

MASSACHUSETTS

Gay-Straight Alliances

Youth Survey 2014

GSA ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

Brief Report 1



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

- gsanetwork.org

Some GSAs have started renaming themselves **Gender Sexuality Alliances** to be more inclusive of the wide spectrum of gender and sexual orientations. Previous studies across the nation have provided evidence showing that...¹⁻⁶

- the presence of GSAs may make schools safer and more accessible for LGBTQ youth by challenging biased language and harassment as well as by creating a more positive school climate;
- GSA involvement may help LGBTQ youth identify supportive school staff and foster members' sense of school connectedness and academic achievement;
- LGBTQ youths' participation in GSAs may have a positive impact on their wellbeing into their young adulthood.

To extend this area of work, a collaborative team of researchers, practitioners, youth workers across several community-based agencies, teachers, and members of the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth developed a broad GSA youth survey. This questionnaire aimed to capture: (a) the varied experiences of youth involved in GSAs across Massachusetts and how these experiences related to positive developmental outcomes; and, (b) the ways in which GSAs operated and the activities and discussions that occurred within them. The interdisciplinary team aimed to identify issues of pressing interest and concern, as well as relevant facets of GSAs to be examined. The team drew from empirically-supported models of positive youth development in general, the existing conceptual and empirical literature on GSAs specifically, and field-based data and reports to inform the development and refinement of this project. Based on the data collected from 308 youth in 42 GSAs across Massachusetts, we have generated a series of brief reports on the following set of topics:

- **activities and events done by GSAs**
- **members' involvement and group dynamics**
- **topics discussed in GSA meetings**
- **members' wellbeing**
- **functions of GSAs**
- **members' diversity knowledge and interactions**

Note. ¹ Goodenow, C., Szalacha, L., & Westhimer, K. (2006). School support groups, other school factors, and the safety of sexual minority adolescents. *Psychology in the Schools, 43*, 573-589. ² Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Bartkiewicz, M. J., Boesen, M. J., & Palmer, N. A. (2012). The 2011 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth in our nation's schools. New York: Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network. ³ Szalacha, L. A. (2003). Safer sexual diversity climates: Lessons learned from an evaluation of Massachusetts safe schools program for gay and lesbian students. *American Journal of Education, 110*, 58-88. ⁴ Toomey, R. B., & Russell, S. (2011). Gay-straight alliances, social justice involvement, and school victimization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer youth: Implications for school well-being and plans to vote. *Youth and Society, 45*, 500-522. ⁵ Toomey, R. B., Ryan, C., Diaz, R. M., & Russell, S. T. (2011). High school gay-straight alliances (GSAs) and young adult well-being: An examination of GSA presence, participation, and perceived effectiveness. *Applied Developmental Science, 15*, 175-185. ⁶ Walls, N. E., Kane, S. B., & Wisneski, H. (2007). Gay-straight alliances and the school experiences of sexual minority youth. *Youth & Society, 41*, 307-332.

USAGE GUIDE

We hope that these briefs can serve as a tool for stimulating discussions among GSA members and advisors on how to maximize the potential for your GSA to meet the needs and interests of members. Variations in responses exist across GSAs in different schools. For GSAs with more than seven participants, results specifically based on your GSA are presented separately from those based on the overall sample of GSAs participating in this project. For GSAs with fewer than seven respondents, results reflect responses from the overall sample. In both cases, however, please interpret the findings with caution, as the sample of youth in your GSA and the overall sample may not be entirely representative of the overall membership of your GSA or population of GSA-involved youth in Massachusetts. Lastly, please note that the amount of missing data varied across items.

This brief focuses on the activities and events done by GSAs.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- ☼ Highlights the types of activities/events that your GSA is doing and that more members participate in
- ☼ Can promote discussion on whether your GSA might like to try some new activities/ events or how you can improve the ones you already do
- ☼ Gives your GSA a chance to think about which activities might be more or less effective than others in meeting their needs and interests

WHAT CAN WE DISCUSS BASED ON THIS BRIEF?

- ☼ How have we been deciding on the activities/events we do as a group? Are there ways we can improve how we make these decisions?
- ☼ Are there some activities on this list we haven't done that we could do? Are there some that we want to do less of? Why?
- ☼ What are some ways we can get more people in the GSA involved in the activities/ events that we do? What are some ways we can get more people outside the GSA to be supportive and involved?

