



AB 537: activism

A Student Organizing Manual For Implementing
California's School Nondiscrimination Law (AB 537)

~~acknowledgments~~

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Make it Real is the offspring of the coalition which formed to support youth involvement in passing nondiscrimination protections for students on the basis of sexual orientation and gender. That remarkable effort was led by Jennifer Richard, from the Office of Senator Sheila Kuehl; the leadership and vision of these two women enabled the work which *Make it Real* seeks to further.

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by Ravi Rangji

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introduction

imagine...

Imagine a school where anti-LGBT slurs and harassment are considered unacceptable, and where teachers, students, and administrators intervene whenever they hear them...

Imagine a school where two girls or two guys can hold hands, dance together, or even make out, and nobody even notices...

Imagine a school where a boy can be feminine, a girl can be masculine, and where what matters about a person is not how much they fit into the predetermined boxes of masculinity or femininity, but their individuality and talent and humanity...

Imagine a school where everyone feels safe...

Imagine a school without hate...

Imagine it, then... **make it real.**

This handbook is designed to help you translate what you can imagine into reality at your school by using the basic tools and strategies of student activism. It contains information about the recent nondiscrimination law (AB 537) that California students helped pass. It details the process students can use to make complaints of discrimination and harassment. It provides basic information about how to turn your beliefs into reality by helping your student group become an activist organization, and it outlines eight major strategies for enforcing AB 537. It also includes scores of ideas about how to reduce anti-LGBT bias in schools and a resource list in case you need help or advice as you undertake your work. Throughout the handbook, images of powerlines and telephone poles will guide you through the activism process, reminding you of the importance of building networks of support and communication. Good luck!

definitions



GSA:

GSA is an abbreviation for Gay-Straight Alliance, an alliance of students dedicated to fighting homophobia on campus and improving the lives of LGBT students.

homophobia:

homophobia is a term that is often used generally to describe a strong negative bias toward LGBT people, but the term isn't inclusive in its origins and strict meaning, so you may want to use "anti-LGBT bias." You can get more specific when you need to: the terms biphobia and transphobia mean, respectively, strong negative bias against bisexual people and strong negative bias against transgender people.

LGBT:

LGBT is the string of letters that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. Some people use LGBTQ, to include youth who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity and haven't settled on a label. You might see even more letters on occasion: roll with it, ask what they stand for, and remember, in the words of an advocate for LGBTQ students, "Alas, it's better to be inclusive than poetic."

queer:

queer is an umbrella term used to describe LGBT people; it has been reclaimed by some LGBT people from its derogatory use by others and is used to express pride in being LGBT.

sexual orientation:

sexual orientation is the term that describes whether a person is attracted to members of the same sex (gay or lesbian), to members of the opposite sex (heterosexual), or to members of both sexes (bisexual). Sexual orientation is a newly protected category in California's public schools.

gender:

gender covers a wide range of issues relevant to all people. It relates to masculinity and femininity. Legally, gender means actual or perceived sex and includes gender-related identity, appearance, or behavior, whether or not that identity, appearance, or behavior is different than that traditionally associated with the person's sex at birth.

gender identity:

the gender one experiences oneself to be, regardless of one's biological sex.

gender characteristics:

characteristics such as facial hair or vocal pitch.

gender expression:

the way a person expresses his or her gender, through gestures, movement, dress, and grooming.

gender nonconformity:

simply means not expressing gender or not having gender characteristics or a gender identity that conform to others' expectations. Much, perhaps most, of the harassment LGBT students experience is related to gender and gender nonconformity. Gender is now a protected category in California public schools.

transgender (TG):

transgender is an umbrella term used to describe people whose gender identity, gender characteristics, or gender expression does not conform to the identity, characteristics, or expression traditionally associated with their sex at birth; transsexuals, cross-dressers, gender queers, intersex people, drag kings and drag queens, and other gender nonconforming people may identify as transgender.

chapter 1

historic law protects LGBT students in California

1 The Story Behind the California Student Safety And
Violence Prevention Act of 2000 (AB 537)

2 AB 537: A Tool For Change

3 The Text of AB 537

1 the story behind the student safety and violence prevention act of 2000 (AB 537)

In 1994, Assemblymember Sheila Kuehl became the first openly gay member of the California State Legislature. Her historic election to the California State Assembly would have a dramatically positive impact on legislation affecting queer communities. In 1995, Assemblymember Kuehl introduced “The Dignity for All Students Act,” a bill to bar discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in public schools.

The bill stalled in committee in 1995, but was given reconsideration the following year in January 1996. The author and the LGBT community knew that passing this groundbreaking law would require a fundamental shift in the public understanding of LGBT students’ lives.

