatives from legal services, human rights, professional support services, caring and safe schools, guidance, health and physical education, equity, health and safety, employee services, the Anti-Bullying Committee, superintendents of education, principals, and students who shall meet regularly to advise the Gender-Based Violence Policy (GBVP) Coordinator on policy implementation and prevention strategy. The advisory body will consult with external partners as required.

    (c) Establish a policy implementation team, both East and West, consisting of one Superintendent of Education and Principal and the North - South Chiefs of Social Work to advise the GBVP Coordinator and help facilitate policy and procedure training in each quadrant.

4.8. Communication

    (a) Policies and resources relating to sexual assault and gender-based violence shall be posted in schools and shall form part of the orientation process for all staff and students at the commencement of each year and be included in all student agendas.

    (b) Relevant information shall be prepared for each of the employee groups, parents and community partners on gender-based violence and harassment.

4.9. Evaluation

Research tools shall be developed that ensure prevention programs are regularly evaluated to determine their effectiveness and to identify areas for improvement. An annual report will be made to the appropriate standing committee.

5.0 SPECIFIC DIRECTIVES

The Director is authorized to issue operational procedures to implement this policy.

6.0 APPENDICES

Appendix A: Information About Gender-based Violence in Schools

7.0 REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Board Documents (available on the Board's Policies and Procedures website)

Policies

    P044, Code of Conduct

    P064, Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour

    P051, Safe Schools

    P071, Gender-based Violence

Operational Procedures

    PR585, School Code of Conduct

    PR522, Suspension Appeals and Expulsion Hearings

    PR586, Programs for Students on Long-term Suspensions and Expulsions

    PR697, Consequences of Inappropriate Student Behaviour

    PR698, Police-School Board Protocol

    PR540, Safe Schools Student Transfer

Other Documents

    Education Act, R.S.O. 1990, CHAPTER E.2

    O. Reg. 472/07, Suspension and Expulsion of Pupils

    O. Reg. 612/00, School Councils

Ministry of Education's Policy/Program Memoranda

PPM 128: The Provincial Code of Conduct and School Board Codes of Conduct

Policy P071
Appendix A

Information about Gender-based Violence in Schools

Gender-based violence in schools has far-reaching consequences to students, their peers, their families and the community at large. According to the Province's Safe Schools Action Team, it needs to be seen in the context of bullying. One-third of students experience bullying and one-third report having bullied someone else. Bullying has a negative impact on school safety, school climate and student learning. It can be severe, persistent and pervasive to such a degree that it limits a student's ability to participate in or benefit from an education program and creates an educational environment that is hostile and threatening.

The consequences for victims can include depression, loss of appetite, nightmares, disturbed sleep, low self-esteem and feelings of being sad, afraid, scared, or embarrassed. In terms of student learning, victims reported a loss of interest in school activities, increased absenteeism, decreased quality of school work, poor grades, increases in skipping, dropping classes, tardiness and truancy. While female students are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence, research has shown that males more often than females receive and make homophobic comments.

Students are not the only victims of gender-based violence in schools. Significant numbers of teachers and other staff complain that they have been sexually harassed by students and other staff members.

Gender-based violence, including sexual assault and sexual harassment, is occurring at alarming rates and is largely going unreported[1]. Measures relating to the protection of youth against sexual assaults, including those aimed at timely reporting of sexual assaults and anti-bullying programs have not succeeded in eliminating gender-based violence. These programs need to be combined with preventative education including gender-based peer education programs that examine the roots of gender-based violence and its impact on females and males, healthy relationships, and equality among marginalized groups, as well as the creation of "safe space" programs that use peer facilitators to lead open discussions amongst vulnerable groups.

---

[1] Findings of the School Safety Advisory Panel (2008) and the Ministry of Education's Safe Schools Action Team (2009).

The Vancouver School Board's LGBTTQ Policy

This is another example of a policy that very clearly outlines the desire to create safe spaces for LGBTQ students and staff. Policies are important for recognizing and acknowledging that there is an issue, for raising awareness and getting administrators and staff talking about it – as well as for working for change. The clearer the policy is at including LGBTQ issues – and explaining their impact and importance – the better, since clarity leaves little room for personal interpretation.

Intent

Vancouver Board of Education of School District No. 39 (Vancouver), Vancouver, B.C. is committed to establishing and maintaining a safe and positive learning environment for all students and employees including those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, or who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity. These students and employees, as all students and employees, have the right to learn and work in an environment free of discrimination and harassment. The letter and spirit of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,* the *B.C. Human Rights Acts* and the *Collective Agreements* shall be carefully observed, enforced, and supported, so that all members of the school community may work together in an atmosphere of respect and tolerance for individual differences. Specifically, the Board will not tolerate hate crimes, harassment or discrimination, and will vigorously enforce policy and regulations dealing with such matters.

The Board will provide a safe environment, free from harassment and discrimination, while also promoting proactive strategies and guidelines to ensure that lesbian, gay, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, bisexual and questioning

By including LGBTQ explicitly in this policy, there is no question who is included. One way homophobia, biphobia and transphobia manifest is by exclusion and lack of recognition of the lived experiences of (and different barriers that exist for) LGBTQ individuals. "Queer" is missing from this list.