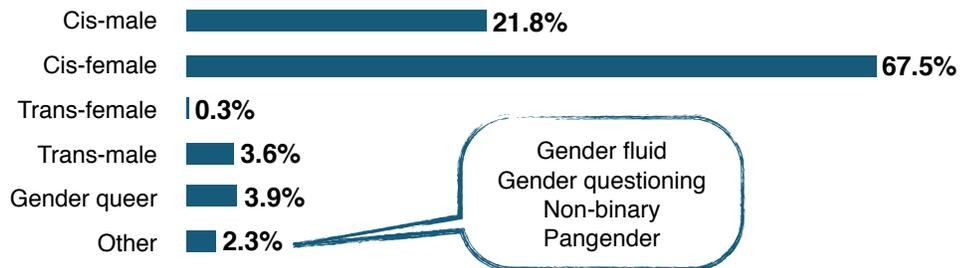
DEMOGRAPHICS

Participants included 308 students from 42 GSAs in Massachusetts during the 2013–14 academic year.

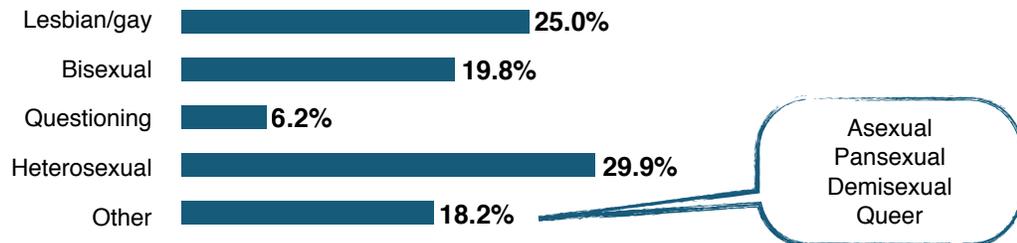
Age

☼ The average age of all participants was 16.06 years (range = 13–20).

