

Y.A. for Change
Activity for GSAs
and Other Youth Organizations

Topic: How to change educational policies, and why those changes are important

Goal: To teach students how to change school policies, in order to make schools safer for students of all backgrounds, especially glbtq youth. To explain to students the purpose of the inSIDEoUT petition, so that they will be familiar with state-wide policy, and the changes we're trying to make. To teach them why policy changes are so important.

Materials: 8 notecards or pieces of paper, one working pen, a copy of your school's bullying or harassment policy, if they have one.

Preparation for the leaders: 1) Find out whether or not your school has a bullying or harassment policy in place. If so, print out the exact wording of the policy, and bring it to the meeting. If you have trouble finding out what the policy is, ask someone at your school to help you. If your group is not based in a school, you can use any school's (or school district's) policy. 2) Read this entire program, including the background information, and be sure you are familiar with it. 3) On each of the eight note cards, write one of the facts given in part I, section 2 of 'THE ACTIVITY' section of this program.

THE ACTIVITY:

Part I (15 minutes)

1. Welcome everyone. Explain to them that inSIDEoUT is currently collecting signatures for a petition to change the North Carolina bullying and harassment policy, so that it better protects queer youth and everyone else, too. The petition is online at inSIDEoUT180.org, and is also attached to this program...

2. Give the notecards to the group. (If there are more than eight or so people, you may want to divide into smaller groups, in which case you will need more than one set of note cards.) On each of the eight note cards, one of the following facts should be written:

- Over 80% of LGBT students report being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation
- Nearly 70% of LGBT students report feeling unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation
- 80% of prospective teachers report negative attitudes toward lesbian and gay people
- 52% of prospective teachers report that they would feel uncomfortable working with an openly gay or lesbian colleague
- 66% of guidance counselors harbor negative feelings toward gay and lesbian people
- Fewer than 20% of guidance counselors have received any training on serving gay and lesbian students
- 20% of gay and lesbian students skipped school each month because they feared for their safety at school
- 32.8% of gay and lesbian youth had attempted suicide in the 1998-99 school year

3. These facts (available at <http://www.nclrights.org/publications/harass-talkingpoints.htm>) make it clear that changes in school policies are necessary. The group must arrange the facts in order of importance. For instance, the first fact should be the one that gives us the most pressing reason to change school policy.

4. Discuss the following questions:

- Which of these facts are most surprising?
- Do any of you relate personally to any of these facts? Which ones?
- Why is it important to change school policies to explicitly mention lgbtq youth?
- Was it difficult to arrange the facts in order of importance?
- Does anyone disagree with the order we've chosen?

Part II (20-30 minutes)

1. Read aloud the change in the State Board of Education's bullying policy that iNSIDEoUT is petitioning for.
2. If your school has a bullying and harassment policy, read it aloud.
3. If your school has no bullying policy, write your own. Refer to the 'GUIDELINES FOR A MODEL BULLYING POLICY' for help.
4. If your school has a bullying policy, does it explicitly mention particular categories such as race, religion, and sexual orientation? If not, write a proposal analogous to the one iNSIDEoUT is petitioning for. Again, refer to the 'GUIDELINES FOR A MODEL BULLYING POLICY' for help.
5. Discuss the following questions:
 - What should we do with the proposal or bullying policy we've created?
 - Why is it important that bullying policies specifically mention different categories? (Leader should share some of the background info!)
 - Why is mentioning specific categories important for students of other minorities, besides lgbtq students?
 - How does it feel to be a part of 300 students in the Triangle who are actually doing stuff to create important social changes?

Part III (10 minutes)

SIGN THE PETITION! Visit iNSIDEoUT180.org, right there at your school, with the rest of your GSA, and make sure everyone's name goes on the petition!!!!

iNSIDEoUT180.org

SIGN THE PETITION!!!

CHANGE IN THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION'S BULLYING POLICY THAT iNSIDEoUT IS PETITIONING FOR

Visit iNSIDEoUT180.org to sign the petition.
To view the entire current policy, visit <http://sbepolicy.dpi.state.nc.us/>

We, the undersigned, believe that the North Carolina statewide anti-harassment, bullying and discrimination policy must include the explicit enumeration of various categories in order to ensure that every student in the state has access to an education free of verbal and physical abuse. Since youth of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations face disproportionately high rates of bullying and harassment, it is especially important that they be explicitly mentioned in the policy, in order for it to be effective. The first paragraph of the North Carolina State Board of Education's policy for anti-harassment, bullying, and discrimination currently reads:

"It is the priority of the State Board of Education to provide each and every student in North Carolina's public schools and public charter schools with a safe, orderly, and caring learning environment that is free from harassment, bullying, or discrimination."

