GSA PROGRAM

GUIDEBOOK AND RESOURCES

SECOND EDITION

Acknowledgements:

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We are deeply appreciative of our collaborating partners who made this guidebook possible.

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IA GSA NETWORK

www.iowasafeschools.org

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A Letter of Introduction

Dear Reader,

Gay-Straight Alliances or Gender-Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) are student-run clubs or organizations in schools that serve as a safe space for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. GSAs provide a place for students to meet, support, and listen to each other about their experiences. They also provide a space to talk about topics related to the LGBTQ Community and work to end homophobia and transphobia in schools.

The GSA Network is a program of Iowa Safe Schools, with the mission of empowering students to create safe spaces in Iowa schools through youth activism and community support. The ultimate goal of enriching LGBTQ youth is accomplished through collaboration with GSA student leaders, advisors, and community partners by lifting up and amplifying student voices. The GSA Guidebook is designed to give advisors, administrators, and students a resource to develop a lasting and impactful GSA at their school. We look forward to supporting GSAs on their mission to create safe and more inclusive learning environments for LGBTQ and Allied youth.

This year more than ever, LGBTQ youth need our support. Research shows that GSAs are a life-saving resource for LGBTQ and Allied youth and promote healthy and sustainable behaviors.

Sincerely,

Kaylyn Fisher

Kaylyn Fisher she/her
Editor, The GSA Guidebook

#GSAGuidebook

A Breakdown of the 2019 Iowa YRBSS
LGB* Youth Reports

18% of LGB students have missed a day or more of school because of safety concerns

27% of LGB students have experienced sexual violence

63% of LGB students have felt sad or hopeless in the past 12 months

47% of LGB students have seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months

48% of LGB students have ever used an electronic vapor product

27% of LGB students have drunk alcohol, with 24.3% reporting they had for the first time before 13

42% of LGB students have experienced bullying on school property

41% of LGB students have experienced electronic bullying

Iowa Department of Public Health. (2019). 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results. Retrieved January 4, 2021, from https://idph.iowa.gov/PublicHealthData/Iowa-Youth-Risk-Behavior-Survey

*The Iowa Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey does not collect data on other identities and orientations within the LGBTQ Community.

A Rationale for Supporting LGBTQ Youth

Access to safe and supportive educational environments is a crucial component to the success of students. Data from across the country shows that students who are able to identify an adult who supports them in school will have higher academic scores and fewer absences. LGBTQ youth are subject to the negative impacts of the Achievement Gap, described by the National Education Association as, "the differences between the test scores of minority and/or low-income students and the test scores of their White and Asian peers" (NEA, 2019).

In 2019, the Iowa Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (Iowa Department of Public Health, 2019) released data that showed 17.3% of students in Iowa identify as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, or Questioning*. That same data showed that over 82% of LGBTQ youth reported feeling sad or hopeless in the past 30 days, and that almost half considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months before the survey. Additionally, the Iowa YRBSS reported that LGB youth reported higher rates of bullying on school property (42.1% v. 19.9%) than their heterosexual peers and higher rates of electronic bullying (40.5% v. 15.6%). According to the United States Transgender Survey by the National Center for Transgender Equality, 82% of transgender youth report that they feel unsafe at school (NCTE, 2020).

The GLSEN School Climate Survey (2019) reported that in schools with a GSA students:

- Were less likely to hear anti-LGBTQ remarks or slurs
- Were less likely to feel unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation or gender identity
- Were less likely to experience bullying, harassment, or other victimization related to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression
- Were less likely to miss school because of feeling unsafe or uncomfortable.

*The Iowa Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey does not collect data on other identities and orientations within the LGBTQ Community.

The Iowa GSA Network
An Iowa Safe Schools Program

The Iowa GSA Network is a program of Iowa Safe Schools, designed to empower students on their mission to create safe spaces through their GSAs. It is designed to provide resources and support to LGBTQ and Allied students in Iowa, as well as educators and GSA advisors. The Network assists students interested in starting a GSA at their school and connects GSAs across the state.

The Iowa GSA Network's ultimate goal of enriching LGBTQ youth lives through partnerships with student leaders and GSAs is accomplished through collaboration with GSA leaders, advisors, and community partners. It offers resources, support, and direct interactive services to GSA groups, students, and their advisors. The Network can provide your GSA with an e-toolkit of materials and ideas to help the group:

1. Support students who have been victims of bullying and harassment
2. Build a space where students can express themselves and live their truth
3. Problem solve issues within their group, and set up the GSA for continued success
4. Create positive change in their school

The GSA Network also helps groups connect with each other! Iowa Safe Schools believes that students should collaborate with and support each other, and we help provide spaces for GSAs to do just that. The GSA Network unites LGBTQ and Allied youth in several events throughout the year, including: Pride Camp, GSA Con, Student Day at the Capitol, Virtual Hangout, and the Annual Governor's Conference on LGBTQ Youth.

The Iowa GSA Network
An Iowa Safe Schools Program

The following page serves as a meeting and activity starting point for GSAs involved in the Iowa GSA Network. The GSA Network Standards & Associated Topics (a.k.a. CHIQE) is a curated list of topics that staff and students have developed to guide GSA activities and meetings.

Each section of CHIQE should be represented throughout the year in activities, events, and fundraisers so that the GSA has ample opportunity to develop and grow. How these topics are presented or talked about in meetings will vary based on member interest and student leadership decisions. As always, GSA Coordinators are happy to provide resources or help brainstorm more topic ideas that fall under the CHIQE standards.

The GSA Network Standards
& Associated Topics

Confident

Public Speaking
Pride in Identity
Communication Skills
Being a Role Model
Leadership 101
LGBTQ Leaders & History
Navigating Conflict

Innovative

Entrepreneurial Skills
Conflict Resolution
Setting Short & Long Term Goals
Taking Initiative
Using Creativity
Adapting to Changing Priorities

Engaged

Civil Dialogue
Law & Policy
Advocacy
Caucusing & Voting
Faciliting Difficult Conversations
Building Community Relationships
Community Service
Accessing Resources

Healthy

Relationships
Physical Health
Nutrition
Self-Care
Mental Health
Boundaries
Sexuality & Gender Identity
Stress Management

Qualified

ACT & SAT Preparation
Finding an Inclusive College
FAFSA & Scholarships
Academic Success
Financial Literacy
STEM Skills
Professionalism
Essay Writing
Networking
Time Management

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GSA Foundation Building

A Letter for GSA Advisors

Dear GSA Advisors,

The GSA Networks is a group of middle and high school GSAs from across the state of Iowa. Our purpose is to support the growth of the GSA movement by connecting students and educators with each other for information-sharing, networking and peer exchange. We know that for most of you, playing the part of faculty advisor to a Gender-Sexuality Alliance or Gay-Straight Alliance is a role that often adds extra hours to your work week. And a role that often adds experiences and challenges that advisors of other clubs may not encounter.

We, at Iowa Safe Schools deeply appreciate GSA advisors and the work that you do. We created this handbook to support your work and it has been a labor of love. We also know that many of you say "yes" to being a GSA advisor without prior knowledge or training on what the job will entail. Our goal in writing this handbook was to provide new GSA advisors with a basic foundation on which to build, and more seasoned GSA advisors with new ideas and suggestions to perhaps take their students' club to a new level.

This handbook is all about GSAs and LGBTQ youth in Iowa. includes an introduction to GSAs, sample activities, frequent issues that arise, and some resources that are available to LGBTQ students. We wanted it to be comprehensive while not overwhelming, and we made every effort to include many voices in compiling the information it contains. In addition to the staff at Iowa Safe Schools, advisors and students, both current and former, were involved in the writing and editing of this handbook.

Research tells us that Gay-Straight Alliances and similar clubs play a crucial role in improving school climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) students in our schools: According to GLSEN's 2019 National School Climate Survey, the presence of a GSA in a school was directly related to more positive experiences for LGBTQ students, hearing fewer homophobic remarks, missing school less because of safety concerns, less harassment due to one's real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, and a greater sense of belonging at school. Additionally, a student's ability to name just one supportive staff member is directly related to missing less school due to feeling unsafe, greater academic achievement, higher future academic aspirations, and a greater sense of belonging at school.

As an advisor to a GSA, you may very well be the only supportive person to students at your school. Thank you for being that one person. We hope that you find this resource useful and that you will share your thoughts and feedback with us. We are very interested in making this handbook as helpful and accessible as possible and we rely on you to help us achieve that goal.

Thank you for all that you do.

