



## SAMPLE PROPOSAL FOR A MIDDLE SCHOOL GSA

COURTESY OF JANET WILSON, ALBUQUERQUE ACADEMY, ALBUQUERQUE, NM

### INTRODUCTION

"The Academy is committed to supporting all its students. Indeed, the school's "commitment to diversity" policy states: "We dedicate ourselves to creating an environment in which all people regardless of... sexual orientation...can thrive." Likewise, the harassment policy declares, "all individuals must be free to develop relationships, work, and learn in a healthy environment that is free of fear, intimidation, humiliation, or unwanted or unacceptable behaviors that create a hostile atmosphere." The above statements are the school's promises to make Albuquerque Academy a safe and tolerant environment. To that end the 10-12 GSA would like to propose that GSA be extended into the 8/9 division."

Put it right out there that a GSA will be helping fulfill the school's mission statement, diversity statement, or anti-harassment policy.

### RATIONALE

"The 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades are a stressful time for even the most easygoing of students."

"The students are struggling to redefine themselves and find their own values at the same time that there is the most pressure to conform to the unreasonable expectations of three hundred peers."

"Accepting the coming out process means accepting others' hatred, whether they are friends who prove less friendly than before, parents who refuse to speak to their child, or strangers who condemn a gay person without thinking twice. How can a student of this age, hyperaware of everything other students are saying and thinking, cope with their automatic hatred? The situation is grim, but they do it anyway. Students undeniably and unstoppably come out in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades."

"Gay students at this age have some additional specific issues. Schoolwork can be sharply affected by the coming out process. Students are likely to lose interest in classes while they are trying to decide whether they are gay, which is often accompanied by a drop in grades."

"[the lengthy and burdensome process of coming out] can be shortened and made easier by external support."

"What support system in 8/9 do gay students, relatives, and allies currently have? Their only options at the moment are to speak to their friends or to a counselor. This is, however, inadequate. Friends may not be accepting or unsure of how to support someone in the coming out process. Straight friends find it difficult to understand, whereas friends who are also coming out have their own stresses and are not as helpful as they could be. Counselors, on the other hand, are unlikely to be the first thought of a student in this process. At that age, students are untrusting of adults, do not feel that the adults can properly understand, and are uncomfortable with the stigma attached to going to the counselor. It reinforces the idea of "having a problem" and, on the whole, makes students less comfortable rather than more. The students currently in the 10-12 GSA generally did not use the counselors as resources in 8/9."

"An 8/9 GSA would ameliorate this problem in many ways. Firstly, it could be a direct means of support, a forum for students to talk about what they're facing in front of an audience known to be sympathetic."

"Secondly, students who do not wish to talk about coming out or other issues would feel supported merely by attending and being reassured that there is a friendly community, or even by not attending but being comforted that such a community exists."

"Finally, it would send a message to the rest of the division encouraging them to rethink homophobic comments."

In addition to talking about students' need for emotional support, make sure to emphasize the effect of anti-LGBT harassment on students' schoolwork and test scores.

## CONCERNS

"We would like to try to address the possible concerns you might have."

**Concern** : 8/9 students are not ready to talk about sex.

**Concern** : Gay culture, and hence GSA, crosses over too much into the cultures of drinking and drugs. This is not appropriate for 8/9 graders.

**Concern** : No other middle schools are doing it.

Your answers to these concerns need to be thought-out, specific, and to the point. Take some time to figure these out for yourself.

## "Sandia Preparatory School, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Their Gay/Straight Alliance was started last year by two 9<sup>th</sup> grade girls. Although poorly attended, it is open to students in grades 6 - 12.

## "Rio Rancho Middle High School, New Mexico

Rio Rancho Middle School has had a GSA in grades 6 - 8 since 2001. Their mission is to promote tolerance and normalize the condition of being gay. The sponsor establishes order and has an agenda at each meeting because the students are so emotional at this age.

These are a great help. Find as many of these as possible. If you need help, register at [www.studentorganizing.org](http://www.studentorganizing.org) and sign up for AdvisorTalk by clicking "yes" next to "AdvisorTalk" in your profile.

Some of the things they discuss at meetings are:

## DESCRIPTION

"In our vision, 8/9 GSA would have two primary functions: education and support."

## SUPPORT

"...many gay children begin questioning at this age and, without support, risk various kinds of unnecessary emotional and social difficulties."

"We would never expect students to declare a sexual orientation, and the expectation is that the majority of the members of the group would be straight. Some people will wish to identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or straight, however, and we will support any identity that they claim."

"Empowering straight allies would also be another important function of the group."

This is a part of the proposal that you should spend some time discussing with some prospective students, to see what they'd like to get out of the club.

## Education

"Education would also be another primary focus of the 8/9 GSA. This aspect of 8/9 GSA would mimic 10-12 GSA. The following are some of the topics covered in 10-12 GSA."

This is a great way for the students to empower themselves, and make the club into an agent of change throughout the rest of the school.

## Structure

"We propose that 8/9 GSA meet once a week at lunch with \_\_\_\_\_ as primary sponsor. The structure of 8/9 GSA would be different from the 10-12 GSA in that meetings would be more structured even than 10-12 GSA, where each meeting has a specific agenda and purpose. Conversations about anything even remotely sexual will not be tolerated."

## PERSONAL STORIES

We would like to end with some personal stories.

It might help to add a list of ground rules that students have agreed to follow in the meetings, so administrators can be sure that students know