To begin accomplishing that profound social change, the first-ever Queer Youth Lobby Day (QYLD) was held in January 1996. QYLD was a daylong event at the State Capitol in Sacramento to empower and educate LGBTQ youth about the legislative process. It was also an opportunity to educate the state legislature about issues affecting LGBTQ youth in California. That first year, more than 250 youth from around the state traveled to Sacramento to lobby the state legislature on AB 1001. Even though the bill still didn’t make it out of committee, queer youth activists from around the state had begun the critical process of creating a fundamental shift in the way the people of California understand LGBT youth. In 1997, Assemblymember Kuehl reintroduced the bill and again queer youth activists came to the state capitol.

And each year our numbers grew—both in terms of the youth lobbyists involved and the number of votes the bill received. But the bill still didn’t pass the legislature.



Student lobbyists cheer at Queer Youth Lobby Day.

In 1999, Assemblymember Kuehl introduced the bill yet again. This time, as part of Queer Youth Lobby Day 1999, more than 700 students rallied in front of the state capitol on March 22, 1999. After the rally, queer youth from around the state flooded legislative offices, sharing personal accounts of discrimination and harassment and demanding action. Each legislator was asked to vote in favor of the bill. And youth lobbyists didn’t stop there. When they returned home, they also spoke to their local media, lobbied their school boards, and visited their legislators’ local offices in an effort to get the word out about the bill and why it was so necessary.

But on Friday, June 4, 1999, in the early hours of the morning, after a long night of passionate debate, the State Assembly was still deadlocked, and the bill was defeated by one heartbreaking vote.

Activists watched as the same homophobic Assemblymembers came forward and offered the same hateful comments in opposition to the bill.

Supportive legislators, student activists, and citizens across the state were outraged at the defeat of the

bill. The state's major newspapers wrote editorials criticizing the vote. Newspaper readers across the state wrote angry letters to the editor criticizing the Assemblymembers' failure to place basic human rights above their private political calculations.

The response from youth activists and adult allies was so strong that something incredibly rare occurred. The bill was resurrected during the same legislative session. The new bill was called "The California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000."

The name wasn't the only thing different about the bill. Rather than adding the term "sexual orientation" to the nondiscrimination code for California public schools, the new bill sought to protect all categories of individuals who were protected by the hate crimes statute in the California penal code. This simple change meant that students would be protected not only on the basis of *real or perceived sexual orientation*, but also on the basis of *real or perceived gender identity*. This historic move meant that trans-

gender and gender nonconforming students would now also be protected.

The new bill moved with lightning speed through the legislative process. It was easily passed in the State Senate and then returned to the State Assembly where the other three bills had been defeated. Activists watched as the same homophobic Assemblymembers came forward and offered the same hateful comments in opposition to the bill.

But this time, when the vote was cast, one additional Assemblymember stepped forward to cast a vote of conscience in support of the bill. But student and citizen lobbyists weren't finished yet with their work.

Governor Gray Davis hadn't yet announced his position on the bill. Activists once again urgently needed to make their voices heard.

Finally all the hard work paid off. On October 2, 1999, Governor Gray Davis signed into law AB 537, the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000, making California only the fourth state in the nation to pass a law protecting students from harassment and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and the very first state to protect students from harassment and discrimination on the basis of gender identity. On January 1, 2000, the California Student Safety and Violence Act of 2000 went into effect.


Activists *can* change the world!

2 AB 537: a tool for change

The law passed, and it took effect on January 1, 2000, but is the work done?

No. Not until the idea the law represents, the idea of equality and safety and freedom and dignity for LGBT students, becomes a reality in every California school.

This section will briefly explore some of the ideas we'll need to understand in order to keep doing this work most effectively using the new tools provided by the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000.

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- 1. What is a nondiscrimination law?**
 - 2. What is discrimination?**
 - 3. What is AB 537?**
 - 4. What opportunities does AB 537 create?**

what is a nondiscrimination law?

First, let's talk about what it's not. It's not a magic wand. It won't drain a prejudiced mind of its prejudice. It won't automatically make an irresponsible person responsible, an ignorant person enlightened, or a violent person gentle. Advocacy, education, and rehabilitation will all still be necessary.

It's also not an endpoint. It doesn't represent the end of a process of changing a society—it's a mile-marker in the early days of our journey.

Finally, a law isn't instant. It takes time to grow. Both within the judicial system and throughout society, people will learn about a law and understand its meaning gradually, over months and years as we do our work to educate them. Laws are fleshed out and grow by being tested and used. What develops is called case law, and it helps lawyers, judges, and the rest of society understand what a particular law means.