In Solidarity,

Kaylyn Fisher

she/her
GSA Coordinator

How Students Can Contribute to A Healthy GSA

- Adhere to the GSA Rules and Constitution
- Be open and engaged
- Represent yourself, the GSA, and the Iowa GSA Network positively
- Contribute to and foster safe spaces for students in GSA
- Communicate when you will or will not be able to attend GSA meetings
- Get involved in Iowa Safe Schools through events and programs
- Create a post-secondary plan
- Assist in fundraising and recruitment efforts of the GSA
- Collaborate with other GSAs in your district and around the state
- Run for leadership positions in your GSA or empower those who do
- Contribute to the safe space that a GSA represents by respecting members

Advisor Expectations

GSAs are groups initiated by students, for students. As a GSA Advisor, it is important to remember that you are there as a supportive adult, and not as the group leader.

- **Empower**
- **Support**
- **Engage**
- **Model**

Advisors should support GSAs by:

- Meeting with student leaders of the GSA as they plan and execute meetings, activities, and advocacy efforts
- Providing the GSA with a safe, positive, and supportive space to meet
- Working with student leaders and members of the group to navigate school policies and logistics around advertising, planning, and participating in activities
- Advocating for the GSA and students who are part of the LGBTQ community
- Collaborating with other GSA advisors in the district, and facilitating GSAs working together on projects and events
- Ensuring that the GSA is progressing towards group goals throughout the school year, has a succession plan in place, and is fundraising.
- Regularly checking in with group members regarding their school experience
- Maintaining regular contact with the Youth Engagement staff at Iowa Safe Schools

Advisor Expectations

- Empower

It can be hard to be supportive without taking over and leading. Learning from students in the GSA is just as important as steering them in the right direction. Students are their own best advocates and empowering them to set group goals contributes to a healthy GSA. Taking a step back and allowing students to take active leadership roles builds them up to be leaders after their school career.

- Support

If the group seems to be stalling or running out of ideas for meetings, it is okay to offer suggestions and support. Helping students identify activities, resources, and ideas for meetings can be a way for you to be involved in the group's work without being the sole leader. Ensuring students learn about school policies and their legal rights is another way for advisors to be active and supportive of the GSA. Encourage students to collaborate with other groups, either on campus or in the community.

- Engage

Working with students outside of the classroom is a great opportunity to model best practices in real world conversations. Modeling positive conflict resolution skills, teamwork, and problem solving can help build crucial skills for the GSA and students' adulthood. Engaging students as they create safe environments and navigate the different scenarios of school policies and legal rights of the organization can help students develop lifelong skills.

- Model

Be excited about the GSA! Students will pick up on your enthusiasm, and will be more likely to engage in activism if they feel supported and encouraged. If you are educated on LGBTQ issues and bullying, you will be better equipped to encourage engagement of GSA members.

How Can Teachers Be Allies?

1.Educate Yourself

In order to be an ally for LGBTQ students, teachers need to be educated about the problem of anti-LGBTQ bias and harassment. Professional development trainings and speaking one on one with students is a great place to start!

2.Intervene When Harassment Occurs

Many teachers are allies in spirit, but are unsure of what to do if they see or hear harassment and bullying occur. If you hear hurtful language or name-calling in the classroom or hallway, always speak up! Students will know which teachers are their allies when they see actions put behind words

3.Adopt Gender-Neutral Language

Using gender-neutral language is one of the simplest, most proactive ways that teachers can "come out" as allies to LGBTQ students. For example, when splitting up a classroom, or lining up to leave, arranging students by traits other than gender or sex is a great way to be an ally. This is just one of many examples!

4.Create a Safe Space

Show that your classroom is a safe space! Hanging flags, using pronouns next to your name on the board, and being open to conversations around LGBTQ issues are just a few ways to create a space where all students feel welcome. Involve students in creating their environment, so everyone feels they have a stake in making sure it feels safe.

Ideas for GSA Ground Rules

1. **Respect Others:** You may hear ideas at GSA meetings that are new or different for you, and opinions that might run counter to your own. As you participate and interact, try to take in new information without judgment and to keep an open mind. Make sure that your words and body language reflect a respectful attitude toward others. Learn by listening to others, and make an effort to be supportive.

2. **Speak From the "I":** Speak from your own personal experiences and do not judge the thoughts or experiences of others. Use I-statements such as "I feel..." or "In my experience..." Avoid "You should" statements and generalizations or globalizations of any kind.

3. **Be Open to New Ideas:** New ideas and techniques may be utilized or suggested during GSA meetings. Be open to considering new information and incorporating new practices.

4. **Ask Questions:** Please feel free to ask any question that comes up for you without fear that it is too silly, stupid or explicit. Make sure to phrase all questions in respectful ways.

5. **Respect Confidentiality:** Please be sure that everything said in the room stays in the room. When sharing personal anecdotes, avoid using the real names of other people.

6. **Step Up, Step Back:** Though we encourage you to express your ideas and opinions, we ask that you not monopolize the group's time, and that you help create a safe space in which everyone can speak. No one, however, is obligated to speak.

7. **Respect Commitments:** While you are encouraged to take care of your personal needs throughout the meeting, please honor your commitment to being here by observing time guidelines during breaks, turning off beepers and phones, and limiting unnecessary interruptions.

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GSA Constitution Template

A CONSTITUTION IS A GREAT DOCUMENT TO BRING STRUCTURE TO A GSA. IT ALLOWS RULES TO BE RECORDED AND AMENDED AS NEEDED.

Article I- Name of the Student Organization

Section A Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) a.k.a. "PRIDE Club"

Article II- Purpose and Objectives

Section A The specific purposes and objectives of the GSA shall be:

Creating Safe Space for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and Questioning students at ABC High to express themselves without discrimination or harassment

Provide education to the student body and staff at ABC High School about LGBTQ issues

Work toward an open forum where the student body and staff at ABC High School can find a greater understanding of minority communities

Article III- Membership

Section A The membership of this organization shall consist of currently enrolled students and faculty of ABC High School

Section B Membership in this organization shall be open to all members of the ABC High School community, regardless of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other minority status as outlined in the Iowa Civil Rights code, Section 216

Section C Any individual shall be allowed to join this organization at any time of the school year

Section D All members shall have equal rights and privileges in regards to election of officers within this organization

Section E No member monetary membership dues shall be required to join or maintain membership status in this organization

Article IV- Officers

Section A The officers of this organization shall consist of:

1. President
Call and run meetings of the organization
Plan and coordinate events for the organization
Represent the club during official meetings with school faculty

2. Vice President
Run all meetings if the President is absent
Represent the club alongside the President during official meetings with school faculty
Co-facilitate meetings with the President
Call for official votes during meetings

3. Secretary
Record accurate minutes of any meeting
Maintain an accurate and complete list of all members of the organization
Tally and report out vote counts and final decisions
Dispense official meeting minutes to absent members via email or social media

4. Treasurer
Keep an accurate record of club finances
Maintain club paperwork as required by ABC High School administration

Section B Officers must be regular attendees of all meetings. Absences and exceptions should be discussed with the faculty advisor.

Section C Candidates for office must:

1. Be in good standing with ABC High School as outlined in the student handbook
2. Have time to commit to duties as outlined in Section A. Significant conflicts due to other activities may disqualify a candidate for an office position

Section D Officers will remain in office for one school calendar year

Section E Any officer of the organization may be removed from office with a two-thirds vote of members

Article V- Elections and Voting

Section A Each member shall have one vote. Absent members on the day of voting will not be allowed to vote. Proxy votes shall only be accepted in written form, and should be given to the faculty advisor

Section B Election of officers shall be held during the second official meeting of the fall semester

Section C Any officer or member of the organization may resign at any time

Section D In the case of resignation of an officer, a special election will be held one week after the resignation to fill the vacant position

Article VI- Meetings

Section A All members shall be notified of any meetings and nature of the business that will be discussed

Section B Regular meetings shall be held one time a week

Section C Special meetings may be called at any time by the officers with a three day notice to all members via established communication

Article VII- Amendment of Constitution

Section A The Consitution may be amended by officers and two thirds majority vote of members of the organization

GSA Mission Statements

A MISSION STATEMENT SHOULD TELL OTHERS WHY THE GSA EXISTS AND WHAT MAKES IT DIFFERENT FROM ANY OTHER STUDENT GROUP.

A good mission statement addresses the goals and philosophy of the GSA, and talks about the work the group does. Here are some tips and tricks for writing an awesome mission statement.

