MASSACHUSETTS
Gay-Straight Alliances
Youth Survey 2014

FUNCTIONS OF GSAs

Brief Report 3
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
- topics discussed in GSA meetings
- functions of GSAs
- members’ involvement and group dynamics
- members’ wellbeing
- members’ diversity knowledge and interactions

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 functions of GSAs.

**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

- Raises awareness of the match or mismatch between what GSAs do and what members want in certain areas
- Highlights the kind of resources and support that members want more of in their GSA

**WHAT CAN WE DISCUSS BASED ON THIS BRIEF?**

- How do you feel about the way we currently emphasize things like support, socializing, education, and advocacy in our GSA?
- Are there some things we could do more or less of in these areas based on what we need or want right now? Could this help bring in new members?
- What do we do really well in our GSA? What are some things we struggle to do?
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

- Cis-male: 21.8%
- Cis-female: 67.5%
- Trans-female: 10.3%
- Trans-male: 3.6%
- Gender queer: 3.9%
- Other: 2.3%

Sexual orientation

- Lesbian/gay: 25.0%
- Bisexual: 19.8%
- Questioning: 6.2%
- Heterosexual: 29.9%
- Other: 18.2%

Race/ethnicity

- Asian/Asian American: 5.5% (6.1%)
- Black/African American: 5.5% (8.7%)
- Latino/a: 5.8% (17.0%)
- Native American: 1.3% (0.3%)
- White (non-Hispanic): 68.5% (64.9%)
- Biracial/Multicultural: 11.4%
- Other: 1% (0.0%)

Average duration of youths' GSA membership

- 1.6 years

Note. 1 Statewide elementary and secondary education 2013-14 enrollment data retrieved from http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=000000000&orgtypecode=0&
Functions of GSAs

GSA members reported the extent to which they received and wanted support and social opportunities from their GSA. Below are the averages of students’ responses.

All GSAs (n = 308)

Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Received</th>
<th>Wanted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A place of safety</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional support</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation &amp; reassurance</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A place where I share any concerns</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social Opportunities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Received</th>
<th>Wanted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hang out with others</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play games or watch movies</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just be myself with others</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet new people or make new friends</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GSA members reported the extent to which they received and wanted education and advocacy opportunities from their GSA. Below are the averages of students’ responses.

**All GSAs (n = 308)**

### Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Received</th>
<th>Wanted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learn about LGBT topics or terms</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receive training on diversity issues</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receive resources on services available</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn ways to deal with stress</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Advocacy Opportunities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Received</th>
<th>Wanted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organize school events to raise awareness of LGBT issues</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educate those not in the GSA on diversity issues</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give presentations about LGBT issues or our GSA</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do advocacy events in the community</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with other student groups on diversity issues</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak out for LGBT issues</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak out for other minority group issues</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### RESOURCES

#### Population emphasis

**Bisexual Resource Center**
- An online resource center with information about bisexuality
  - www.biresource.net
- Bisexual | Pansexual

**Boston GLASS, JRI**
- 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

**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

**Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition (MTPC)**
- Ends discrimination on the basis of gender identity/expression through advocacy and community building
  - www.mastpc.org

**Trans resource wiki:**
- www.masspc.org/mediawiki

**Safe Schools Program, DESE**
- 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

**The Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth**
- Recommends and advocates effective policies, programs, and resources to state government for LGBTQ youth
  - www.mass.gov/cgly

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

**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

### Drop-in space

**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

**GLBT Youth Support Project, Health Imperatives**
- Provides training for educators and health care providers who are working to support LGBT youth
  - www.healthimperatives.org/glys

**Greater Boston PFLAG**
- Support for parents, friends, and family of LGBTQ youth in groups or one-on-one across the state
  - www.gbpflag.org

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

### Health care

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- AIDS | Transgender

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### Training + technical assistance

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### 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

Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE) Supports young people with LGBT parents www.colage.org

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

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

TL Talkline: 800.246.7743

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

TL 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

TL 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

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

TL Safe Schools Coalition 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

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

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

TL Trevor Lifeline: 866.488.7386

TL 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