Out of concern for the safety of our peers, we request that the following sentence be added to the end of the first paragraph:

"This includes, but is not limited to, students of any actual or perceived race, ethnicity, cultural background, ability, religion (creed), sex, socioeconomic status, gender identity/expression or sexual orientation, as well as those who are associated with people identified by these categories."

SIGN THE PETITION AT iNSIDEoUT180.org

GUIDELINES FOR A MODEL BULLYING POLICY

From the National Center for Lesbian Rights <http://www.nclrights.org/publications/model safeschoolbill.htm>

A model safe schools bill:

- protects students, teachers, employees and staff from discrimination and verbal and physical bullying and harassment
- explicitly lists sexual orientation and gender identity and expression for protection
- protects students based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity and expression
- protects people based on their association with students who fall under one of the protected categories (for example, students with queer parents, siblings or friends)
- provides a way to notify the school community of the policy
- details how the policy is to be enforced
- requires that school employees undergo training for dealing with bullying and harassment
- requires that the school collect data concerning bullying and harassment, to assess the environment at school

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR LEADERS
From the National Center for Lesbian Rights
<http://www.nclrights.org/publications/inclusion.htm>

There is now extensive evidence that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students are disproportionately targeted for harassment and discrimination in schools. Left unchecked, this harassment and discrimination may escalate to the level of physical violence or violent crime.

The facts listed in Part I above show that schools are currently unsafe for lgbtq youth. The most effective way to protect these students, allowing them to receive the safe and effective education they deserve and protect schools from potential liability is (1) to adopt and implement laws and policies that explicitly prohibit discrimination and harassment on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity; (2) to establish clear procedures for responding to complaints under the policy; and (3) to provide training for staff and teachers necessary to implement these laws and policies.

The climate of fear created by anti-gay attitudes may result in increased absenteeism, decreased academic performance and increased risk of suicide for LGBT students. The National School Climate Survey also found that 30.9% of LGBT students had missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe.

One critical step that state legislatures and local school districts can take to respond to these alarming statistics is to pass and implement "safe school legislation" and policies that explicitly include sexual orientation and gender identity. These laws and policies are the most effective way to protect students from discrimination, while helping schools fulfill their legal responsibility to provide safe and effective learning environments for all students.

Is a blanket prohibition against discrimination and harassment without enumerated categories sufficient to protect LGBT students?

No. While harassment of any kind is unacceptable and should be dealt with quickly, firmly and with appropriate consequences and remedies, certain groups of people have suffered systematic institutional prejudice, discrimination and, as a result, are at a disproportionate risk of being the target of harassment and violence. In recent history, nondiscrimination laws such as race, sex, national origin, religion or color have been passed in order to help these groups of people. Harassment and discrimination based on these characteristics has decreased over time due, in part, to the protection afforded by these laws.

Evidence shows that school officials often do not recognize that anti-gay harassment and discrimination are unacceptable behaviors. As schools have often been complacent about responding to this type of harassment, many teachers are often reluctant to intervene for fear of becoming targets of harassment themselves.

Without specifically enumerating sexual orientation and gender identity as protected categories, many school officials may continue to believe that anti-gay conduct is not covered by the school's harassment policy. As the United States Supreme Court has explained: "Enumeration is the essential device used to make the duty not to discriminate concrete and to provide guidance for those who must comply." Inclusion of the enumerated categories will provide clear direction to teachers, administrators and students about the scope of the law or policy. It is also necessary to give teachers and staff the backing they need in order to feel confident about responding to LGBT harassment.

Is it necessary to add gender identity in particular?

Yes. Transgender youth are disproportionately likely to face harassment. In a recent survey, 89.5% of transgender students reported feeling unsafe based on their gender expression. Also, the harassment tends to be particularly violent. A recent survey analyzing reported instances of bias-motivated violence against LGBT people from 1995 through 1998 found that although anti-transgender violence accounted for only a relatively small percentage of all reported cases, those incidents accounted for 20% of all reported murders, and approximately 40% of all police-initiated violence. These conditions put transgender youth at great risk of suicidal feelings and behavior. Moreover,

harassment on the basis of gender nonconformity-behaving in a manner not conforming to traditional gender characterizations-perpetuates and reinforces gender-based stereotypes that hurt everyone.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students are disproportionately targeted for harassment and discrimination in schools. It is now clear that school districts can be held legally accountable for failing to protect LGBT students.

The most effective way to protect both students and schools is to adopt and enforce a state law and local policy that clearly prohibits discrimination and harassment on the basis of real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity.

For more information, visit the

National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR)

www.nclrights.org

870 Market Street, Suite 370

San Francisco, CA 94114

415.392.6257

To view sample bullying policies with commentary, go to
<http://www.nclrights.org/publications/schoolguidance0903.htm>