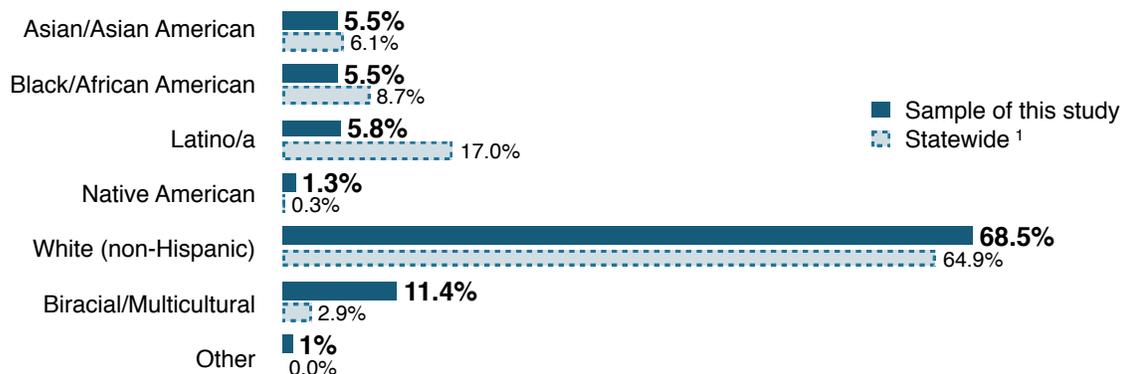
Gender



Sexual orientation



Race/ethnicity



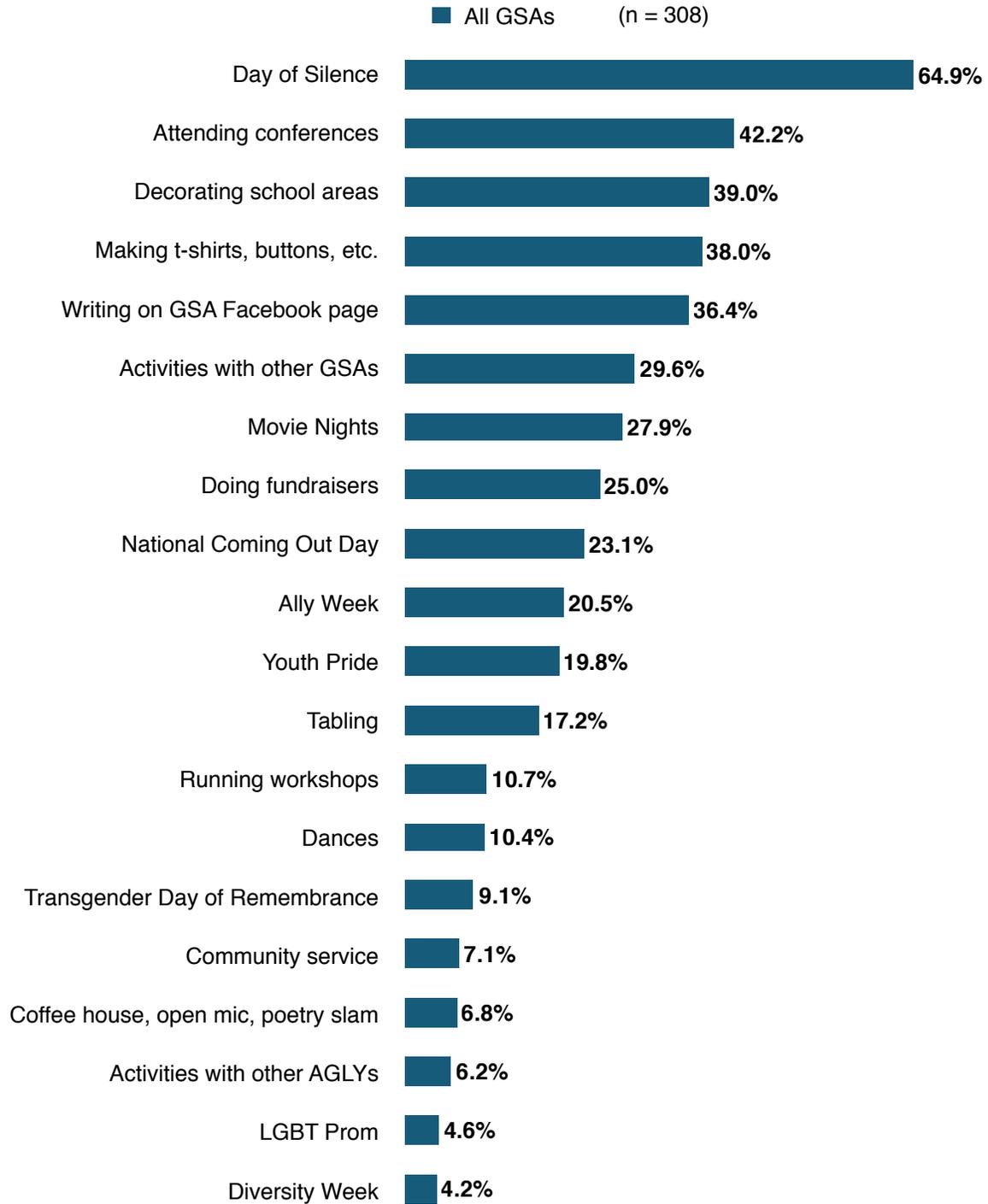
Average duration of youths' GSA membership



Note. 1 Statewide elementary and secondary education 2013-14 enrollment data retrieved from <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=00000000&orgtypecode=0&>

ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

GSA members reported their participation across a range of activities and events. The figure below shows the proportion of GSA members participating in each activity.



GSA members also reported other unique events, such as participating in AIDS Awareness Day, AIDS Walk, No Name Calling Day, and Rainbow Day; attending activities with PFLAG; and educating teachers and administrative staff.

RESOURCES

@Massachusetts

Population emphasis

Drop-in space

Health care

Training + technical assistance

Bisexual Resource Center

An online resource center with information about bisexuality
www.biresource.net

Bisexual Pansexual

Boston GLASS, JRI¹

A drop-in space for youth with case management services, peer support, and educational opportunities that focuses on LGBTQ youth of color ages 13-25
www.jri.org/services/health-hiv-lgbtq-services/health-and-prevention-services/boston-glass

D H Youth of color

Fenway Health

A community health center with comprehensive health care services, counseling and support groups
www.fenwayhealth.org

Sidney Borum Jr. Health Center

A health center that is part of Fenway Health that specializes in LGBTQ youth ages 12-29
www.sidneyborum.org

Helpline: 617.267.9001

Toll-free: 888.340.4528

Peer Listening Line: 617.267.2535

Toll-free: 800.399.7337

H

Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders (GLAD)

Advocates for LGBTQ youth and their families through legal assistance, legislation, and public education
www.glad.org/work/initiatives/c/youth-initiative

Info on LGBTQ youth rights:

www.glad.org/youth

Legal Infoline: 800.455.4523

T

GLBT Youth Group

Network A network of community-based organizations managed by the Boston Alliance of GLBT Youth (BAGLY) that provides safe spaces for LGBTQ and ally youth to get support and socialize all over the state
www.bagly.org/programs/youth-group/find-an-agly

D

GLBT Youth Support Project, Health Imperatives

Provides training for educators and health care providers who are working to support LGBTQ youth
www.healthimperatives.org/glys