So what is a nondiscrimination law? It's a rule that says you can't discriminate in a particular context against a person because that person has a particular trait or characteristic, or is a member of a particular group or social category, and it typically applies some form of penalty for doing so.

But every law is also something greater than just a rule: it's a symbol and an opportunity. In many ways, its greatest power and potential derives, not from the legal process of accessing it, but from the social processes of education and discussion which it can start. A law symbolizes and clarifies our society's values, and it creates innumerable opportunities for us to educate individuals and groups about those values and how to make them part of our everyday lives.

what is discrimination?

Good question. 200 years ago you would have gotten a very different answer from the one most of us agree on today. Thirty years ago, you would have a different answer, too. Our society's understanding of what discrimination is changes as our understanding of equality has evolved. When the Constitution was ratified in 1788, the concept of equality only covered white men. When sex discrimination first came to be outlawed in employment in 1964 and in education in 1972, it didn't include the idea that sexual harassment constituted discrimination. And today, we're standing at the beginning of a new era for LGBT students. What will be categorized as discrimination that we don't even think of as discrimination now? How deeply will the law change schools' cultures and, ultimately, how individuals come to view themselves and each other?

These questions will take time to answer, and they'll be answered in response to real

people who encounter real problems that will be sorted out using the law as a guide.

There are a lot of areas in which LGBT students are treated differently, and such treatment may one day be understood as discriminatory, if not through this law, then perhaps through others that build on it. Think about sex education, which essentially pretends that LGBT people don't exist. AB 537 doesn't cover that. Or consider your school library, which may have very little information about LGBT people or issues. Or think about how rituals like electing a Prom Queen and a Prom King typically enshrine heterosexuality and enforce gender stereotypes. All of these are inequities which our society as a whole doesn't yet understand to be discriminatory.

If we use it, AB 537 may help us arrive ultimately at a much broader and deeper understanding of equality for LGBT students.

examples of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity:

1. A same-sex couple isn't allowed to attend the school prom.
2. School administrators ignore bias incidents committed on the basis of a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.
3. A hostile climate of verbal harassment and intimidation is allowed to flourish in a school.
4. Same-sex couples that display affection in public are treated differently than opposite couples who display their affection in public.
5. A biologically male student wears a dress to school and is sent home and told to change into "boy's" clothes.
6. A biologically female student is harassed because she chooses to express masculine aspects of her gender identity by wearing very short hair and masculine clothing and shoes.
7. A LGBT student is denied full access to part of the school facilities as a result of the school's unwillingness or inability to make those facilities safe for LGBT people.
8. A Gay-Straight Alliance or other club to support LGBT youth isn't allowed to form on campus.



Assemblymember Sheila Kuehl addresses Queer Youth Lobby Day 1999 participants.

what is AB 537?

AB 537, the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000, changed California's Education Code by adding sexual orientation and gender to the Code's umbrella nondiscrimination provisions.

This makes it illegal for schools to discriminate against students on the basis of real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, or to allow the school environment to get so hostile for LGBT students, or students who are perceived to be LGBT, that they are, in effect, denied equal access to an education.

what opportunities does AB 537 create?

What's most important about AB 537 is that it exists. It's something you can point to, and it's something you can educate people about.

AB 537 creates opportunities for discussion. And it gives us the authority to demand what we already know is right: an equal shot at a safe education for every student, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Think of the law as a tool. Now think of the thousands and thousands of students who have that tool.

A house built with one hammer takes a long time. A house with a thousand hammers and hands can take shape before your eyes.

3 the text of AB 537

Below is the text of AB 537, which prohibits discrimination on any of the bases listed in Section 422.6 of the Penal Code. Section 422.6 explicitly covers actual or perceived sexual orientation and actual or perceived gender. Gender is defined as actual or perceived sex and includes a person's identity, appearance, and behavior, whether or not that identity, appearance, or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with a person's sex at birth.

AB 537: the california student safety and violence prevention act of 2000:

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. This bill shall be known, and may be cited, as the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000.

SEC. 2. (a) The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(1) Under the California Constitution, all students of public schools have the inalienable right to attend campuses that are safe, secure, and peaceful. Violence is the number one cause of death for young people in California and has become a public health problem of epidemic proportion. One of the Legislature's highest priorities must be to prevent our children from the plague of violence.

(2) The fastest growing, violent crime in California is hate crime, and it is incumbent upon us to ensure that all students attending public school in California are protected from potentially violent discrimination. Educators see how violence affects youth every day; they know first hand that youth cannot learn if they are concerned about their safety. This legislation is designed to protect the institution of learning as well as our students.