Pro-active strategies and guidelines are just as important as those that are reactive – perhaps even more so if they are effective.

students, employees and families are welcomed and included in all aspects of education and school life and treated with respect and dignity. *It is wonderful that this policy is so explicit! "Welcomed and included in all aspects of school life" is broad enough and clear enough at the same time to address homophobia, biphobia and transphobia wherever it appears.* The purpose of this policy is to define appropriate behaviours and actions in order to prevent discrimination and harassment through greater awareness of and responsiveness to their deleterious effects. *Greater awareness is a crucial component of creating safer spaces for LGBTQ individuals.* This policy is also drafted to ensure that homophobic complaints are taken seriously and dealt with expeditiously and effectively through consistently applied policy and procedures. The policy will also raise awareness and improve understanding of the lives of people who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. By valuing diversity and respecting differences, students and staff act in accordance with the Vancouver district's social responsibility initiative.

Leadership

The Vancouver School Board shall ensure that all staff will be able to identify individual discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, as well as work to eliminate the systemic inequities and barriers to learning for students who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity and demonstrate accountability for their removal so that all students are treated with fairness and respect. *Being able to identify individual discriminatory attitudes and behaviours as such is key. Homophobic comments like "That's so gay" have become common and accepted parts of youth language and are often not seen for the damaging effect they have on LGBTQ individuals and how they are perceived. Systemic barriers are even harder to notice when they are not impacting you personally. But by clearly outlining both of these as areas of focus, the Vancouver School Board acknowledges that discrimination happens through individuals as well as through policies and systems.*

All administrators, teachers, counsellors, and staff and student leaders will communicate the board's position to their employees, staff and students. In the course of their leadership roles, they will commit to listen to lesbian, gay, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, bisexual and questioning youth and their designated support groups and take concrete actions to make schools more welcoming and safer places for these students. *This is amazing - because who better to tell you what is happening and how they are affected than the people who are experiencing it?* The Board shall consult with the LGBTTQ Advisory Committee to ensure that policy directions, priorities and implementation of programs and services are consistent with this LGBTTQ policy.

An Advisory Committee specifically for LGBTQ issues is a good idea to help bring (and keep) attention to the need for safety and awareness.

Counselling and Student Support

The Vancouver School Board is committed to maintaining a safe learning and working environment which actively provides counselling and support to students who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. All counsellors provided by the board shall be educated in the knowledge and skills required to deal with LGBTTQ issues with students. *Counsellors who are educated on LGBTQ issues are very important because their role is to support and guide people who are struggling. Homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in this environment can be particularly damaging since it flies in the face of what we expect. Furthermore, for some students seeing a counsellor may be their last resort, so timely and appropriate intervention may be even more crucial.* Counsellors will be informed and familiar with all policies with respect to human rights, anti-homophobia, hate literature, discrimination and harassment, and will alert their school community to these policies. Counsellors will be sensitive to lesbian, gay, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, bisexual and questioning students as well as students from LGBTT-headed families. *Homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are experienced by children of LGBTQ parents because of their family structure. These students may fall under the radar because they themselves are straight or cisgender, but the attack on one's family can be just as impactful.*

Elementary and Secondary Schools are encouraged to appoint a staff person to be a safe contact for students who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. School administrators should inform students and other staff about the location and availability of this contact person. Schools are encouraged in their goal planning to advocate for students who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity and those who are questioning their gender identity. Where students request and where staff are willing to volunteer their time, Gay/Straight Alliance clubs (GSAs) will be encouraged at Secondary Schools in the District.

Students who come from LGBTQ families are not included in this list, and should be (see last two comments above).

Even heterosexual individuals can be victims to homophobic (or biphobic or transphobic) harassment if they do not conform to society's expectations of masculinity or femininity, and are percieved as LGBTQ.

Anti-Harassment

Homophobic harassment is demeaning treatment to all students, students' parents or guardians, and employees regardless of their sexual orientation. Harassment based on gender identities is also demeaning to all students and employees. These forms of harassment and discrimination are prohibited under the B.C. Human Rights Code. Any language or behaviour that deliberately degrades, denigrates, labels, stereotypes, incites hatred, prejudice, discrimination, harassment towards students or employees on the basis of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identification will not be tolerated. Schools will be encouraged to specifically include the prohibition of such language and behaviour in their student codes of conduct. Please refer to the "General Anti-Harassment VSB Policy." *Naming these behaviours and including them explicitly in the code of conduct is important in order to raise awareness and visibility as well as to increase the likelihood that action will be taken. This will leave less room for interpretation.*

Curriculum Learning Resources

Anti-Homophobia Education strives to identify and change educational practices, policies, and procedures that promote homophobia, as well as the homophobic attitudes and behaviours that underlie and reinforce such policies and practices. Anti-homophobia education provides knowledge, skills, and strategies for educators to examine such discrimination critically in order to understand its origin and to recognize and challenge it.

Seeing yourself and your life reflected positively in the curriculum is important to self esteem and engagement. Omissions speak just as loudly as negative messages about the value society places on a particular experience or reality.

Beyond individual behaviour, the curriculum is full of messages about what and who has value. By educating staff about systemic homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and heterosexism (and how they manifest) staff can critically examine the curriculum they use including their own language. Awareness can be raised by using offending examples as teaching tools to show how homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heterosexism and cisnormativity manifest themselves.

