



Rainbow Cafe LGBTQ Center

Southern Illinois' safe space for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender folks, and allies

Month Day, 20XX

John Smith

Role/Position [ex. Principal]

School Street Address

City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am a student at **Example High School** and harassment and bullying of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students is a serious ongoing problem within our school. I would like to establish a Gay-Straight Alliance or Gender-Sexuality Alliance (GSA) within our school and am asking for both your support and cooperation in ensuring the safety of LGBTQ students at **Example High School**. GSAs are student-led and student-organized school clubs that aim to create safe, welcoming, and accessible school environments for all youth, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. **Example High School** having a GSA would not only be a benefit to its LGBTQ students, but *all* of the student body - research shows that GSAs greatly improve student body attitudes towards LGBTQ issues compared to schools without GSAs.¹

LGBTQ young people experience record-high rates of depression and anxiety - The Trevor Project found that 42% of LGBTQ youth have seriously considered attempting suicide, and 52% of transgender and nonbinary youth.² Additionally, GLSEN has found that 31.8% of LGBTQ students have missed at least one entire day of school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.³ However, LGBTQ students with access to affirming spaces like GSAs drastically lower rates of depression and suicide, as well as more likely to have positive outlooks.

In accordance with **Example High School** policies as outlined in the student handbook, we have begun gathering the necessary materials to begin meeting and spoke with **Mx. Jones** about becoming our faculty advisor or sponsor. We greatly appreciate your help moving us forward to become an official school club and making **Example High School** a safer and kinder place for all its students.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Maria Williams

mariawilliams@email.com



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Common Arguments Against GSAs - and Why They're Wrong

1. "It's too controversial."

A GSA may be controversial, but that's not grounds to ban or silence them. GSAs are protected under students' First Amendment right to speak freely and to associate for expressive purposes, as long as they do not "materially and substantially" disrupt their educational environment, as decided in the 1969 US Supreme Court case *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*. Clothing, posters, and other materials relating to LGBTQ pride and issues on their own are not disruptive.

GSAs are also protected under the Equal Access Act (EAA), a federal law that prohibits all schools that receive federal funding to discriminate against any student group based on its viewpoint. If your school has allowed even one non-curricular club to meet at school, then LGBTQ students have the legal right to form a GSA and have it treated like any other student club at your school.


Gay-Straight Alliances and Gender-Sexuality Alliances are further protected Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 and Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits sex-based discrimination and gender-based harassment in educational environments, including harassment on the basis of a student's failure to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity.⁴

If other people complain about the GSA or protest its existence, that does not mean the GSA itself has caused the disruption. If other students, parents, or community members are in an uproar over a GSA, it is the school's responsibility to address those people's concerns - not shut down a peaceful group just because some people don't like it.

2. "If we let students start a GSA, then we'd have to let students form any other kind of club they want. What if they wanted to start a KKK club or an anti-LGBTQ club?"

If a club's purpose is to harass or intimidate other students, then the club is disruptive to the education process, which gives schools the grounds and power to stop it from forming - as discussed above from *Tinker v. Des Moines*.

Further, your school has the responsibility to protect *all* students because of their federal, constitutional right under the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment, as decided by the 1996 case of *Nabozny v. Podlesny* when the school district of Ashland,



Wisconsin was found to not have done its duty to protect its students from anti-queer bullying and harassment.⁴

Illinois public schools are also required to intervene when students and/or faculty say homophobic, transphobic, or otherwise threatening things to or in front of LGBTQ students, according to the Prevent School Violence Act. Further, all LGBTQ students maintain protection against sexual orientation and/or gender identity-based discrimination via the Illinois Human Rights Act.⁵

3. “We can’t let our students have a club that’s about sex.”

GSAs are NOT about sex. A GSA meeting is no more about sex than any other school-sponsored activity. As mentioned in the letter, GSAs are safe and supportive spaces for LGBTQ students that aim to create school environments where they can be themselves without fear while valuing all people regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.⁶

4. “Well, only if students get parental permission before joining.”

Schools are not allowed to single out GSAs for parental permission requirements, or otherwise require students to get their guardians’ consent before they can join. Even if parental consent rules are supported by the local school board or by state law, the Equal Access Act requires that such rules be applied equally to all student groups.⁷

5. “We can’t let outsiders come in and start this kind of club in our school.”

Outsiders don’t form GSAs - they are student-led and student-organized. While there are outside organizations that have created contact lists and/or loose coalitions of GSAs across the country, GSAs are not chapters of some larger conspiracy or organization. There is no big, evil national GSA conspiracy out there trying to get its hands on the youth of America.⁶

6. “Sure, *but* only if you keep it ‘toned down.’”

Prohibiting GSAs from using words or phrases like “gay,” “queer,” or “LGBTQ” infringes on students’ First Amendment rights to free expression as well as their right to be treated equally. Therefore, schools are not allowed to require GSAs to “tone down” their name to something like the “Diversity Club” or “Tolerance Club.”

GSAs must also be granted the same privileges as any other non-curriculum-related club, which includes usage and access to bulletin boards, public address systems, and more as according to the EAA and First Amendment rights.⁷

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1. GLSEN, [*2009 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth in Our Nation's School.*](#)
 2. The Trevor Project, [*2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health.*](#)
 3. GLSEN, [*2015 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth in Our Nation's School.*](#)
 4. "Know Your Rights - Federal Laws Protecting GSAs and LGBTQ Students," GSAFE, 2021, <https://gsafe.org/resources/for-youth-gsas/legal-rights/federal-laws-that-protect-gsas-and-lgbtq-youth/>.
 5. The Illinois Safe Schools Alliance, [*Know Your Rights! LGBTQ+ Rights in School.*](#)
 6. "How to Start a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA)," ACLU, 2021, <https://www.aclu.org/other/how-start-gay-straight-alliance-gsa>.
 7. "Gay-Straight Alliances," Lambda Legal, 2021, <https://www.lambdalegal.org/know-your-rights/article/youth-gay-straight-alliances>.

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