(3) Not only do we need to address the issue of school violence but also we must strive to reverse the increase in teen suicide. The number of teens who attempt suicide, as well as the number who actually kill themselves, has risen substantially in recent years. Teen suicides in the United States have doubled in number since 1960 and every year over a quarter of a million adolescents in the United States attempt suicide. Sadly, approximately 4,000 of these attempts every year are completed. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for youths 15 through 24 years of age. To combat this problem we must seriously examine these grim statistics and take immediate action to ensure all students are offered equal protection from discrimination under California law.

SEC. 3. Section 200 of the Education Code is amended to read:

200. It is the policy of the State of California to afford all persons in public schools, regardless of their sex, ethnic group identification, race,

national origin, religion, mental or physical disability, or regardless of any basis that is contained in the prohibition of hate crimes set forth in subdivision (a) of Section 422.6 of the Penal Code, equal rights and opportunities in the educational institutions of the state. The purpose of this chapter is to prohibit acts which are contrary to that policy and to provide remedies therefor.

SEC. 4. Section 220 of the Education Code is amended to read:

220. No person shall be subjected to discrimination on the basis of sex, ethnic group identification, race, national origin, religion, color, mental or physical disability, or any basis that is contained in the prohibition of hate crimes set forth in subdivision (a) of Section 422.6 of the Penal Code in any program or activity conducted by an educational institution that receives, or benefits from, state financial assistance or enrolls pupils who receive state student financial aid.

SEC. 5. Section 221 of the Education Code is renumbered to read: 220.5. This article shall not apply to an educational institution which is controlled by a religious organization if the application would not be consistent with the religious tenets of that organization.

SEC. 6. Section 241 is added to the Education Code, to read:

241. Nothing in the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000 requires the inclusion of any curriculum, textbook, presentation, or other material in any program or activity conducted by an educational institution or postsecondary educational institution; the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000 shall not be deemed to be violated by the omission of any curriculum, textbook, presentation, or other material in any program or activity conducted by an educational institution or postsecondary educational institution.

SEC. 7. Section 66251 of the Education Code is amended to read:

66251. It is the policy of the State of California to afford all persons, regardless of their sex, ethnic group identification, race, national origin, religion, mental or physical disability, or regardless of any basis that is contained in the prohibition of hate crimes set forth in subdivision (a) of Section 422.6 of the Penal Code, equal rights and opportunities in the postsecondary institutions of the state. The purpose of this chapter is to prohibit acts that are contrary to that policy and to provide remedies therefor.

SEC. 8. Section 66270 of the Education Code is amended to read:

66270. No person shall be subjected to discrimination on the basis of sex, ethnic group identification, race, national origin, religion, color, or mental or physical disability, or any basis that is contained in the prohibition of hate crimes set forth in subdivision (a) of Section 422.6 of the Penal Code in any program or activity conducted by any postsecondary educational institution that receives, or benefits from, state financial assistance or enrolls students who receive state student financial aid.

SEC. 9. Section 66271 of the Education Code is renumbered to read:

66270.5. This chapter shall not apply to an educational institution that is controlled by a religious organization if the application would not be consistent with the religious tenets of that organization.

SEC. 10. Notwithstanding Section 17610 of the Government Code, if the Commission on State Mandates determines that this act contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement to local agencies and school districts for those costs shall be made pursuant to Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division 4 of Title 2 of the Government Code. If the statewide cost of the claim for reimbursement does not exceed one million dollars (\$1,000,000), reimbursement shall be made from the State Mandates Claims Fund.

chapter 2

~~making a complaint~~

1 Phase One: Recognizing Harassment And Discrimination

2 Phase Two: Preparing Yourself For the Risks You Might Encounter

3 Phase Three: Making a Complaint At Your School

4 Phase Four: Taking It To the Next Level (When Your School Doesn't Respond)

5 What If You Can't Wait?

making a complaint

Why file complaints?

When you hear the word "complaint," you might have a negative reaction. You might think, "I'm not a complainer." The word has a negative connotation in everyday speech, but put those connotations aside. The way the word "complaint" is being used in the context of AB 537 is taking formal action by notifying authorities about a problem. In other words, lodging a "complaint" is your way of officially taking a stand. It means you're not going to let harassment or discrimination continue.

You may have other fears about making a complaint: you may worry about retaliation, or being outed. These are real concerns, and you should weigh them carefully. We know from experience with other civil rights laws that people who take a stand are sometimes targeted. See "Phase Two, Preparing Yourself for the Risks You Might Encounter," for a more detailed discussion of the risks of making complaints and ways you can respond to those risks.

But be aware also that if you don't complain, your school can claim that it didn't do anything because it didn't know there was a problem. In other words, when you complain, you force your school to take responsibility – to either put a stop to harassment and discrimination, or to go on record as not caring. If that's what they choose to do, they may be in trouble later.