The Board is committed to enabling all lesbian, gay, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, bisexual and questioning students to see themselves and their lives positively reflected in the curriculum. Resources should be chosen or updated in order to promote critical thinking and include materials that accurately reflect the range of Canada's LGBTTQ communities. Keeping in mind the multicultural aspect of the district, as many of the above resources as possible should be available in different languages and in formats easily accessible to ESL students.

Staff Development, In Service, and Professional Development

The Vancouver School Board is committed to ongoing staff development in anti-homophobia education and sexual orientation equity for trustees and Board staff, and will assist them to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours to identify and eliminate homophobic practices. The Board will provide in-service training for teaching and support staff in anti-homophobia methodologies to enable them to deliver an inclusive curriculum. The Board will also provide in-service training for employees to deal effectively and confidently with issues of homophobia, heterosexism and gender identity and support initiatives that foster dialogue to create understanding and respect for diversity.

LGBTQ individuals exist in every culture, all over the world. Curriculum materials should reflect the diversity within LGBTQ communities, regardless of the diversity of the students in the district, as part of preparing students to be global citizens.

There are still many countries around the world where sexual orientations other than heterosexual are illegal and some where same-sex relationships are punishable by death. In most jurisdictions around the world transgender people face some form of discrimination, often including state-supported violence, intimidation, and a lack of access to medical care.

Training and professional development should extend beyond school staff so that all members of the school community receive these important messages (regardless of how they identify).

Positive messages are important for creating a safe environment because they set the tone in the school and send a message to the school community of who is valued and important. This is proactive.

Reactive support is just as crucial as proactive support. Immediate recognition and intervention are necessary to ensure schools are safe for all members of the school community.

As communities and legislation change, ongoing dialogue is important to keep informed about the needs and realities of LGBTQ individuals and how best to create and sustain safe spaces.

Having LGBTQ parents and parents of LGBTQ students on parent advisory councils helps to create inclusive schools because the needs and realities of LGBTQ parents and LGBTQ students can be represented and considered in decision making .

School-Community Involvement

The Vancouver School Board is committed to ongoing, constructive and open dialogue with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities and other communities who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity to increase cooperation and collaboration among home, school and the community.

The Board will work to create partnerships that ensure effective participation in the education process by representative and inclusive organizations and LGBTTQ communities that are committed to the mission of the VSB. (To enable students to reach their intellectual, social, aesthetic and physical potential in challenging and stimulating settings which reflect the worth of each individual and promote mutual respect, cooperation, and social responsibility.)

The Board will encourage parent advisory councils to reflect the diversity of the District. The Vancouver School Board will acknowledge through its communication to students, staff, and the community that some children live in LGBTT-headed families and need to be positively recognized and included as such. Any information to students and parents on anti-homophobia, anti-discrimination and sexual orientation equity needs to be translated into the languages spoken in the home. Parent Advisory Councils and students will be encouraged to engage in dialogue with openly identified LGBTTQ youth and their organizations.

Employment Equity

The Board of School Trustees (the "Board") believes in equitable treatment for all individuals regardless of race, colour, ancestry, ethnic origin, religion, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or mental ability, or political beliefs. The letter and spirit of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,* the *B.C. Human Rights Acts* and the *VSB/VTF Collective Agreement* shall be carefully observed, enforced, and supported, so that all members of the school community may work together in an atmosphere of respect and tolerance for individual differences.

The Board will ensure that the confidentiality of the sexual orientation and gender identity of staff will be protected. Employees who are out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or transitioning to another gender will be given the support they require to do their work in a safe and respectful environment.

→ **START A WRITING GROUP**

Think about compiling them as a group to share with others or post them on *MyGSA.ca*.

Tell your own stories!

→ **ARRANGE SPEAKERS**

Contact some of the local organizations listed in the LGBTQ and LGBTQ-Friendly Organizations, Programmes, & Resources section of this kit or on *MyGSA.ca* and ask to have someone come in to talk about matters related to the LGBTQ community.

→ **DO A CAMPAIGN**

As a group, come up with a name for your campaign and

What matters to you? What do you want to change?

create posters, videos, pamphlets, stickers, etc. to share your message.

Promote your campaign and connect with LGBTQ youth and allies throughout the country by uploading information about it on *MyGSA.ca*!

Want some ideas? Check out the following:

• **Heterosexual Questionnaire**

• **Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack II– Sexual Orientation**

(*both are coming up in the next sections*)

This questionnaire highlights some of the questions that LGBTQ individuals often hear– but directed to heterosexual individuals. It is an attempt to raise awareness of how being asked these questions may feel, and to increase empathy and compassion since seeing these questions from the "other side" will hopefully shed light on how ridiculous they are.

This questionnaire is for self-avowed heterosexuals only. If you are not openly heterosexual, pass it on to a friend who is. Please try to answer the questions as candidly as possible. Your responses will be held in strict confidence and your anonymity fully protected.