- **Invite Input:** An effective mission statement is best when created by all members of the GSA! Make sure everyone has a chance to give input.
- **Keep it Short & Sweet:** Two or three focused sentences is the ideal length for a powerful mission statement.
- **Take Your Time:** Great mission statements take time to develop and require a couple drafts. Revisit the mission statement whenever you have a new member join the group.
- **Share Your Mission Statement:** Distribute copies to everyone in your group. Consider posting copies around your school, sharing it on social media, submitting it to your school's administration, and printing it for your group's archives. Mission statements aren't meant to be kept a secret.

GSA Leadership Roles

GSA SUCCESS DEPENDS ON STUDENTS TAKING ON LEADERSHIP POSITITIONS

The **President** serves as the "face" of the GSA, and this position holds the most responsibility and commitment. The President should do their best to attend and lead all GSA meetings with an organized agenda and plan in place.
The President;

- Is the spokesperson for the group
- Should have strong verbal and written communication skills
- Is the backbone of the GSA

The **Vice President** should co-plan all GSA meetings with the President, and be in regular contact with the Secretary and GSA members to discuss upcoming agendas and issues that should be brought to the attention of the group.
The Vice President:

- Should have strong verbal and written communication skills
- Take on an active leadership role
- Have the ability to keep the group on track

The **Secretary** has the responsibility of co-planning all GSA meetings with the President and Vice President. The Secretary should also have the role of record keeping- including GSA meeting minutes and attendance. The Secretary should also keep track of decisions made during meetings and events.
The Secretary:

- Should distribute handouts during meetings
- Should exhibit strong verbal and written communication skills
- Have a strong ability to remain organized and engage in professional communication with members of the GSA

Dependent on the GSA's Constitution or Rules, leadership elections should take place annually and in a democratic and fair process. GSA Leadership is crucial for the sustainability of a GSA and it's success.

10 Tips for Running an Effective GSA Meeting

1. Opening every meeting with a check in is important, no mater how many people have expressed a need for emotional support

2. Take time to wrap up every meeting and bring everyone together one last time. Maybe its a chant, or a plan for next week!

3. Switch the meetings up with games and activities! Take turns brainstorming ideas for the next meeting so everyone feels invested in what happens at meetings.

4. Creating a safe space for every student means it's important to remember that students are present in meetings in different ways. Make sure that everyone feels comfortable participating or not participating as long as they are respectful of other members.

5. Make sure you are prepared. Leadership should meet or chat before each meeting so everyone is on the same page with what is happening and what is coming up next for the GSA. This will save your group from confusing breakdowns in communication.

6. Establish ground rules for each meeting and go over them at every meeting so new and returning members know how to add to the safe space!

7. Be sure that your advisor attends all meetings. Your advisor should participate as an equal rather than controlling or dominating the space.

8. Keep notes on your GSAs discussions, activities, and meetings.

9. Start and end meetings on time.

10. Provide snacks if you can!

Tips for Recruiting GSA Members

- Advertise your meetings! Consider hanging posters in high traffic spots and letting Allies and LGBTQ folks know when and where the meetings take place, or how to find out that information.

- Designate some leadership positions for new and younger members so that they have a chance to learn as they take on responsibilities.

- Find out immediately what new members are interested in and how they'd like to contribute to the group.

- Involve new members in all aspects of your group meetings, including leadership role during activities and project planning.

- Send your members to events and conferences. Iowa Safe Schools has several great ones throughout the year! Find out more on our website.

- Remember that each current member of your group is a potential future leader of your group!

- When holding fundraisers or activities, consider inviting peers that are Allies or LGBTQ youth to attend and join in, even if they're not yet a member of GSA.

- Collaborate with other organization and clubs to co-host events or meetings in a space that everyone feels welcome.

Equal Access Act

of 1984

A law that states that any non-curricular club should have equal access for students within schools.

Under the Federal Equal Access Act, any school that receives government funding and has at least one other non-curricular club must also allow a GSA. As the law states, "It shall be unlawful for any public secondary school which receives Federal financial assistance…to deny equal access or a fair opportunity to, or discriminate against, any students who wish to conduct a meeting …on the basis of the religious, political, philosophical, or other content of the speech at such meetings."

The law also says that your school must treat all clubs the same and let them use school resources in the same way. If your school allows other clubs to meet in classrooms, put up posters and organize school events, then they have to allow your GSA to do the same. The act also stipulates that meetings must be voluntary, initiated by the students, and of no specified numerical size. School employees, such as faculty advisers, may attend and help facilitate.

Iowa Safe Schools Law

Anti-Bullying & Anti-Harassment Act of 2007 (Iowa Safe Schools Law), Iowa Code 280.28:

Local school boards of ALL Iowa school districts (public schools) and all accredited nonpublic schools (private elementary, middle schools and high schools) must have a board policy on safe schools. The policy must include ALL of the following:

1.) A DEFINITION OF HARASSMENT & BULLYING

That definition must state substantially that harassment and bullying mean any electronic (this law also protects you from cyber-bullying which includes, but is not limited to, communication via email, internet-based communications, pager service, cell phones, and electronic text messaging), written, verbal, or physical act or conduct toward a student which is based on any actual or perceived trait or characteristic of the student and which creates an objectively hostile school environment that meets one or more of the following conditions:

- Places the student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or property;
- Has a substantially detrimental effect on the student's physical or mental health;
- Has the effect of substantially interfering with the student's academic performance; or
- Has the effect of substantially interfering with the student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by a school.

2.) AN ANTI-HARASSMENT, ANTI-BULLYING STATEMENT

Schools must have a statement that no one shall engage in bullying and harassing behavior of students in school, on school property, or at any school function or school-sponsored activity (the Safe Schools Law protects you not just while you are on school property, but also when you are at any school function or school-sponsored activity—regardless of its location) with a description of the type of expected behavior from school employees, volunteers , parents or guardians and students when preventing, reporting and investigating harassment or bullying. The school must have written consequences and appropriate corrective action for a person who violates the anti-harassment and anti-bullying policy.

3.) A REPORTING PROCEDURE

Schools must have a procedure for reporting acts of bullying or harassment, including the name or job title of the school official responsible for receiving and investigating such reports. The law protects you from retaliation from others when you report harassment and bullying.4.) AN INVESTIGATION PROCEDURE Schools must have a clear procedure for prompt investigation of complaints.

Iowa Safe Schools Law

4.) AN INVESTIGATION PROCEDURE

Schools must have a clear procedure for prompt investigation of complaints.

5.) THE POLICY MUST STATE:

The policy must state that students will be protected from bullying and harassment based on any of the following traits or characteristics: age, color, creed, national origin, race, religion, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical attributes, physical or mental ability or disability, ancestry, political party preference, political belief, socioeconomic status, and familial status. The school board may add to this list, but may not omit any of the listed traits from its local policy.

6.) THE POLICY MUST BE PUBLICIZED:

The policy must be publicized, and the school must have a statement of how the school's anti-harassment and anti-bullying policy will be publicized. The most likely means of doing this will be in student handbooks, registration materials and periodic updates to communities

7.) SCHOOLS OFFICIALS MUST REPORT ANNUALLY

School officials must annually report incidents of bullying and harassment, and discipline of bullies, to the Iowa Department of Education. This is information available to the public, both from the schools and from the Department of Education.

8.) SCHOOLS ARE ENCOURAGED TO PROVIDE:

• Programs Designed to Eliminate Harassment & Bullying in Schools
The law highly recommends that schools establish programs to eliminate harassment and bullying. These programs can include Gay-Straight Alliances, Diversity Clubs and other student groups whose aim is to make the school safe for all students—especially those that are historically marginalized.

• Training for Teachers and Staff
The law highly recommends that schools provide training for their teachers and other staff in recognizing and reacting appropriately to bullying and understanding the school's anti-harassment and anti-bullying policy. If training cannot be provided (due to budget constraints), school officials must make sure that bus drivers, substitute teachers, volunteer coaches, support staff, etc., know about the school's policy, how to help if a student needs to make a complaint, and how to react if they witness bullying or harassment.

• Training for Students
The law highly recommends that schools develop a process to educate their volunteers and students about how to combat bullying. School officials must make sure that students know about the school's policy, how to make a complaint, and how to react if they witness bullying or harassment.

Online GSA Meetings

Setting Up an Online GSA Meeting

There are several online platforms that GSAs may use to host their meetings.

Google Meet and Zoom are two of the most popular platforms for online meetings. This is a guide to setting up for online GSA meetings!

Google Meet

Google Meet is a free platform that is used across the country to facilitate online meetings, gatherings, and classes.