Making a complaint is the primary mechanism that AB 537 provides to students. It is an opportunity to make a difference, not just in your own situation, but in the situation of other students at your school and in the environment for all students across California. Requiring all schools to respond to complaints and giving students a place to go when their schools fail to respond is a significant change in the balance of power.

But how can students use this power to their advantage?

Here's how.

1 phase one: recognizing harassment and discrimination

According to AB 537, harassment and other forms of discrimination on the basis of real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity are now illegal in California public schools. But the first step is recognizing harassment and other forms of discrimination. What are they?

harassment

Harassment is one form of discrimination. Most people know when they're being harassed: trust your feelings. If anybody at school (including at off-campus school functions or during transportation to and from school) says or does something to you about your sexual orientation or gender identity that makes you feel threatened, uncomfortable, angry, hurt, or unable to enjoy a normal and productive school climate, you have experienced an incident of harassment. Anyone can be a harasser: other students, teachers, administrators, or other school employees.

The California Code of Regulations, which explains how laws should be interpreted and carried out, defines "harassment" as conduct that is "severe or pervasive, which unreasonably disrupts an individual's educational or work environment or that creates a hostile educational or work environment." Some individual incidents of harassment may not meet that definition, but that doesn't mean you should ignore it, because if you do, the harassment could get worse.

forms of harassment:

derogatory words
hostile notes
demeaning drawings
gestures
jokes
damage to a person's property
threats

Harassment on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity often overlaps with sexual harassment, and can include:

inappropriate touching
lewd comments
unwelcome sexual behavior, communicated by spoken words, in writing, or visually

discrimination

Other forms of discrimination can be a little harder to define and can be harder to recognize. Discrimination is any kind of differential treatment that negatively affects a group or an individual because he or she is perceived to be a member of a particular group. Harassment which rises to the level defined in the regulations (severe and pervasive) is one form of discrimination, but there are others, too. Discrimination is often difficult to prove, because it's often comparative. If no one is allowed to kiss on campus, for instance, it isn't discrimination if a same-gender couple is stopped mid-kiss.

examples of discrimination:

Teachers at your school punish students quickly and strongly for making most hateful slurs but ignore words like "dyke" and "fag" when they hear them.

Straight couples at your school are allowed to be affectionate in public, but your principal or a teacher asks you not to hold hands in public with a person who is the same gender as you.

A student wears clothing, accessories, or a hairstyle not associated with his or her birth sex — and that student is told to go home and change.

A same-sex couple at your school is not allowed to go to the prom together, or is told that the school "can't vouch for their safety" if they attend.

Your school allows a lot of different student clubs to meet, but doesn't allow you to form a Gay-Straight Alliance.

2 phase two: preparing yourself for the risks you might encounter

Our society's experiences with other civil rights laws, such as employment nondiscrimination laws or sexual harassment laws, teach us that making a complaint can sometimes involve certain risks. The people perpetrating harassment and other forms of discrimination have an interest in silencing complaints, as do those who have turned a blind eye to harassment and other forms of discrimination. When you decide to file a complaint, you are essentially reporting illegal activity, and that has serious consequences for all parties involved. When you weigh the risks of making a report of discrimination or harassment, don't forget to weigh the risks of not reporting, which include escalation of harassment, continuation of an unsafe or hostile school environment, and interference with your right to learn and be educated.

Here are some risks you should consider before you file a complaint, as well as some strategies you can use to respond to them.

risk #1: retaliation from the perpetrator

risk #2: inappropriate punishment

risk #3: confidentiality

risk #1: retaliation from the perpetrator

When someone who has targeted you learns that you have reported his or her behavior, that person may respond by trying to target you again.

responding to the risk of retaliation

At the very first sign of retaliation from the perpetrator, be prepared to report him or her again and insist that your school take active measures to ensure your safety. You may also want to plan ahead and think about safe places at school, safe routes from place to place within school, and safe ways to get to and from school. Ask friends or trusted adults to help you plan for your safety if you fear that reporting harassment or discrimination may lead to more of the same. Remember, too, that violence and threats of violence are criminal – and the police may be able to help you.

risk #2: inappropriate punishment

Some administrators, because of bias, ignorance, or incompetence, will treat incidents of harassment as simple mutual conflict between students. These administrators will punish both parties and take no special steps to eliminate harassment.

responding to the risk of inappropriate punishment

If this is how your principal responds, you can pursue your complaint at the district level (see "Phase Four: Taking It To the Next Level" in this chapter).

