



## Responses from advisors about middle school GSA's

"We just (2-3 years ago - but it feels like yesterday) worked really hard to extend our GSA into grades 8 and 9. My school is grades 6 - 12, independent, non-religious. 9th graders used to be able to attend, but when they moved the divisions from 6 - 8 and 9 - 12 to three divisions of 6/7, 8/9, and 10-12 the 9th graders were no longer able to attend.

**The older kids recognized the need for having GSA in lower grades as many of them had come out with NO support.** (We're working now on how to do something for the 6th and 7th grades as that's when a lot of kids are coming out now - again, with no formal support.) We asked politely repeatedly with no results. Then the leadership changed and we thought we'd have better luck and asked again to no avail. So we decided to put together a formal proposal and asked to **go to a faculty meeting to present our case.**"

"We've had a GSA in our middle school for the last two years. We call it PRYDE club, peers reaching youth for diversity education. Last year we had about 15 members, this year only two."

"Before heading off to high school I tried to start a GSA in my middle school. It was **shut down by the teachers within the school** however I believe that it will be **best if you taught them how to keep fighting** even after people try to shut them down. Also how to **deal with the questions mothers and fathers will be asking about a GSA**. Also educate them on **how they word certain things**. When speaking to middle school students **it is easy to be misunderstood**. So wording is key and very important. These are just certain things I wish I knew when I tried to start my GSA and I believe it will help many others if they know it."

"I hope there are more responses to this topic.

I am a middle school teacher and have wanted to do something to both **combat the homophobia** I see on campus everyday and **provide support to my students who may be starting to question** who they are. I went to the high school we feed into and met with their GSA to ask some questions.

The first question I asked the members was, **did they think a GSA at the middle school would have been helpful to them. They overwhelmingly said yes.** But when I asked, "Ok, remember this is middle school, would you have shown up to a group called the 'Gay-Straight Alliance?'" they had to admit that they probably wouldn't have. We talked about calling it a "Diversity Club" instead. I think that would probably be more accepted by students, but I still fear doing more harm than good."

"I ran a GSA in a Jr/Sr high school (I just retired this past June). I called it a Gay-Straight Alliance because I wanted no confusion about what it was. However, you will find that **middle school students will want most things planned for them and they want to have fun**. So I always had nice **snacks, movies, bingo, music, checker tournaments**, and the like. I also took them on trips for bowling, roller skating, and ice skating. I always started meetings with **tidbits of gay news** I had culled from a local gay newspaper. ... We would then have a brief discussion of the events, make some announcements, and then move on to having the students enjoy the day's planned entertainment. At that age students seemed more likely to identify as bisexual as opposed to homosexual, but that's just fine. Because of the fun atmosphere of the club, a good **number of students who identified as straight were not intimidated from joining a club with the word "Gay" in its title**. Also, no doubt it permitted some of our gay students to more comfortably join under the cover of "being straight" **just to check things out**. Having numerous straight students (some of whom were very popular students at the middle school level) additionally helped to promote acceptance of the club. This club was based in a small conservative town, with **little school administrative support, so my goal was simply to make sure the club's title and purpose were clear** to the student body, and that its members enjoyed being there."