Steps to Set Up a Meeting:

1.Create a free Google account if you don't already have one by visiting accounts.google.com

2. Visit meet.google.com to start setting up your meeting

3. Click "New Meeting"

   a. This brings up a few options, you can select "Get Code to Share" for a shareable link to send to participants

   b. Save this code so that you can start the meeting at your set meeting time!

4. When ready to start, click "Join Now"

5. In the upper right hand corner you will be able to see and add participants

6. You may also toggle to the chat icon in the upper right hand corner to start a group chat

Google Meet

Steps to Set Up a Meeting:

7. The bottom of the screen will display three buttons
    a. The left button will control your microphone
    b. The center button will allow you to leave the call
    c. The right button will control your camera
8. In the bottom right corner, you may click "Present Now" to share something with the group. This is helpful for any activities or presentations that may be planned
9. When ready to wrap up the meeting, simply click the center button at the bottom of the screen. This will end the hangout for all participants if you are the host.

Zoom

Zoom is a free online platform that gives participants the option for virtual face to face, phone calls, chats, and screen sharing in their meetings.

Steps to Set Up a Meeting:

1.Create a free Zoom account if you don't already have one by visiting Zoom.us and clicking the orange sign up button in the upper right hand corner

2. Once you're signed in, the main page will have "Schedule a Meeting" in the upper right hand corner. Click this to set one up.

3. Zoom will prompt you to fill out details about your meeting. If you're unsure what options to choose, please contact your schools' IT Administrator for guidance.

4. When all details are correct, click "Save". This will take you to the meeting details screen.

5. To give others the log in access, you can click "Copy Invitation" or copy and paste the Invite Link

6. When ready to start, click "Start Meeting" in the upper right hand corner

Zoom

Steps to Set Up a Meeting:

7. When ready to start, click "Start Meeting" in the upper right hand corner
8. In the lower left corner you will have the option to turn on your microphone or video
9. You may also see who is a participant in the meeting by clicking the "Participants" button in the center of the strip at the bottom of the screen
10. The chat will be visible by clicking "More" and then "Chat". Participants will be able to chat with you and others in the Zoom meeting.
11. In the bottom right corner, you may click "Share Screen" to share something with the group. This is helpful for any activities or presentations that may be planned
12. When ready to wrap up the meeting, simply click the red button at the bottom left of the screen. This will end the meeting for all participants if you are the host.

Sign Ups for Virtual Meetings

Having sign ups for a virtual meeting is crucial because it allows you to plan on who is there and what the activity should be. You can send out a survey such as Google Form or Survey Monkey for members to fill out. Including questions like whether or not they plan to attend, what they want to see at the meeting, and what they hope to gain from a meeting can be helpful for a successful meeting.

A survey can also be used to get information like emails from members, so you can send them reminder to come to the meeting and communicate with them. Be sure to send out the meeting sign-up many times and populate it on your social media, or in an email so members know when meetings are scheduled!

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ONLINE ICEBREAKERS

TWO TRUTHS AND A LIE

Each member of the group takes turns introducing themselves and then tell 2 true things about them and 1 lie. Then the group will try to guess what the lie is

SHOW AND TELL

Each member will introduce themselves and find an object that they feel represents them. They will then tell the group about their object and why they feel it represents them

THE NAME GAME

Each member of the group takes turns introducing themselves and along with a adjective that starts with the same letter of their name (Ex. Silly Sally). Then next person in line says the first person and then theirs. (Ex. Silly Sally, Beautiful Brenda), The chain keeps building on each other for each member until everyone has gone. For a fun twist you can add an actions with the alliteration (Ex. Jumping Jack, everyone could jump

HOLDING OFFICER ELECTIONS ONLINE

Before the actual election you will want to have a Google form or some questionnaire software to see who is running. Put in questions like "What position are you running for?" and "What is your plan for the GSA?".

During the election meeting we recommend you use a virtual video chat option (Ex. Zoom, Google Hangouts, Skype). From here then you will have each candidate give a speech on why they should be in this position.

Then open voting in a form, online poll, or through the software, for people to vote (Be sure that your voting is anonymous so feelings don't get hurt) Have only your advisor see the results, so there is no personal bias in the election. Have your advisor report the results after everyone has voted.

Online Activities

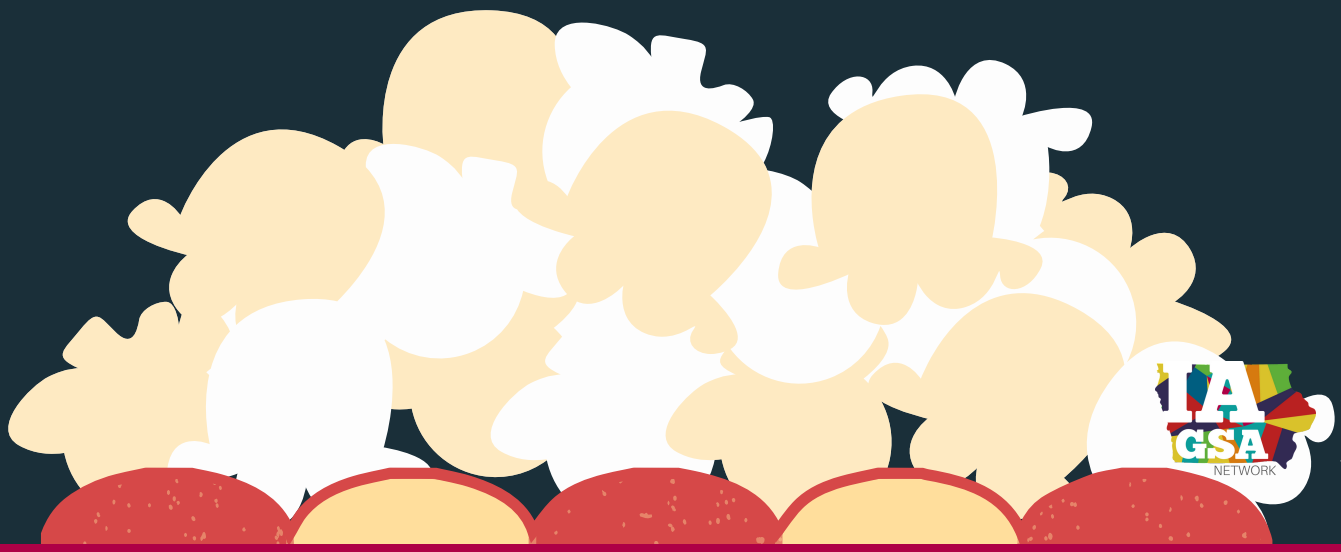
- Movie Watch Party
- Book Club
- Trivia
- Kahoots
- History
- Skribbl.io
- Online Bingo
- Talent Show
- Create a Group Playlist
- Online Silent Disco
- Show and Tell
- Influential Figures
- Discussion Groups
- Succession Planning

HOLDING AN ONLINE MOVIE PARTY

The first step to hosting a meeting is to find a software that will work the best for you. There are extensions for Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime that allow you to have a "watch party". You can also use software like Zoom to watch videos too (You need to make sure that the sound is coming from the internal computer and not through the speakers).

Next you need to pick a movie! Choosing a movie that everyone is comfortable with is important. You can send out a form to see what people will like and choose based on votes. Make sure you chose a movie that is appropriate for the occasion.

Finally, kick back and enjoy the movie! Have some snacks and a cozy blanket for yourself. At the end you can thank everyone for coming and even have discussion after the movie about what everyone thought.



GSA Resources

Virtual Hangout

One of Iowa Safe Schools free services to LGBTQ and Allied youth is Virtual Hangout. Students may join the virtual space every Friday at 4pm to connect and support one another. GSA Coordinators facilitate discussions and activities every week to build connections with LGBTQ and Allied youth throughout Iowa.

Sign up: bit.ly/virtualgsa

FINDING A GREAT ADVISOR

One of the greatest supports that a GSA can have is an engaged faculty advisor. They are a fierce ally for the group, and can serve as an adult voice backing up the work of the GSA. Here are some ways that advisors can be amazing allies for the GSA:

- Offer encouragement as the GSA gets started
- Provide a safe meeting space in their classroom
- Help answer questions around creating a solid mission statement for the group
- Promote the work of the GSA to other educators and administrators in the building
- Using inclusive language in their classroom everyday
- Speak up when they hear slurs or other ant-LGBTQ comments (both with students AND adults)
- Connect with Iowa Safe Schools to stay up to date on resources and supports for GSA groups

Sometimes the GSA will have an advisor who was great as the group was starting up, but as the group grows and missions change they are no longer the best fit. It can be intimidating to have a conversation with an adult about the changing needs of a GSA. Here are some tips for evaluating the partnership you have with your advisor:

- Is the club student-run, or has the advisor taken charge? If the advisor is running most of the meetings, your GSA is no longer covered under the Equal Access Act. Have a conversation with your advisor, and let them know that you appreciate the help they provide in meetings. Explain that in order for the GSA to be protected under the Equal Access Act, students need to run meetings and decide on subject matter.