1. What do you think caused your heterosexuality?

2. When and how did you first decide you were a heterosexual?

3. Is it possible your heterosexuality is just a phase you may grow out of?

4. Could it be that your heterosexuality stems from a neurotic fear of others of the same sex?

5. If you've never slept with a person of the same sex, how can you be sure you wouldn't prefer that?

6. To whom have you disclosed your heterosexual tendencies? How did they react?

7. Why do heterosexuals feel compelled to seduce others into their lifestyle?

8. Why do you insist on flaunting your heterosexuality? Can't you just be what you are and keep it quiet?

9. Would you want your children to be heterosexual, knowing the problems they'd face?

10. A disproportionate majority of child molesters are heterosexual men. Do you consider it safe to expose children to heterosexual male teachers, pediatricians, priests, or scoutmasters?

11. With all the societal support for marriage, the divorce rate is spiraling. Why are there so few stable relationships among heterosexuals?

12. Why do heterosexuals place so much emphasis on sex?

13. Considering the menace of overpopulation, how could the human race survive if everyone were heterosexual?

14. Could you trust a heterosexual therapist to be objective? Don't you fear s/he might be inclined to influence you in the direction of her/his own leanings?

15. Heterosexuals are notorious for assigning themselves and one another rigid, stereotyped sex roles. Why must you cling to such unhealthy role-playing?

16. With the sexually segregated living conditions of military life, isn't heterosexuality incompatible with military service?

17. How can you enjoy an emotionally fulfilling experience with a person of the other sex when there are such vast differences between you? How can a man know what pleases a woman sexually or vice-versa?

18. Shouldn't you ask your far-out straight cohorts, like skinheads and born-agains, to keep quiet? Wouldn't that improve your image?

19. Why are heterosexuals so promiscuous?

20. Why do you attribute heterosexuality to so many famous lesbian and gay people? Is it to justify your own heterosexuality?

21. How can you hope to actualize your God-given homosexual potential if you limit yourself to exclusive, compulsive heterosexuality?

22. There seem to be very few happy heterosexuals. Techniques have been developed that might enable you to change if you really want to. After all, you never deliberately chose to be a heterosexual, did you? Have you considered aversion therapy or Heterosexuals Anonymous?

DAILY EFFECTS OF STRAIGHT PRIVILEGE

This article is based on Peggy McIntosh's article on white privilege and was written by a number of straight-identified students at Earlham College who got together to look at some examples of straight privilege. These dynamics are but a few examples of the privilege which straight people have. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer-identified folk have a range of different experiences, but cannot count on most of these conditions in their lives.

On a daily basis as a straight person…

- I can be pretty sure that my roommates, dorm-mates, and classmates will be comfortable with my sexual orientation.

- If I pick up a magazine, watch TV, or play music, I can be certain my sexual orientation will be represented.

- When I talk about my heterosexuality (such as in a joke or talking about my relationships), I will not be accused of pushing my sexual orientation onto others.

- I do not have to fear that if my family or friends find out about my sexual orientation there will be economic, emotional, physical, or psychological consequences.

- I did not grow up with games that attack my sexual orientation (e.g., fag tag or smear the queer).

- I am not accused of being abused, warped, or psychologically confused because of my sexual orientation.

- I can go home from most meetings, classes, and conversations without feeling excluded, fearful, attacked, isolated, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, stereotyped, or feared because of my sexual orientation.

- I am never asked to speak for everyone who is heterosexual.

- I can be sure that my classes will require curricular materials that testify to the existence of people with my sexual orientation.

- People don't ask why I made my choice of sexual orientation.
- People don't ask why I made my choice to be public about my sexual orientation.
- I do not have to fear revealing my sexual orientation to friends or family. It's assumed.
- My sexual orientation was never associated with a closet.
- People of my gender do not try to convince me to change my sexual orientation.
- I don't have to defend my heterosexuality.
- I can easily find a religious community that will not exclude me for being heterosexual.
- I can count on finding a therapist or doctor willing and able to talk about my sexuality.
- I am guaranteed to find sex education literature for couples with my sexual orientation.
- Because of my sexual orientation, I do not need to worry that people will harass me.
- I have no need to qualify my straight identity.
- My masculinity/femininity is not challenged because of my sexual orientation.
- I am not identified by my sexual orientation.
- I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help my sexual orientation will not work against me.
- If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has sexual orientation overtones.
- Whether I rent or download a movie or go to a theater, I can be sure I will not have trouble finding my sexual orientation represented.
- I am guaranteed to find people of my sexual orientation represented in the curriculum, faculty, and administration.

- I can walk in public with my significant other and not have people double-take or stare.
- I can choose to not think politically about my sexual orientation.
- I do not have to worry about telling my roommate about my sexuality. It is assumed I am a heterosexual.
- I can remain oblivious of the language and culture of LGBTQ folk without feeling in my culture any penalty for such obliviousness.
- I can go for months without being called straight.
- I'm not grouped because of my sexual orientation.
- My individual behavior does not reflect on people who identify as heterosexual.
- In everyday conversation, the language my friends and I use generally assumes my sexual orientation: for example, sex inappropriately referring to only heterosexual sex or family meaning only heterosexual adults who have children.
- People do not assume I am experienced in sex (or that I even have it!) merely because of my sexual orientation.
- I can kiss a person of the opposite gender on the street or in the cafeteria without being watched and stared at.
- Nobody calls me straight with maliciousness.
- People can use terms that describe my sexual orientation and mean positive things (e.g., "straight as an arrow," "standing up straight," or "straightened out") instead of demeaning terms (e.g., "ewww, that's gay" or being "queer").
- I am not asked to think about why I am straight.
- I can be open about my sexual orientation without worrying about my job.