risk #3: confidentiality

The law requires that the person who receives your complaint must keep it confidential; however, many schools automatically notify your parents of bias incidents, threats, or harassment that you report. In fact, many schools consider it their duty to make such notifications — and in cases of other kinds of harassment or discrimination, such notifications sometimes make sense. Administrators are not, however, legally allowed to notify parents of harassment or discrimination reports against the wishes of the student. In the case of harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity, parents who are supportive of their children may be a tremendous resource for them. But some students who are open about their sexual orientation or gender identity at school may not wish to discuss these issues with their parents because they fear that their parents will react negatively. Parental notification is legally the student's call to make, because students know far better than principals or others how their own families might respond. The bottom line is that you have a legal right to confidentiality, but you need to insist on it.

responding to the risk of a breach of confidentiality

1. Ask your principal if he or she will respect students' wishes not to notify parents. Inform him or her of students' legal right to confidentiality, and explain why students may not want parental notification and give examples of how students' welfare could be jeopardized as a result. Parents sometimes do not handle sexual orientation and gender identity issues well and attack, threaten, or verbally abuse their children when they learn or suspect that their children are LGBT. Some parents throw their LGBT children out of the house. Some parents force them to undergo "therapy" which they believe will "change" them. These are significant risks and should not be treated lightly. Once they are educated about the risks as well as their legal obligations, many principals will understand and respect a student's legal right to keep complaints confidential from their parents.

2. Ask your principal to commit to a policy which requires a school to ask student permission before notifying parents of a sexual orientation-related or gender identity-related harassment or discrimination report. That way students filing complaints will know about their right to confidentiality, and won't have to ask to exercise it. This means asking students explicitly if parents should be notified — and leaving the decision in students' hands.

3. If your school principal refuses to respect students' legal rights regarding parental notification, go directly to your school district's discrimination complaint officer (see Phase Four below). If your principal does not follow the legal guidelines outlined in the Uniform Complaint Procedure, skip him or her entirely and work directly with the district complaint officer.

4. Ask your district to adopt a written policy that clearly outlines students' rights regarding parental notification in cases of harassment and discrimination. This is part of a larger piece of advocacy — include it in any district-wide organizing you undertake.

5. Explore anonymous options. One community center in Southern California helps students by reporting harassment to schools and to the County Human Relations Commission in cases where students don't feel comfortable making such complaints directly. Some students may want to let their schools know about harassment through an anonymous letter or phone call, but be aware that it is difficult to respond to anonymous complaints, and anonymous complaints do not require action or hold schools accountable.

6. Contact a community-based civil rights or legal organization. A counselor or an attorney can help you negotiate such issues as parental notification and can help make sure that your complaint is heard without exposing you to unnecessary risks.

3 phase three: making a complaint at your school

What do you do if you experience harassment or other forms of discrimination? There are three things to do, depending on the situation.

1. get safe first
2. educate — if circumstances permit
3. make a complaint

1. get safe first

The most important thing to do if you experience harassment or discrimination is to make sure you are safe. If you have experienced any form of violence or any threat of violence, immediately find a safe place. Go to the principal's office, for instance. Go to a place where there are people who will stop an attack from occurring.

Violence and threats of violence are illegal: if you have experienced a serious attack, report it to the police.

2. educate — if circumstances permit

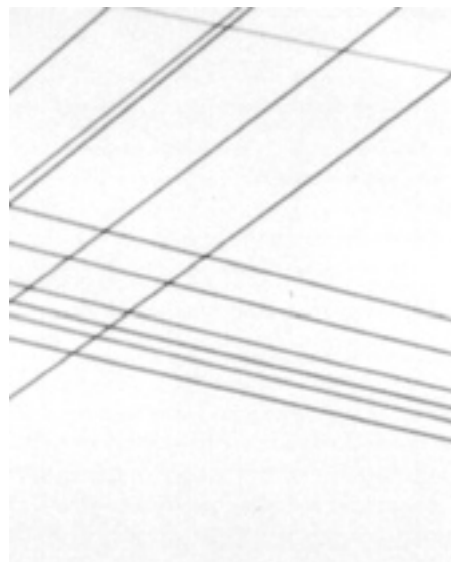
It is NOT your duty to educate a person who has harassed you, but sometimes you do have the opportunity to change a person's behavior simply by letting them know that you consider their behavior a form of harassment. For instance, if someone makes a derogatory joke about lesbians, you can tell them their joke was insulting and not funny and explain how it makes people feel. This form of problem-solving frequently works, but don't do it if you have any fear that it will expose you to more of the same.