- Set clear expectations of students and advisors. Find out how the advisor envisions interacting with the group, and how you as a student would like them to participate. Creating expectations and boundaries helps define the role of your advisor.

- Is the advisor attending the GSA meetings? Life can be really busy for educators, and other commitments can sometimes draw advisors away from attending meetings. If you and other members are noticing that your faculty advisor is too busy to attend meetings, or has stopped showing up, ask to sit down and talk with them. Explain that it is important that the advisor is at meetings, so they can remain active and up to date on what the GSA needs to be supported. Offer to find another faculty advisor to help take some of the schedule conflict off their shoulders.

More information on the Equal Access Act can be found on page 19

Advisor Appreciation

The faculty advisor of a GSA can be an incredible ally. They volunteer their time and resources to ensure that students have a place to meet, and help students follow school guidelines for the group to exist. How often does the group take time to thank the advisor for their willingness to attend meetings and assist the group? Here are a couple ideas for showing your appreciation of everything the advisor does for the GSA:

A Surprise Party

The group will want to plan this outside of the GSA meeting, so the advisor doesn't catch wind of what you're up to. Plan a celebration of the advisor during a meeting, and bring treats! Some groups will pitch in and get a small gift for the advisor, and members will sign a thank-you card.

A "Thank-You" Video or Essay Collection

As a group, take some time to think about the impact your GSA advisor has on the group, and in your life at school. Write out your thoughts or record them on video, and present a collection of stories to your GSA's advisor.

The GSA advisor is a cornerstone of a successful group, so make sure to show the group's appreciation for their willingness to help out!

30 Fundraising Ideas

1) Host a car wash
2) Sell glow sticks at school sports games
3) Work at a concession stand for sports games or activities
4) Have a bake sale
5) Host bingo or trivia
6) Sell raffle tickets
7) Sell rainbow ribbon for Coming Out Day
8) Offer gift wrapping services (around the holidays)
9) Host a principal/teacher challenge (if the student body donates enough money, a teacher/principal will do something like dye their hair a unusual color)
10) Host a movie night
11) Tie-Dye shirts
12) Offer dog walking services
13) Host a soup cook off
14) Start a school garden, and sell the produce
15) Host a talent show
16) Have a bottle/can drive
17) Have a daycare service at parent/teacher conferences
18) Do a gift basket auction
19) Host a color run
20) Offer dog bathing services
21) Host a kickball tournament
22) Host a scavenger hunt
23) Have a penny drive
24) Offer lawn mowing services
25) Offer leaf raking services
26) Offer candy grams around the holidays/Valentine's Day
27) Sell a coupon book
28) Host a karaoke night
29) Do face painting at a sports game
30) Create a crowdfunding page on websites such as GoFundMe

SAMPLE DONATION REQUEST LETTER

Governor's Conference on LGBTQ Youth

Dear,

I am writing to tell you about an exciting opportunity that has been presented to my student group at (NAME OF SCHOOL). Students in my GSA (Gay/Straight Alliance) have been given the chance to attend the annual Governor's Conference on LGBTQ Youth. This conference is hosted each year by Iowa Safe Schools, the state's only LGBTQ youth serving organization, and is the largest conference of it's kind in the nation. With over 2,000 attendees last year, the Governor's Conference on LGBTQ Youth is celebrating its 16th year of creating safe and supportive spaces for LGBTQ Youth and those who support them. Workshops throughout the day teach students practical skills and tools to be engaged, qualified members of their community, and is often the only opportunity throughout the year to interact with other LGBTQ and Allied you.

The conference takes place virtually this year. Some of the important takeaways we hope to gain by attending the conference are:

-
-
-

If you would like to know more about Iowa Safe Schools or the Governor's Conference on LGBTQ Youth, you can visit their website at www.iowasafeschools.org. The cost of this trip is (insert ticket amount here) per student. (Discuss the different fundraising you have done or plan to do and why you need help with cost of registration).

I am writing to ask if you (OR BUSINESS NAME) would be willing to sponsor our trip for $ (DOLLAR AMOUNT). Any amount would be greatly appreciated and would help me/us to reach my/our goals.

If you would like to sponsor me/my GSA, you can pay by Check: Make checks payable to (WHO THE CHECK SHOULD GO TO). Please write Governor's Conference on LGBTQ Youth on the memo line. I can stop by and pick up a check, or you can mail to me/my GSA at: (LIST ADDRESS)

I appreciate your support in this exciting opportunity. If you are not able to sponsor me/us at this time, I certainly understand and appreciate your continued support of LGBTQ youth in the community. If you have questions, you can call me at (PHONE NUMBER). Tank you again.

Sincerely,
YOUR NAME/YOUR GSAS NAME

Creating a Docu-Series

Our stories are only powerful when we have the courage to tell them. When we give our voices a platform, we can create real change by putting a face to an issue that is important to us and the community. The way we tell our stories should be as unique as we are, and there is no wrong way to share your experience and what you are passionate about. The GSA Docu-Series Activity can help the group get started on bringing a voice to LGBTQ issues in your community.

1. **Decide on a medium (How you want to share your stories)**
    a. Film?
    b. Pictures?
    c. Posters?
    d. Be creative!
2. **Determine Interest and Start to Plan**
    a. Decide on the topics your group wants to highlight
        i. Harassment/bullying?
        ii. Name-calling?
        iii. Discrimination?
        iv. Transgender issues?
    b. Have students who are interested and feel safe telling their story sign up to participate
    c. Create a timeline of when final products should be complete
        i. Will stories be released one-by-one, or will there be a showcase of all stories once everyone has completed their project?
    d. Decide how the Docu-Series will be showcased
        i. Gallery style?
        ii. A movie night?
        iii. At a community venue (coffee shop, etc.)
        iv. School assembly
    e. Work together!
        i. As a group, work together to complete each student's story and finished product
    f. Hold your event!
        i. You have shared your story, now let your community hear it!

Writing an Editorial

Does your school have a publication or school paper? If so, this is a great way to advertise the GSA, and promote inclusion and safety for all students. An editorial is a brief article that is written to express an opinion or viewpoint on a current issue. The GSA can write an editorial or letter to the editor on many different issues, like:

- The need for more involvement in the GSA (call for more members to join)
- The need for more inclusive language in the hallways
- Issues related to cyberbullying
- Issues related to homophobia, transphobia, and bullying
- How the school and community can support the GSA
- Highlight the work the GSA is done, and encourage more involvement

These are just a few of the countless subjects the group can write about. The GSA can also write letters to the editor in the local community paper, and invite local business and community groups to be involved in the work of GSAs. Here are some tips for writing an awesome editorial:

1. Structure the editorial similarly to an essay: introduction, body, and conclusion
2. Make sure to explain the issue or topic at hand (define GSA, define homophobia, define bullying, etc.)
3. Try to include a current event to the issue being discussed. It could be national, or something much smaller like an incident that a student experienced at school
4. Offer solutions to the issue. This could be as simple as "join the GSA," or could go into how community groups can show they are allies
5. Write from the heart. People are drawn to articles and news stories that are heartfelt and meaningful
6. Make sure to use grammar and spell-check!

BRINGING IN A GUEST SPEAKER

There's only so much a GSA can learn on their own, and sometimes you need to go to the experts! Bringing in a speaker from an organization that isn't related to your school can be a great way to learn new things and gain a new perspective. Below is a list of just some of the individuals/organizations you could contact.

A LOCAL POLITITIAN

AN LGBTQ FRIENDLY HEALTHCARE CLINIC

IOWA SAFE SCHOOLS

A LOCAL BUSINESS OWNER

A LOCAL BANK TO LEARN ABOUT FINANCIAL LITERACY

A LOCAL YOGA INSTRUCTOR

Make sure to communicate with your advisor along the way, as they may have insight on things like who to contact, and making sure the speaker is approved to be at your school. Below is a sample first email to send to a person/organization you would like to come to a meeting.

Hello _____,
My name is ____ and I am a representative of the GSA from (insert school name here). The purpose of a Gay-Straight Alliance is to provide support, outreach, advocacy, and education to LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) and Allied students. We would love to have ___ as a guest for our meeting on (date you'd like them to attend) to teach us more about ____.