Adapted from *http://www.cs.earlham.edu/~hyrax/personal/files/student_res/straightprivilege.htm*.

➲ HAVE A BOOK CLUB

Check out this list of recommended books! Ask your friends to read the same book and bring topics, comments, and questions for discussion to your GSA meeting.

What are your favourite books with LGBTQ themes or written by LGBTQ writers?

Individually or as a group, write up a review to post on *MyGSA.ca* and find out what other youth throughout Canada think!

Tell us about your favourite LGBTQ books at *mygsa@egale.ca*!

Absolutely, Positively Not (2005) by David LaRochelle. In a touching, sometimes hilarious coming-out story, Steven DeNarski, 16, tries to deny he is gay. . . . The wry, first-person narrative is wonderful as it goes from personal angst to outright farce (Steven takes a pet golden retriever to the school dance). The characters are drawn with surprising depth, and Steven finds quiet support, as well as betrayal, in unexpected places. Many readers, gay and straight, will recognize Steven's need to talk to someone.

Am I Blue? Coming Out from the Silence (1994), edited by Marion Dane Bauer, is a collection of short stories for young adults which addresses issues of homosexuality. Some of the protagonists have gay friends or family members, like Willie in "Holding." Some of these young adults are discovering that they feel attracted to people of the same sex and are questioning their sexual orientation, as in the title story. Others, like the young people in "Parents' Night," have determined that they are homosexual and now must confront society, family, and friends. Awards include ALA Best Books for Young Adults; ALA Recommended Book for Reluctant Young Adult Readers; 1995 ALA Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual Book Award for Literature; 1995 Lambda Literary Award for Children and Young Adults; and 1995 Minnesota Book Award for older children.

Between Mom and Jo (2006) by Julie Anne Peters has been named an Honor Book for the first ever James Cook Teen Book Award given by the Ohio Library Council. The award recognizes books that promote and celebrate cultural, ethnic, and social diversity; demonstrate excellence in writing; and have a wide appeal to a teen audience. It has also been chosen as Rainbow Reads by the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Round Table of the American Library Association.

"Jo promised Nick they'd always be together. So did Mom. When you're a stupid little kid you believe what your parents tell you. You want to believe that your life will be good and nothing will change and everything–everyone–goes on forever. It's not until later you find out people are liars, forever is a myth, and a kid with two moms should never be put in the position of having to choose between them."

From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun (1995) by Jacqueline Woodson: Thirteen-year-old Melanin Sun has always had a close relationship with his mother, a single parent. He is surprised when she tells him that she has fallen in love with a white woman. Worried that this relationship means that she doesn't love him, an African-American male, Melanin shuts his mother out of his life. After a confrontation, he agrees to spend the day with his mother and her partner, Kristen. It is through meeting Kristen that Melanin learns how important family is, and rejoices in the fact that his mother will always have a place for him in her life.

Funny Boy is Shyam Selvadurai's first novel; it won the Lambda Literary Award for Best Gay Men's Novel as well as the Smithbooks/Books in Canada First Novel Award in 1994. In this remarkable debut novel, a boy's bittersweet passage to maturity and sexual awakening is set against escalating political tensions in Sri Lanka during the seven years leading up to the 1983 riots. Arjie Chelvaratnam is a Tamil boy growing up in an extended family in Colombo. It is through his eyes that the story unfolds and we meet a delightful, sometimes eccentric, cast of characters. Arjie's journey from the luminous simplicity of childhood days into the more intricately shaded world of adults–with its secrets, its injustices, and its capacity for violence–is a memorable one, as time and time again the true longings of the human heart are held against the way things are.

Hear Me Out: In 2004, Teens Educating and Confronting Homophobia (T.E.A.C.H.) published a book of stories written by peer facilitators about their coming out experiences. These stories are based upon the stories the peer facilitators use to engage participants during T.E.A.C.H. workshops. Critically acclaimed, the book received attention across Canada upon its publication.

Koolaids (1998) by Rabih Alameddine: An extraordinary literary debut, this book is about the AIDS epidemic, the civil war in Beirut, death, sex, and the meaning of life. Daring in form as well as content, Koolaids turns the traditional novel inside out and hangs it on the clothesline to air.

The Little Black Book for Girlz: A Book on Healthy Sexuality (2006) and *The Little Black Book for Guys: Guys Talk about Sex* (2008) by youth for youth: St. Stephen's Community House, a community-based social service agency in Toronto, engaged a diverse group of teens looking for the real deal about sexuality. To find answers, they collected stories, poetry, and artwork from other youth. They also interviewed health experts to get the facts about issues young people face. The result? An honest and powerful mix of real-life examples and life-saving info.

Luna (2004) by Julie Anne Peters has been chosen by the American Library Association for their 2009 Great Stories CLUB. The Great Stories CLUB (Connecting Libraries, Under-served teens, and Books) is a reading and discussion program designed to reach under-served and at-risk youth through books that are relevant to their lives.

"From as early as she can remember, Regan O'Neill has known that her brother Liam was different. That he was, in fact, a girl. Transgender. Having a transgender brother has never been a problem for Regan–until now. Liam (or Luna, as she prefers to be called by her chosen name) is about to transition. What does it mean, transitioning? Dressing like a girl? In public? Does Liam expect Regan to embrace this decision, to welcome his sex change? She's always kept her brother's secret, always been his confidante, but now Regan's acceptance and love will be put to the test."

