

The BCTF, PEN, and GSAs



The BCTF and Pride Education Network are dedicated to the formation and support of GSAs around the province through the provision of bursaries, resources, and workshops to support students and sponsor teachers.

A student in Maple Ridge formed the first GSA in British Columbia, in 1997. Since then, others have been formed in about 62 secondary schools (as of August 2010). These are located in urban and rural areas across BC.

In March 2000, the AGM of the BC Teachers' Federation debated and passed a motion to support teachers, and teacher locals who work toward the formation of GSAs. This action is in keeping with the BCTF's longstanding concern for the needs of diverse students, and its tradition of activism and action in various areas of social justice. Part of this support includes the provision of workshops to teachers on starting GSAs.

What is a GSA?

A gay-straight alliance (GSA) is a school-based group organized to end antigay bias and homophobia in schools, and create positive change, making schools a welcoming and safe place for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. GSAs help eliminate antigay bias, discrimination, harassment, and violence by educating school communities about homophobia, transphobia, and the lives of youth.

Networking



Networking with other GSAs can provide you with other resources and information. Below are organizations to network with to support GSAs in your area.

Pride Education Network

E-mail: info@pridenet.ca
Website: www.pridenet.ca (GSA link)

BC Teachers' Federation

James Chamberlain
Phone: 604-871-1842
Toll-free: 1-800-663-9163 (local 1842)
E-mail: jchamberlain@bctf.ca

Gab Youth Services/Qmunity

Contact Tash Wolfe
www.qmunity.ca/youth

Prideline BC

Phone: 604-684-6869
Toll free: 1-800-566-1170
7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

GSAs in Canada

Information for students and teachers about GSAs across Canada
www.mygsa.ca

10 Steps Towards Starting a Gay-Straight Alliance



British Columbia Teachers' Federation
100-550 West 6th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5Z 4P2
www.bctf.ca

10 steps towards starting a GSA

The steps listed below are intended for use in secondary schools. Because situations and schools vary, there are no simple 10 steps that are applicable to every school. Please contact any of the networks listed on the back for individual help in starting a GSA in your school.

For a more detailed manual on how to start a GSA, please visit the GSA link on the Pride Education Network website (www.pridenet.ca).

Steps

1 Follow guidelines

Establish a GSA the same way you would any other group or club. Look in your student handbook for your school's rules regarding clubs. Some schools require students to go through a process for establishing a club; this could include writing a constitution or showing student interest.

2 Find a sponsor teacher

Find teachers or staff members who you think would be supportive, or who have already shown themselves to be an ally around sexual orientation and gender identity issues. See your school rules for more information about who can be a club advisor.

3 Find other students

Work with a diverse range of students who are interested in such a group. You may check with other existing clubs for students who might have an interest in issues of diversity (i.e., amnesty, multiculturalism, student council, global issues, etc.).

4 Inform administration

Inform administrators of what you are doing right away. It can be very helpful to have them on your side. They can work as liaisons to teachers, parents, community members, and the board of education. If an administrator opposes the GSA, elicit the help of your sponsor teachers(s). There may be policies or information that deal with equal access, and/or discrimination in your district.

5 Pick a meeting place

You may wish to find a meeting place within the school that offers some level of privacy, yet is still accessible.

6 Advertise

There are many ways to advertise—think about how you've seen other clubs advertise. These could be any combination of using your school newsletter, announcements, flyers/posters, or word-of-mouth. If your flyers are defaced or torn down, do not be discouraged. Save defaced posters as examples to prove that homophobia exists in your school. Replace posters, if necessary. Eventually, whoever is tearing them down will give up, or be reprimanded by the school. Besides, advertising your group and having words up such as gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered, or end homophobia can be part of educating the school, and can actually make other students feel safer—even if they never attend a single meeting.

7 Plan your meeting

Of course, you want to have a good meeting, so plan ahead of time. There are tons of things you can do, from discussions to inviting speakers, workshops to games. Visit the Pride Education Network website for ideas or search the Internet.

8 Hold your meeting!

You may want to start with a discussion about why people feel the group is needed or important. You can also brainstorm what things your club could do this year.

9 Establish ground rules

Many groups have ground rules in order to ensure that group discussions are safe, confidential, and respectful. One very helpful ground rule is that no assumptions or labels are used about a group member's sexual orientation or gender identity.

10 Plan for the future

Develop an action plan. Brainstorm activities. Set goals for what you want to work towards. If you haven't already done so, contact Qmunity so that you may share ideas, resources, and information. Also look into local GSA networks in your own town or city. Pride Education Network has a GSA directory online of existing clubs in BC.

These 10 steps are based on a variety of actual experiences from GSAs. Not every school is the same, so share your experiences with others so they can learn what worked for your group!