T

GLSEN², Massachusetts Chapter

Provides resources and tool kits for youth and educators to foster a healthy school climate for all members of the school community
www.glsen.org/chapters/massachusetts

T

Greater Boston PFLAG³

Support for parents, friends, and family of LGBTQ youth in groups or one-on-one across the state
www.gbpf.org

Allies Parents

Hispanic Black Gay

Coalition (HBGC) Leadership development, mentorship, support groups, and community engagement for Black and Latin@ LGBTQ youth
www.hbgc-boston.org

Youth of color

Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition (MTPC)

Ends discrimination on the basis of gender identity/expression through advocacy and community building
www.masstpc.org

Trans resource wiki:

www.masstpc.org/mediawiki

Transgender

Safe Schools Program, DESE⁴

Provides training, technical assistance, and professional development to students, staff, and administrators on issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and school climate
www.doe.mass.edu/ssce/lgbtq

T

The Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth

Recommends and advocates effective policies, programs, and resources to state government for LGBTQ youth
www.mass.gov/cgly

T

The Network/La Red Offers services for survivors of LGBTQ partner abuse and community resources for ending partner abuse
www.tnlr.org

Hotline: 617.742.4911

TTY: 617.227.4911

Partner abuse Sexual assault

Youth on Fire, AIDS Action Committee

A drop-in center for homeless and street-involved youth ages 14-24
www.aac.org/about/our-work/youth-on-fire.html

Contact: 617.661.2508

D Homeless youth

Note. ¹ Justice Resource Institute; ² Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network; ³ Parents, Friends, and Family of Lesbians and Gays; ⁴ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

RESOURCES

Nationwide

Population emphasis

Online Community

Scholarships

Training + technical assistance

Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE)

Supports young people with LGBT parents
www.colage.org

 Youth with LGBT Parents

Family Acceptance Project

A research, intervention, education and policy initiative that works to prevent health and mental health risks for LGBTQ children and youth in the context of their families; provides training and consultation on a family-based prevention and intervention approach across the U.S. and in other countries
www.familyproject.sfsu.edu

 Parents

Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) Network

A national youth leadership organization that connects school-based GSAs to each other and community resources through peer support, leadership development, and training
www.gsanetwork.org



GLBT National Youth Talkline

Provides telephone and email peer counseling, as well as factual information and local resources for cities and towns across the nation
www.glnh.org/talkline

Talkline: 800.246.7743

 Peer Counseling

GLSEN¹ Provides resources and tool kits for youth and educators to foster a healthy school climate for all members of the school community
www.glsen.org



Lambda Legal Works to ensure that all LGBTQ young people can be safe, respected and free from discrimination and harassment through impact litigation, education and public policy work
www.lambdalegal.org/issues/teens

Info on LGBTQ youth rights:
<http://www.lambdalegal.org/know-your-rights/youth>



Human Rights Campaign

A national LGBT civil rights organization that works to ensure LGBT people have basic equal rights, and can be open, honest and safe at home, at work and in the community
<http://www.hrc.org/resources/category/youth-campus>



LGBT Student Scholarship Database: www.hrc.org/resources/entry/scholarship-database



Matthew's Place An online community that features resources about LGBTQ youth friendly shelters, outreach centers and empowerment programs across the country; includes moderated chats, discussion boards, and informational columns from notable individuals in the LGBTQ and allied communities
www.matthewsplace.com



PFLAG² Support for parents, friends, and family of LGBTQ youth in groups or one-on-one across the nation
www.pflag.org

Allies Parents

Point Foundation Empowers promising LGBTQ students to achieve their full academic and leadership potential through leadership training, mentorship and financial support
www.pointfoundation.org



Safe Schools Coalition A A public-private partnership in support of LGBTQ youth to help schools become safe places where every family can belong, where every educator can teach, and where every child can learn, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation
www.safeschoolscoalition.org



Scarleteen An online resource with inclusive, comprehensive sexuality information and help for young people
www.scarleteen.com

 Sex Ed

The Trevor Project Suicide prevention and support line for LGBTQ youth available through call, text, or online chat
www.thetrevorproject.org

Trevor Lifeline: 866.488.7386

 Youth in Crisis

YouthResource, Advocates for Youth A website that takes a holistic approach to sexual health by offering support, community, resources and peer-to-peer education about issues of concern to LGBTQ young people
www.youthresource.com



Note. ¹ Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network; ² Parents, Friends, and Family of Lesbians and Gays. Some resources above were selected from http://www.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/combined_lists_2013.pdf