It would be wonderful to connect with you and discuss this visit in more detail. I can be reached by email at: _____. Thank you in advance, I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best,
(Your name)

LGBTQ Student Resources

24/7 Hotlines

If you need to speak with someone immediately, the following resources are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If this is an emergency, please call 911:

The Iowa Victim Service Call Center
1-800-770-1650 or text 'iowahelp' to 20121

The Trevor Project
1-866-488-7386

CommUnity Crisis Services
1-855-325-4296 or Chat at www.IowaCrisisChat.org

The National Sexual Assault Hotline
1-800-656-4673

Trans Lifeline
1-877-565-8860

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
1-800-273-8255

AN INTRODUCTION ON RESTROOMS

The subject of gender-inclusive restrooms often comes with a multitude of questions regarding best practices, safety considerations, legal implications, and parental concerns. Transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and queer students face a myriad of issues related to school safety and support, resulting in disproportionate rates of bullying, harassment, and victimization at school.

Restroom usage is often a source of anxiety and fear among K-12 students who identify as transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, or queer. According to the GLSEN School Climate Survey, 45.2% of LGBTQ students avoided gender-segregated bathrooms out of fear for their safety.[1]

"PEOPLE STARE AT ME AND EVEN SAY THREATENING THINGS TO ME NO MATTER WHICH RESTROOM I USE. I USUALLY JUST DON'T USE THE RESTROOM UNTIL I GET HOME FROM SCHOOL."

Implementing gender-inclusive restrooms in schools creates better conditions for learning for all students and is often the first thing that transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and queer students notice when entering the building. Every student has the right to feel safe and supported in their educational environment.

This guide provides a road map of strategies, definitions, and best practices for implementing a more inclusive school culture.

1 GLSEN National School Climate Sruvey, 2019

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RESTROOMS FOR ALL

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

All students deserve to feel safe and supported at school. This includes in classrooms, hallways, and gendered facilities like restrooms. Students who do not feel safe using restrooms at school are at heightened risk for health concerns and their ability to achieve academically. Staff and administration teams should model expectations, behaviors, and attitudes that are supportive of all students.

WHY ARE WE ONLY CHANGING RESTROOM POLICIES FOR TRANSGENDER STUDENTS?

Inclusive restrooms create safer learning environments for more than just transgender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary students. Religion, culture, health issues, modesty, and ability are just a few of the many different reasons that an individual may need to access a restroom that does not align perfectly with their sex assigned at birth. No matter what the reason, every student should feel that they have access to a restroom that supports them and their individual needs.

SCHOOL CLIMATE

WHAT IS SCHOOL CLIMATE?

School climate is a broad concept that refers to the overall patterns, behaviors, and beliefs of the students, educators, and administrators in a school environment. It refers to the "feel" that a school has. There are many factors that influence school climate and culture, including:

- Norms and expectations of how people are treated physically, socially, and emotionally
- The level of respect that people are given in the school
- How engaged students, educators, and administrators in the learning community
- The disciplinary policies and practices in the school
- What types of academic supports are in place to help students achieve academically

Positive school climates are directly correlated to student and overall school success. Clear policies and expectations often contribute to a more inclusive environment for all students, educators, and administrators.

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GENDER 101

Gender is not the same as biological sex.

There are many different variables that have influenced the concept of gender as we know it. **Gender** is a social construct that identifies certain things like behaviors, expressions, careers, or activities as being inherently male or inherently female. This could be as simple as the idea that boys wear blue and girls wear pink.

Gender Identity is how a person navigates living in a gendered society and world. Gender identity is all about how you think about yourself. It is sometimes described as a person's innermost sense of gender that is often connected to names and gender pronouns. Gender identity can either match a person's biological sex assigned at birth or not, and should be thought of as independent from biological sex.

Actions, clothing choices, demeanor, and hair styles are just a few of the many ways in which a person can express their gender identity. This is referred to as a person's gender expression. **Gender Expression** is the way in which a person projects their gender identity on to the world within the context of how a culture identifies masculine or feminine characteristics. An example of this may be that women wear dresses and men wear bow ties.

Sex Assigned at Birth (or biological sex) refers to the physical traits or sex characteristics that are associated with being male or female. Many people fit in to the categories or either male or female when born. Approximately 1 in 1,500 people are born with some sort of variation in their development, where they no longer fit perfectly into the box of male or female. These individuals[1] are often referred to as **Intersex**.

Regardless of their gender identity, gender expression, or sex assigned at birth, every student must have access to a restroom that is safe and affirming of who they are.

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1 American Psychological Association, 2006

IMPORTANT POINTS TO CONSIDER

Having all gender restrooms or access to gendered restrooms that align with a student's gender identity sends a clear message of a safe and supportive learning environment for all students in school.

Every student deserves to feel safe and supported. If a student is concerned about sharing a restroom with a student who identifies as transgender, gender non-conforming, or non-binary, more private accommodations may be made for that student.

Note: A transgender student accessing a gendered restroom or locker room does not violate policies concerning appropriate behavior at school.

Barring a student from accessing a gendered space simply because their presence makes another student uncomfortable is discrimination.

Schools are responsible for ensuring ALL students feel safe and supported.

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BEHAVIOR DOES NOT EQUATE IDENTITY

Appropriate behavior in restrooms includes respecting the privacy of the people sharing the space. If a student is making others feel uncomfortable **because of their actions or behavior** in the restroom, schools have an obligation to address these occurrences with appropriate disciplinary action.

If there is a student who enters a gendered restroom who is not transgender, gender non-conforming, or non-binary (perhaps on a dare from another student), this is considered inappropriate behavior, and the school likely has a policy in place to address that situation. The number of instances that this occurs is not related to the addition of an inclusive restroom policy.

If students or staff are caught off guard by seeing a student begin to use a gendered restroom that they have not previously been seen using, administration should have a plan in place on how to respond. This plan should be centered around respect and a desire to understand, rather than an investigation.

HOW SHOULD STAFF ADDRESS STUDENTS USING A NEW RESTROOM?

Each student is a unique individual, and there is no one-size-fits-all model for working with a transgender, gender non-conforming, or non-binary individual. It may involve speaking privately with the student about how the school can be supportive as they access their education.

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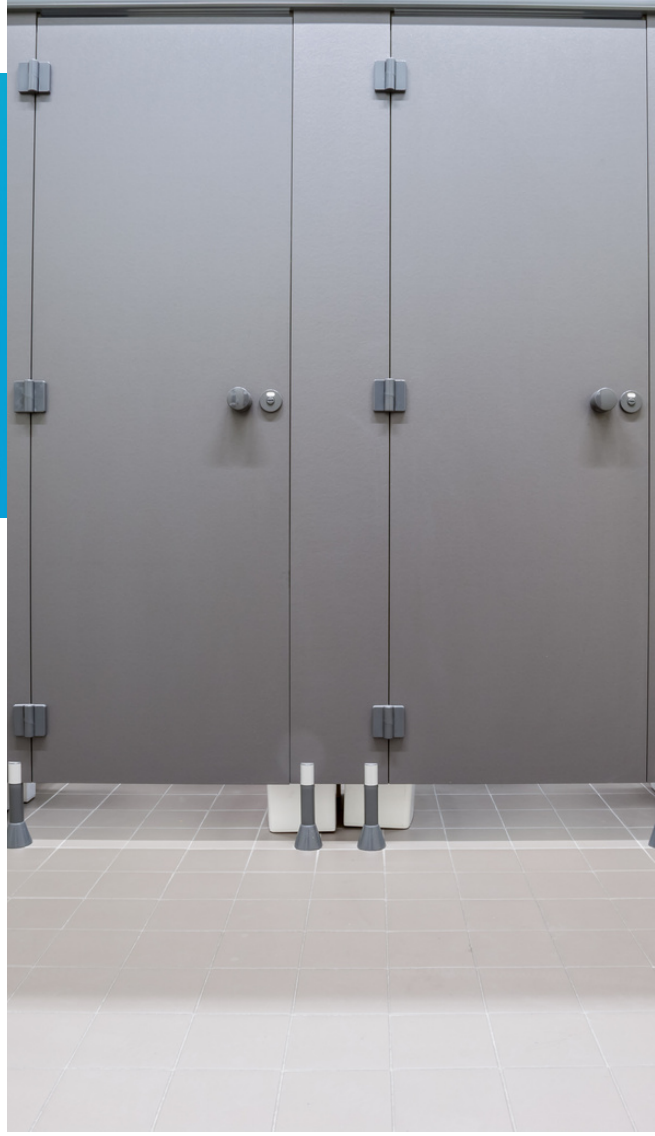
Navigating the Law



Providing all students with the ability to use a restroom that aligns with their gender identity is the right thing to do. In Iowa, it is also the law. A number of statutes and policies in place at a state and federal level protect a student's right to use a restroom without policing or restriction.