She Walks for Days Inside a Thousand Eyes: A Two Spirit Story (2008) by Sharron Proulx-Turner. Sharron Proulx-Turner combines poetry and history to delve into the little-known lives of two-spirit women. Regarded with both wonder and fear when first encountered by the West, First Nations women living with masculine and feminine principles in the same body had important roles to play in society, as healers and visionaries, before they were suppressed during the colonial invasion. She walks for days inside a thousand eye (a two-spirit story) creatively juxtaposes first-person narratives and traditional stories with the voices of contemporary two-spirit women, voices taken from nature, and the teachings of Water, Air, Fire and Mother Earth.

So Hard to Say (2004) by Alex Sanchez. Frederick is the shy new boy and Xio is the bubbly chica who lends him a pen on the first day of class. They become fast friends-but when Xio decides she wants to be more than friends, Frederick isn't so sure. He loves hanging out with Xio and her crew, but he doesn't like her that way. Instead, he finds himself thinking more and more about Victor, the captain of the soccer team. Does that mean Frederick's gay?

Stealing Nasreen (2007) by Farzana Doctor: Nasreen Bastawala is an Indo-Canadian lesbian and burnt-out psychologist who meets and becomes enmeshed in the lives of Shaffiq and Salma Paperwala, new immigrants from Mumbai. Both Shaffiq and Salma develop confusing attractions to Nasreen. For Shaffiq this causes him to bring home and hide things he "finds" in her office. Salma's crush on Nasreen harkens back memories and regrets about a lesbian affair that ended badly years ago.

Zami: A New Spelling of My Name (1982) by Audre Lorde: This biomythography traces Audre Lorde's life from her childhood in Harlem through her discovery and acceptance of her self as a black, lesbian woman in the late 1950s. Masterfully crafted by the profound and artistic Lorde, *Zami* reads like musical poetry. Through her life experiences, Lorde carefully forges a path to locate her position in the world. Ultimately, naming and accepting difference are the tools necessary for Lorde's ability to stay alive and stay human.

Contact local organizations from the LGBTQ and LGBTQ-Friendly Organizations, Programmes, & Resources section of this kit or *MyGSA.ca* for assistance.

PARTICIPATE IN PRIDE EVENTS

Does your community have a Pride celebration? Look it up on the Queer Calendar on *MyGSA.ca* if you aren't sure.

If so, take part in marching and/or performing. Do a dance routine or make a float!

If not, why not? (See "Do a Campaign.")

DO WORKSHOPS

Using your collective knowledge and the information provided in this kit and on *MyGSA.ca*, put together your own anti-heterosexism, anti-homophobia, anti-biphobia, anti-transphobia, and intersectionality workshops.

FUNDRAISER

Do something for your community to raise funds for your group. Need ideas? Start a topic on the *MyGSA.ca* discussion forums and brainstorm with other students from across the country!

HAVE AN EVENT

Choose a date from the Queer Calendar on *MyGSA.ca* and learn more about it. Have an event to celebrate or commemorate it.

PLAY GAMES

Try the "Icebreakers" (*page 41*) or "A Sociometry of Oppressions" (*page 84*). There are also activities included in the Educators' Section of the kit. Look there for even more ideas!

GOOD LUCK & HAVE FUN! If you encounter any obstacles setting up a GSA or planning activities, talk to your school staff advisors, teachers, guidance counsellors, and school administration.

A SOCIOMETRY OF OPPRESSION

Used with the permission of Susan Diane RN, BA, MA

Grades: 10-12
Time: 30 to 60 minutes

Context: The basic premise for this experiential educational exercise came from Logan et al. (1996) who were educating social work students about heterosexual privilege. Although this educational tool still includes sexual orientation/identity, it has been expanded to include gender, race/ethnicity, age, class, occupation, ability, and religion. It is expanded here to give a sense of the interconnections and complexity of identity within the multiple structures of oppression in a hierarchical, capitalist, patriarchal society. Although the activity is complex, students can gain a sense of these issues through role play and assuming other identities.

Learning Outcomes:

• to introduce the concepts of privilege and oppression and that all individuals are affected by them;

• to develop a better understanding of the complexity of individuals within our society;

• to increase awareness and understanding of the meanings of power and control;

• to gain a better understanding of how and why our culture maintains the status quo; and

• to develop empathy for others.

Preparation:

• Photocopy and cut identity cards.

• If necessary, photocopy the Sociometry of Oppressions Question Sheets to read out to the group.

• A fairly large open space is needed which often necessitates moving furniture or using a gym or hall instead of a classroom.

• A class of about 15-20 participants seems ideal, but it can be used with smaller or larger numbers.

• About half an hour is needed to complete the exercise, although this will vary depending on the amount of time it takes for debriefing each participant.

Lesson:

1. Explain that participants will be given an identity card and asked to move forward one step (or its equivalent if there are wheelchair participants) when answering affirmatively to a series of questions. It is helpful to explain that everyone will be taking the same amount of risk in playing the game. If it seems the students may be reluctant, try using a "fish bowl" technique, where some students do the activity and others watch. (All the students report on what they learned from the activity. It does not work as well, but is one way to adapt this for shy students.)