3. make a complaint

There are ways to make your complaint more effective. Here's how:

step one

Document the incident. Make sure you write down a thorough description of the incident, including what happened, who was involved, where it happened, when it happened, the names of any witnesses, and whether any faculty members were present and how they responded. It is essential that you do this immediately. That way the facts can be clear, which makes your complaint stronger.



step two

Pay attention to time limits. If you are harassed, you have six months from the date of the incident to file a formal complaint. With discrimination, it's a little different because you are not always aware of discrimination when it occurs, so the clock starts ticking the day you find out that you were discriminated against. Six months may seem like a long time, but don't wait until the last minute. The events will be much fresher in your mind if you file a complaint immediately, and your complaint will be stronger as a result. Filing a complaint with your principal, while it is usually the first step in the process, does not count as filing a formal complaint. You have six months to file a formal complaint at the district level, so make sure you don't let the clock run out.

step three

Take it to the right person. Take your complaint to the school principal or to the person he or she has designated to receive and process complaints of harassment or other forms of discrimination. Teachers' responsibilities to respond are not a legally settled matter at this point. If you inform someone who is not responsible for stopping the harassment, your school can still claim that they never knew about it. Don't let your school use this excuse. Take your complaint to the person in charge.

step four

Use witnesses. If someone witnessed the harassment, ask them to join you in person when you make the complaint or have the witness add a short note to your written description verifying that they witnessed the incident and that it happened as you described it. Sometimes witnesses will not be willing to do that, so just tell your principal who the witnesses are.

step five

Present your written description. It helps make a principal take a complaint seriously if he or she is also presented with a written description of the event. If you've documented the incident as outlined above, you'll already have a written description. Don't give the principal your only copy. Make a copy for yourself and keep it in a folder.

step six

Ask for a solution. Ask your principal to take action that will stop the harassment and prevent it from happening again. Make sure that this action doesn't involve removing you from the classroom or school — you are not to blame for any harassment you suffer. Ask your principal to let you know what action he or she plans to take and when.

step seven

Make sure a bias incident report is filed. A new law (AB 1785) that took effect in January of 2001 requires schools to report bias crimes and bias incidents. If you have been harassed, that is a bias incident. If you have been attacked or threatened, that is a bias crime. Your principal may not know about this law, but make sure he or she does and let them know you expect a report to be filed. Ask for a copy. School districts may not have the appropriate form during the first year, but they should document the incident nevertheless and submit it as part of their standard school crime reporting. If your principal says that no crime has occurred, tell him or her that bias incidents which are not crimes are also covered by the law, and that he or she should consult with the school district official in charge of crime reporting or directly with the Department of Education.

step eight

Report back. If harassment continues from the same individual, let your principal know that the disciplinary action failed and something stronger will be required. If the disciplinary action worked, let your principal know that it did and that you will keep him or her informed if problems happen again in the future. Everyone needs feedback: it helps us all understand whether we're doing our jobs right. Principals need it, too.

step nine

Document your interaction with your principal. Make a note of when you met with your principal, what you agreed on, and whether your principal carried out his or her end of the bargain. This will be helpful if your principal doesn't solve the problem and you have to go take your complaint to your principal's boss, the school district.

4 phase four: taking it to the next level (when your school doesn't respond)

If the problem stops after the meeting with your principal, then congratulations! You have taken a stand and made a difference. Unfortunately, this will not always be the case. What do you do next? There are three steps:

- step 1: recognize that your school has failed to respond.**
- step 2: take your complaint to your school district.**
- step 3: appeal to the California Department of Education.**

step 1: recognize that your school has failed to respond.

How do you know if your school's response is inadequate? Ask yourself a few simple questions about the outcome of your meeting:

1. Has the problem been solved?
2. Did your school take positive steps to stop the harassment or discrimination?
3. If the harassment or discrimination is constant or widespread, did your school take steps to change the school environment and prevent harassment from happening, rather than merely responding to each incident?
4. Did your school treat your complaint with the same seriousness and speed that it has treated other complaints of threats, harassment, or discrimination?

If the answer to any of these questions is "no," you should consider taking your complaint to the next level – your school district.

How long should you wait? Don't let the problem fester or get worse. If your school has taken no action or ineffective action, let them know quickly that if the harassment doesn't stop within a specified period of time (two weeks is more than enough), you plan to complain to the district. Remember, you must do this within six months.

step 2: take your complaint to your school district.

