What Can You Do?

10 Things Teachers and Schools Can Do to Create Safer Environments for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered and Questioning Students

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) students face tremendous discrimination and harassment in schools on a daily basis. In 2007, 86.2% of LGBT students in the U.S. experienced at least one incident of harassment and 60.8% reported feeling unsafe.¹ Despite good laws in California that protect LGBT students against harassment and discrimination (the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000) most schools have yet to fully create safe learning environments for all students. Below are 10 things that schools and school districts can do.

1. Stop behavior when you see it, each and every time. Then, talk about and process why you stopped the behavior with the participants of the incident.
2. Train teachers and staff to intervene when they hear slurs or negative comments based on sexual orientation and gender, including gender identity, appearance and behavior and other protected groups.
3. Develop nondiscrimination policies in your district that include sexual orientation and gender identity. This is necessary for districts to be in compliance with California law.
4. Inform through verbal and written notice, all students, teachers and staff of existing processes for filing complaints against homophobic and transphobic harassment and discrimination.
5. Ensure that administrators and teachers treat all reported incidents of homophobic and transphobic harassment and discrimination equally as other serious violations of school policies.
6. Support the establishment of a Gay Straight Alliance student club at your school.
7. Ensure that students and staff know where to get information and support related to sexual orientation and gender identity.
8. Introduce school curriculum that includes lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and age-appropriate information about sexual orientation and gender identity.
9. Recognize and acknowledge that passing a non-discrimination policy is only the first step in creating a safe and non-discriminatory school environment. Verbal and written notification of existing state law, mandatory training for staff and students, and inclusive curriculum are the keys to fully implementing a non-discrimination policy.
10. Utilize available community-based trainers and support staff, parents, and students who are interested in conducting trainings.

For support making these changes at your school, contact GSA Network at info@gsanetwork.org or 415.552.4229.