2. Hand out cards to each participant. Instruct them not to show their cards to other participants. You may need to help some participants individually if they have questions about their identity card. If you have a small number of participants, try to pick identities so that you have a mix of sexual orientations, genders, ethnic origins, religious denominations, and abilities.

3. Have participants line up against a wall. Start with all participants facing towards the wall. Ask those who can be open about their sexual orientation to turn around and face forward– you may choose to broaden this by asking all those who can be open about their own sexual orientation and gender identity as well as the sexual orientations and gender identities of their loved ones to turn around and face forward.

4. Read out the questions regarding social and economic privileges which are worded so that those who can participate in the activity (e.g., take out a loan) can take a step forward. Those who would not be able to do that in our society must remain where they are. After reading out all the questions, and allowing participants to move forward to various degrees, have participants stay in their resulting positions of privilege when the questions are finished.

5. Ask each one in turn to read out their identity and discuss what the experience was like for her or him. You are actually debriefing each participant, but others will usually join in the discussion as this process continues. Be sure to have each and every student discuss what the experience was like for her or him in order to ensure they can all make sense of what they experienced. As in any experiential activity, be prepared for the possibility of someone's personal experiences being triggered so that further debriefing may be needed. Participants are asked to take on a pseudo-identity (a type of role-playing) here, which usually does not trigger major personal revelations.

6. After each student has shared what it was like, discuss how privilege works and how those with it can be successful, while those without it find themselves falling behind in our society. Talk about intersectionality and "double and triple oppressions." This is when a person has a number of interconnecting factors holding them back (e.g., racism, homophobia, and transphobia). Discuss the reason this happens in our society. Why are groups oppressed? What is the purpose of oppressing a group of people? Whose needs does it serve? Is it acceptable? Legal? Fair? Ethical? What can we do to change this? How can we do it? Who is responsible for what is happening in our society? What did we learn from this discussion?

Related Activities:

• Have the students write a journal about any of the questions above that they are interested in.

• Share with the students some historical examples of oppression, such as Apartheid, the Holocaust, Black slavery in the USA, the Stonewall Riots, and the continuing oppression of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirited, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) community. Have them research a group of people (or a specific person) and the oppression they have suffered and present their findings to the class.

Share your thoughts about this exercise on the *MyGSA.ca* discussion forums!
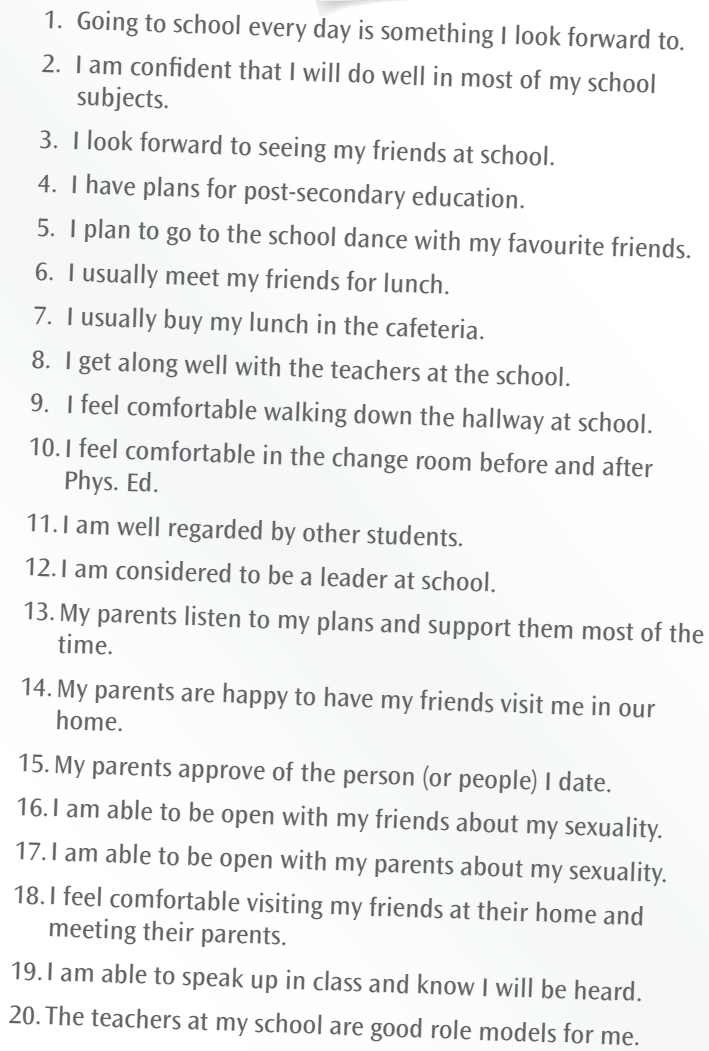
Pseudo-Identity Cards:

|		
19 year-old gay male who has a girlfriend and secretly has sex with guys. His girlfriend thinks they should get married.	16 year-old white female who had sex for the first time last year. She has just found out she is HIV+.	17 year-old First Nations female. She is talented at basketball and wants to play, but she's usually late for practice because she has to look after her siblings.
17 year-old white heterosexual female whose father is rich. She skis in Whistler and stays in their cottage during the summer.	16 year-old Cambodian female who is an ESL student. Her family ignores her and she is behind at school by 2 years. She is always by herself and looks lonely.	Indo-Canadian female who is dating a white male. Her family is against the relationship. She is thinking of getting pregnant.
White male Goth student who is in a relationship with a black female. His family lives in poverty.	Grade 8 white male student, skateboarder. He has a close group of friends, both male and female.	Grade 8 student with learning difficulties, thinking of dropping out of school. Parents don't really expect him to graduate.
Grade 12 student who is an out lesbian. Her friends are trying to find a sponsor teacher to start a GSA in their high school.	17 year-old white depressed female who uses a wheelchair and is questioning her sexuality. She has attempted suicide four times.	15 year-old white female student who is in a violent relationship with an older man. She is scared to tell anyone.
16 year-old straight male hippy who smokes pot openly and was home-schooled.	Grade 12 trans M2F (male-to-female) student. Wants to wear dresses and make-up to school and use the female washroom.	Grade 10 female student who cares about the environment and educates others about food choices.

15 year-old white male who skips school most days and hangs out at the mall. He is starting to do drugs.	17 year-old white lesbian stay-at-home-mom of two small children living on welfare. She is studying by distance education.	19 year-old, vegetarian female rock musician in a relationship with another woman. She identifies as bisexual.
17 year-old female with a one year-old baby, living with her parents. She is trying to finish her last year of high school.	17 year-old Caucasian female who is living on the street. She is addicted to crack.	19 year-old lesbian female, who is a practising Wiccan.
19 year-old white heterosexual female who is in a relationship with an older Jamaican-Canadian man.	16 year-old white male who lives with his mom. She is addicted to heroin. He was recently beaten up by her boyfriend.	16 year-old gay male who is in the closet. He dates girls and plays sports. He recently met a guy he likes.
16 year-old lesbian high school student who uses sign language to communicate.	16 year-old First Nations female student going out with a white male. She practices traditional native spirituality.	16 year-old female who works at the bakery to help her family that has recently immigrated. Her mom speaks very little English.
17 year-old student who identifies as queer and is a practicing Muslim.	Grade 9 student going to a Catholic school and who believes strongly in her religion. Her best friend since kindergarten just came out to her as gay.	Attractive and popular athlete with 2 dads. Nobody knows.

Sociometry of Oppression for Teenagers: revised list of questions for lesson plan

1. Going to school every day is something I look forward to.
2. I am confident that I will do well in most of my school subjects.
3. I look forward to seeing my friends at school.
4. I have plans for post-secondary education.
5. I plan to go to the school dance with my favourite friends.
6. I usually meet my friends for lunch.
7. I usually buy my lunch in the cafeteria.
8. I get along well with the teachers at the school.
9. I feel comfortable walking down the hallway at school.
10. I feel comfortable in the change room before and after Phys. Ed.
11. I am well regarded by other students.
12. I am considered to be a leader at school.
13. My parents listen to my plans and support them most of the time.
14. My parents are happy to have my friends visit me in our home.
15. My parents approve of the person (or people) I date.
16. I am able to be open with my friends about my sexuality.
17. I am able to be open with my parents about my sexuality.
18. I feel comfortable visiting my friends at their home and meeting their parents.
19. I am able to speak up in class and know I will be heard.
20. The teachers at my school are good role models for me.
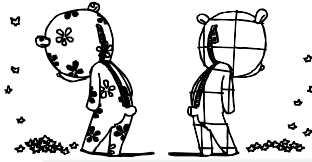
21. I feel comfortable letting others know my religious beliefs.

22. I am able to speak freely with others about what is important to me in life.

Debriefing Questions (for feedback from individual participants)

[Feedback may be verbal—especially for a, b, c, d, and e—or students may write/discuss/reflect.]

a. What holds people back?

b. What gives people privilege?

c. Are there inherent assumptions in our school system?

d. Are there assumptions in our school system? (about roles, aspirations, abilities, interests of students)

e. Do people in our homes and our communities make assumptions?

f. How can we support other people to be themselves and to achieve their potential?

g. What insights have you gained through this exercise?

h. What would you like to tell others about identity?

i. How important is a person's identity in achieving goals or having a happy life?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Alberta Teachers' Association

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity webpage:
Ten Steps to Creating a GSA in your School

American Civil Liberties Union Foundation (ACLU) (US)

Tips on Starting a GSA

The Canadian Teachers' Federation

Gay-Straight Student Alliance Handbook: A Comprehensive
Resource for Canadian K-12 Teachers, Administrators, and
School Counsellors

Egale Canada

MyGSA.ca

Gay and Lesbian Educators of British Columbia (GALE BC)

Creating & Supporting a Gay-Straight Alliance (2nd edition)

Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) (US)

The Jump-Start Guide Part 1: Building and Activating your GSA or Similar Student Club

GSA Network (US)

How to Start a Gay-Straight Alliance

The Nova Scotia Youth Project

Gay/Straight Alliance Manual

Rainbow Youth Niagara, Niagara Pride Support Services

Safer Schools for Gender and Sexually Diverse Youth: A Guide to Starting a Safer Space Program

Stonewall (UK)

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans (LGBT) and Allies Guide: Creating Change at Your School

This Equity and Inclusive
Education Resource Kit for
Newfoundland and Labrador,
Grades 7-12 is part of Egale's
Safe Schools Campaign.