The **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)** covers the subject of student privacy pertaining to educational records. It states that the transgender status, sex assigned at birth, and legal name (among other things) are classified as medical information. These records must remain confidential. This means that a school does not have the right to discuss any matters concerning a student being transgender to anyone (including staff, other parents, or students) without the explicit permission of the student. This is why it is strongly recommended to communicate with a transgender, gender non-conforming, or non-binary student who is using a new restroom and find out what their wishes are for disclosing (or not disclosing) their identity.

Title IX is a federal law that bans discrimination based on sex. This law pertains to all schools that receive federal funding, and courts have clarified that Title IX covers transgender students and other students who do not adhere to gender stereotypes. Title IX protects all students and states that all students have the right to equal educational opportunities and resources in a non-hostile environment. This includes access to gendered spaces like restrooms and locker rooms. This means that a student can't be barred from using a specific gendered space simply because they may not look like they belong in that space.

State level protections vary around the country when it comes to gender identity, so it is important to look at your state's civil rights code for clarification. In Iowa, the **Civil Rights Act** was expanded in 2007 to include sexual orientation and gender identity. Iowa Code 216 states that it is against the law to discriminate against a person because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This means that any individual has the right to access a gendered facility that aligns with their gender identity and must be allowed to do so without being harassed or questioned.

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SAFE SCHOOLS FOR ALL STUDENTS

Every student, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, has the right to a safe and supportive educational environment, free from discrimination and harassment. This section is meant to assist schools in taking the first step in showing their support of all students. There are many other ways in which schools can impact school climate, and be true allies to their LGBTQ students.

SCHOOLWIDE PRIDE GUIDE

The Schoolwide Pride Guide is a curriculum set of interactive activities, age-appropriate conversations starters, and assessment tools designed to integrate meaningful lessons about LGBTQ topics. It includes lessons on appreciating diversity, understanding self-expression, cultivating equity, understanding gender identity and transition, and developing allyship and openness in your schools and classrooms. The book also includes strategies for creating a welcoming classroom for LGBTQ students, a glossary of important terms, crafts that can help your students celebrate their pride, and printable student handouts and reading guides in full color. Helpful tips and a checklist to evaluate your school's climate and culture is also included!

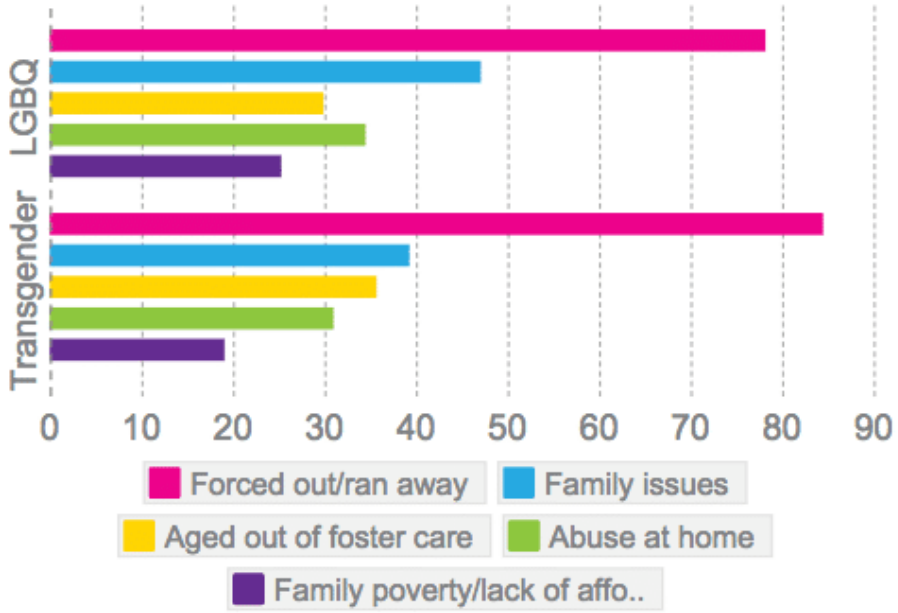
CERTIFIED SCHOOL CULTURE ADVOCATE

The School Culture Advocate Certification recognizes educators who excel at research-driven best practices for building a positive school climate and culture. Completing this coursework will provide you the necessary tools to create welcoming spaces for underrepresented populations, engage students in civic dialogue, and ensure that all students feel safe and support in school. You will be equipped to lead purposeful professional development, form effective partnerships with community stakeholders, and transform the culture of your district to prepare all of your students for their next steps.

LGBTQ Youth Experiencing Homelessness

It is estimated that of the 1.6+ million homeless youth in the United States, 40% of them identify as LGBTQ. LGBTQ youth experience homelessness for a variety of other reasons, including the intersection of homophobia & transphobia, poverty, and other factors like family issues.

Family conflict around sexual orientation and/or gender identity is the most common factor contributing to LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness. While family conflict is the most common factor, its not the only one. The graph below from True Colors United* highlights experiences of LGBQ and Transgender youth.



According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Health and Human Services, homelessness is defined as the following:

- An individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence;

- An individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground;

- An individual or family living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including hotels and motels paid for by Federal, State or local government programs for low-income individuals or by charitable organizations, congregate shelters, and transitional housing);

LGBTQ Youth Experiencing Homelessness

- An individual who resided in a shelter or place not meant for human habitation and who is exiting an institution where they temporarily resided;

- An individual or family who will imminently lose their housing (as evidenced by a court order) resulting from an eviction action that notifies the individual or family that they must leave within 14 days

- Being “doubled up,” “couch surfing” or “couch-homeless,” a term that refers to a situation where individuals are staying with a series of friends and/or extended family members

How can the GSA help?

- Visit your local community shelter and ask about volunteer opportunities

- Organize a clothing, food, or hygiene drive for your local community organizations serving homeless youth

- Educate your school and community about the true definition of homelessness, and how LGBTQ youth are at higher risk of experiencing homelessness

- Work with your local community organizations to provide cultural competency trainings and LGBTQ-101 presentations, so they are better equipped to help LGBTQ youth who are experiencing homelessness

- Research and create a list of LGBTQ friendly places in your community where youth can go to receive support. This could include shelters, churches, community centers, food pantries, local businesses, etc.

- Organize a professional development training for your school’s educators and administrators on the importance of knowing how to identify youth who may be at risk of experiencing homelessness, and how to support them

- Be creative! This is just a quick list to get you started!

LGBTQ Inclusion Checklist: 😎 😐 😢

#1: My school's anti-discrimination policy includes sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. It protects students from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.	☐	☐	☐
#2: My school's anti-bullying policy includes specific language about protecting students based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.	☐	☐	☐
#3: My school's bullying policy is readily available for parents to access.	☐	☐	☐
#4: I know what to do when a student comes to me with a bullying complaint.	☐	☐	☐
#5: My classroom curriculum includes age-appropriate lessons on the school's anti-discrimination and anti-bullying policies.	☐	☐	☐
#6: Classroom expectations for protecting all students are clearly displayed in the classroom.	☐	☐	☐
#7: My classroom has a Safe Space poster displayed on the door.	☐	☐	☐
#8: My school's dress code is inclusive and does not constrain students to dress as a particular gender.	☐	☐	☐
#9: Any forms or documents I have parents and students complete ask for names and gender pronouns.	☐	☐	☐
#10: I ensure that school nurses, counselors, librarians, and other support staff at schoolare aware of my students' names and gender pronouns.	☐	☐	☐
#11: Any forms parents and students complete identify a variety of family structures, including those headed by parents who are LGBTQ.	☐	☐	☐
#12: My classroom library has books that are inclusive and affirming of LGBTQ identities.	☐	☐	☐
#13: Students are comfortable using the bathroom that affirms to their gender identity.	☐	☐	☐
#14: My classroom curriculum includes LGBTQ content, histories, perspectives, and/or current events.	☐	☐	☐

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PRONOUNS

Pronouns are a regular part of our language which we use to help identify ourselves. Much like a name, pronouns are used to communicate our gender identity. We are fairly familiar with "he/him/his" pronouns to describe a man and "she/her/hers" to describe a woman. For individuals who identify as gender non-binary, gender non-conforming, and gender queer, they may use "they/them/theirs" as their pronouns, and that is ok. It is important to respect a person's pronouns as it validates an individual's identity. Not respecting someone's pronouns is an example of misgendering, and could have negative affects on their person's safety and well being.

