MASSACHUSETTS Gay-Straight Alliances Youth Survey 2014

MEMBERS' WELLBEING

Brief Report 5

> **“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**

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 GSA members' wellbeing.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- It helps to understand the extent to which your GSA may be promoting resilience among members
- This can prompt discussions on ways your GSA can do even more to promote resilience and wellbeing
- Offers insight to the range of involvement that GSA members have in the community

WHAT CAN WE DISCUSS BASED ON THIS BRIEF?

- What are the most helpful things our GSA does to make you feel empowered and supported?
- What can we do in our GSA so that more people will feel empowered, confident, and supported during our meetings and outside our meetings?
- What are some things that each of us in the GSA would like to achieve this year? What are some ways that our GSA can support each other to do these things?

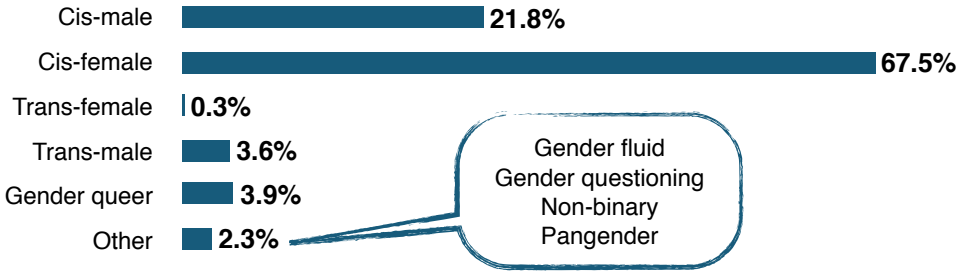
DEMOGRAPHICS

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

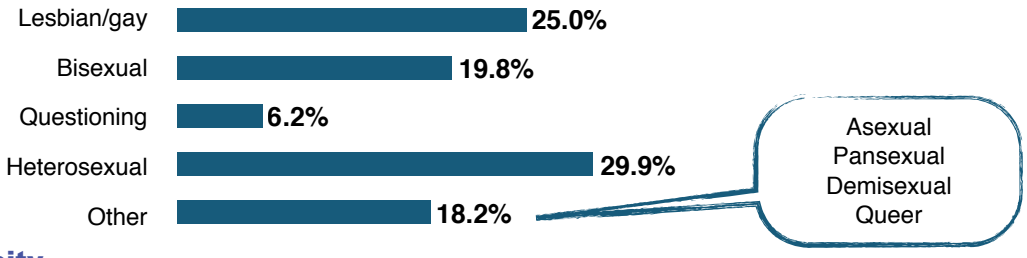
Age

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

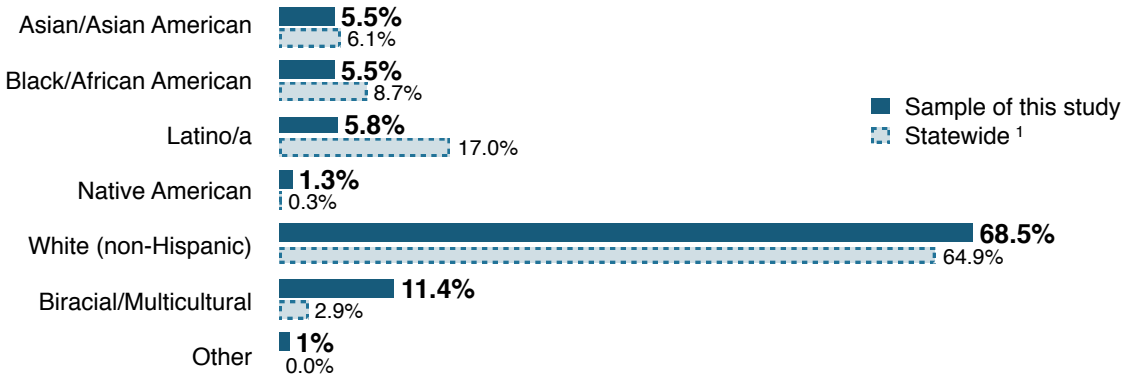
Gender



Sexual orientation



Race/ethnicity

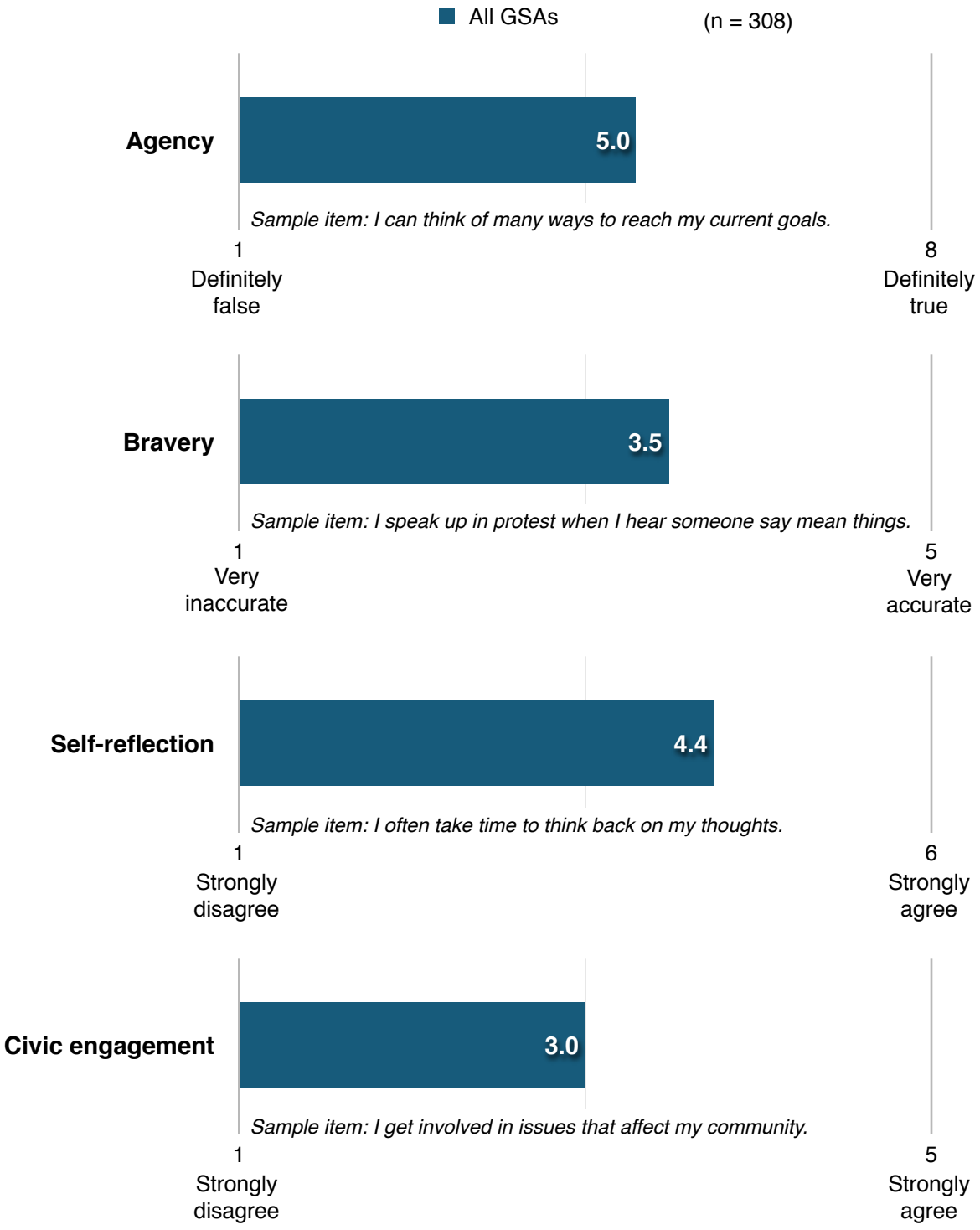


Average duration of youths' GSA membership

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&

INDIVIDUAL WELLBEING

GSA members reported their level of psychological and social wellbeing. Below are the averages of students' responses.



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, JRI[1] 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 LGBT youth www.healthimperatives.org/glys

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GLSEN[2], 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

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Greater Boston PFLAG[3] Support for parents, friends, and family of LGBTQ youth in groups or one-on-one across the state www.gbpflag.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, DESE[4] 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

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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* | *$cholarships* | *Training + technical assistance*

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

O *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

T *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

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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

GLSEN[1] 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

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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*

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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

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

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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

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PFLAG[2] 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

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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

T

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

O *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

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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