Practicing pronouns is the best way to become comfortable using them. The following websites are great resources:

https://www.mypronouns.org/
https://pronouns.minus18.org.au/

Some pronouns you may already be familiar with:

She	He	They
Her	Him	Them
Hers	His	Their

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Inclusive Family Language

TERMS TO AVOID

Language has a powerful effect on how we perceive the world around us. Being aware of the terms we use has the potential to create a more inclusive environment for people that are part of the LGBTQ Community and within the school environment.

- **Parents**
- **Mom**
- **Dad**

- Not everyone accompanying a child is a parent. Grandparents, step-parents, and caretakers may be a caregiver. Not all children have a mom and dad. **Instead use: "grownup" "adult" "caregiver"**

- **Son**
- **Daughter**

- The children in someone's care could be grandchildren, nieces, nephews, etc. By using a gender neutral term, you also avoid the possibility of misgendering. **Instead use: "child" "children"**

- **Extended Family**

- The term is usually meant to include grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. But for folks of many cultures, this isn't "extended" family- it's just family. **Instead use: "family"**

- **Family Resemblance**

- Why? We're conditioned to look for similar features in family members so you may see resemblance where there is none. Many families include step-parents, or adoptive parents. Inversely, don't assume that a child who doesn't look like their caregiver is adopted. Many multi-racial children resemble one parent more than the other. **Instead use: "family"**

- **Members of a Household**

- Families don't always live together. For example, families with divorced parents or incarcerated parents. **Instead use: "family members"**

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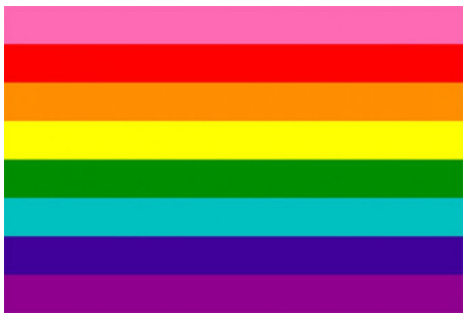
Pride Flags Guide:

While the rainbow is seen as a traditional symbol for the LGBTQ community, there are many identities and subcultures within the community who want to be represented. This is a small sample of the flags you may see proudly on display at a Pride Celebration.



Gilbert Baker Pride Flag:

Flown at the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade in 1978, Gilbert Baker was tasked by out politician Harvey Milk to create this flag. It has eight colors, two more than the Gay Pride Flag traditionally seen today.

Gay Pride Flag:

The most recognizable LGBTQ pride flag, the traditional Gay Pride Flag consists of six colors of the rainbow, each color bearing a different meaning to be celebrated in the Pride festivities.

Philadelphia Pride Flag:

In 2017, the city of Philadelphia added two colors - black and brown - to the Gay Pride Flag to acknowledge the queer people of color who often are not fully included within the LGBTQ community.

Lesbian Pride Flag:

This flag, displaying various shades of pinks and reds, celebrates people in the Lesbian community. This is one of several flags symbolizing Lesbian pride. Another has two interlocking Venus symobls.

Bisexual Pride Flag:

Designed in 1998, the Bisexual Pride Flag uses pink and blue to overlap and make lavender, symbolizing individuals who are attracted to both men and women.

Pansexual Pride Flag:

People identifying as pansexual are attracted to others regardless of their sex or gender. Pink represents women, blue represents men, and yellow represents nonbinary and gender nonconforming people.

Transgender Pride Flag:

Designed by trans woman and advocate Monica Helms, the pink and light blue were selected to represent girls and boys, respectively. The white represents people transitioning or having an undefined gender.

Intersex Pride Flag:

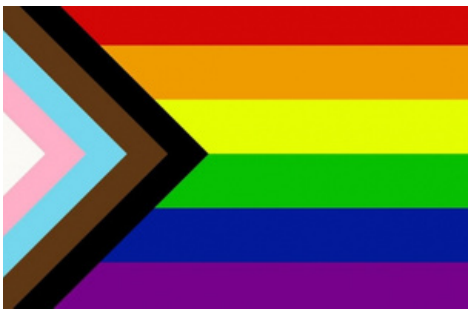
Intersex is an umbrella term used to describe people born with a combination of hormones, chromosomes, and anatomy that do not fit medical definitions of male or female. This flag was created in Australia in 2013.

Genderfluid Pride Flag:

People who identify as genderfluid have a changing gender identity that is not always fixed or anchored to one specific gender. The colors of this flag symbolize the fluidity of gender identity expressed by certain people.

Nonbinary Pride Flag:

People whose gender does not conform to the gender they were assigned at birth. The colors of the flag were selected to acknowledge all gender identities.



Progress Pride Flag:

A combination of the traditional Pride Flag, Philadelphia Pride Flag, and Trans Pride Flag, creator Daniel Quasar designed a flag to place a greater emphasis on unity and inclusion within the LGBTQ community.

Glossary:

This is a vocabulary list to use as a foundation for talking about different identities. By no means is this a comprehensive list. Rather, it is a start for having meaningful conversations. Please note: No definition should be taken as legal or medical counsel.

Asexual – a person who experiences no sexual attraction to others, but may be attracted to others in different ways.

Aromantic – experiencing no romantic attraction to others, but may be attracted to others in different way.

Ally – a non-LGBTQ individual who advocates for and supports LGBTQ causes; a person who advocates for and supports the causes of a community of which they are not a part.

Bisexual – a person who is romantically, sexually, and/or emotionally attracted to a person regardless of gender; a person who is attracted to the own gender and others.

Cisgender – a term used to describe a person whose gender identity corresponds to their sex assigned at birth.

FTM – an abbreviation of female to male. May be used to describe a transgender man.

Gay – a person who is romantically, sexually and/or emotionally attracted to people of the same gender, typically used to describe men who are attracted to other men.

Gender Binary – the belief that every person must identify with one of two genders.

Gender Expression – the external representation of a person's gender through clothing, hairstyles, speech, behavior, and other physical characteristics.

Gender Dysphoria – the emotional distress a person experiences when they realize that their gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth; the condition of feeling one's emotional and psychological identity as male or female to be different to one's biological sex.

Genderfluid – a gender identity that is not fixed or anchored to one specific gender and changes over periods of time.

Gender Identity – a person's innermost sense of gender often connected to names and gender pronouns.

Gender Non-Conforming – a person whose gender identity may or may not conform with the gender they were assigned at birth. People with this identity may or may not identify with the "transgender" identity.

Genderqueer – a person whose gender identity may or may not conform with the gender they were assigned at birth. People with this identity may or may not identify with the "transgender" identity.

Homophobia – the fear, hatred, or dislike of LGB people which can often manifest through acts of harassment and discrimination.

Intersex – an umbrella term used to describe people born with a combination of biological traits - including hormones, chromosomes, or anatomy - that does not fit medical definitions of female or male.

Lesbian – a woman or nonbinary person who is romantically, sexually, and/or emotionally attracted to other women.

MTF – an abbreviation of male to female. May be used to describe a transgender woman.

Outing – voluntary or unwanted disclosure of another person's sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or intersex status.

Pansexual – a person who is romantically, sexually, and/or emotionally attracted to people regardless of their sex, gender identity, or gender expression.

Passing – a term used to describe a transgender person whose gender identity is correctly perceived by others without also being identified as transgender.

Pronouns – the set of terms that people use to refer to individuals in place of their names.

Queer – a term used to describe people with fluid or nonfixed gender identities and/or sexual orientations; once used as a derogatory term to shame LGBTQ people, it is now an reclaimed term similar to LGBTQ

Questioning – a term used to describe a person who is exploring or unsure of their own sexual orientation or gender identity.

Sex Assigned at Birth – the sex determined at birth by doctors, primarily based on the external anatomy of the child.

Sexual Orientation – the romantic, sexual, and/or emotional attraction to other people with the potential to form a relationship.

Transitioning – the process by which a person develops a gender expression which more closely affirms with their gender identity. Transitioning may mean changes in name, pronouns, and/or physical appearance.

Transgender (or Trans) – a term used to describe a person who does not identify or exclusively identify with their sex assigned at birth.

Transphobia – the fear, hatred, or dislike of trans people which can often manifest through acts of harassment and discrimination.