Filing a complaint with your district is a much more formal procedure. Make sure you file your complaint within six months of the original incident. Be aware that your district has legal obligations. State law requires districts to follow something called the "Uniform Complaint Procedure." This procedure lays out a clear process for discrimination and harassment complaints. The points that follow in this section are based on the Uniform Complaint Procedure, and if your school district doesn't act as outlined below, let them know that they are not following the Uniform Complaint Procedure, as they are required to do by law. Here's what to expect when filing a complaint at the district level:

1. Your district is required to have a person who handles complaints.

Every school district has to announce who handles complaints at least annually, but sometimes it is hard to find out whom to submit complaints to. If you don't know whom to submit complaints to, try calling the Superintendent's office and asking who is responsible for handling complaints about harassment and discrimination. They should be able to direct you to the person you need to talk to. If you can't find out who that person is, visit our website, www.ab537.org, for more information.



Queer youth march in the 2001 San Francisco LGBT Pride Parade.

2. Be prepared to submit a description in writing and any documentation you have, as well as a description of how the school responded ineffectively or failed to respond.

Once you find your district complaint officer, send him or her a written description of the problem, along with any documentation you have about the incident as well as any meetings you have had with faculty or your principal. He or she is required to give you a written receipt of the complaint, and to give you any assistance you need in preparing the complaint. Make sure that you have explained what happened, why you are making the complaint, and why you feel that the problem was not adequately dealt with by your school administrators.

3. Your district has clear responsibilities to protect and help you when you file.

Your district is responsible for assisting you with filing the complaint, protecting you against retaliation, ensuring confidentiality, allowing you to submit any information that is relevant to the complaint, and preparing a written report of their investigative findings.

4. Your district has 60 days to investigate.

This may involve mediation, which means that your district will send someone to facilitate a discussion about the problem

between you and your school. You have the right to stop this mediation if you do not feel that it will help your situation. Your district may also conduct an investigation at your school about the problems you are experiencing.

5. Your district is required to give you a written report with their decision after completing the investigation.

At the end of the 60 days, you will receive a written report detailing your district's findings. If you don't get a written report, request one.

6. You have the right to appeal your district's decision.

Don't let your district pressure you into saying a problem is solved if it really isn't. If your district says the problem has been taken care of, and you disagree, appeal. Remember the four questions you asked yourself about whether your school's response was effective, and if you answer "no" to any of them in relation to your district's response, you still have a problem. Don't give up. You still have another place to turn: the California Department of Education.

step 3: appeal to the California Department of Education.

If you are unsatisfied with a decision made by your district, you don't have very much time to act, so don't delay. Here's a quick guide for making an appeal.

1. Act fast.

You only have 15 days to appeal your district's decision. Don't worry about whether you'll be able to decide if the district's decision isn't fair. By this point in the process, you'll be quite experienced and will probably recognize a fair decision if you see one. But here are some red flags to watch out for. If you see any one of the following "red flags" in your district's response, consider an appeal very seriously:

- Your district simply affirms your school's decision, which you believe was unfair.
- Your district says it's sorry and promises that things will change, but doesn't have a clear plan for accomplishing that change.
- Your district doesn't offer you a time-line for achieving any of the actions it promises.
- Your district's plan of action doesn't include any components aimed at changing school climate.

2. Be thorough.

The more detail you can offer, the stronger your appeal will be. When you appeal to the California Department of Education, be prepared to take the initiative: your district has failed to offer a fair resolution. Don't count on it to help you through the next step. Instead, gather all of the material that you have, including your original complaint, your district complaint, the district's response, and a new piece of writing – your explanation of why your district's response is not enough. Then send it all to the California Department of Education.

3. Send your appeal in.

You should send your appeal by registered mail. It's worth the extra trouble, so you'll know that the California Department of Education received it. Send it to:

Office of Equal Opportunity
California Department of Education
721 Capitol Mall, Room 651
Sacramento, CA 95814
Attention: Director
(916) 657-4562

4. Don't expect an overnight response.

After you send your complaint to the California Department of Education, they will notify your school district. They will give your district 10 days to resolve the problem, putting pressure on your school to take action in response to the harassment and discrimination you have experienced. If your district still fails to respond, they will begin an investigation on the 11th day.

Like the district investigation, the Department of Education investigation may involve mediation or an on-site evaluation. The Department of Education has 60 days to reach a decision. Once they reach a decision, they will help you and your school structure a timeline for action. This means that they will set specific dates for improvement, and they will hold your school to them. After 30 days, they will contact you and make sure that your school is keeping its word and following the timeline.

If your school still fails to respond, the California Department of Education can use AB 537 to put pressure on them. AB 537 allows the Department of Education to take away funding from schools that fail to live up to expectations, making it really difficult for schools to ignore their responsibilities.

5 what if you can't wait?

This whole process takes 145 days. For anyone experiencing harassment or discrimination, this is a long time to wait. Hopefully, your school will respond to your complaint effectively, and you won't have to go through the whole process. But keep in mind that you do have other options.

Activism can help you put pressure on your school, empower you and your allies, give exposure to the issue you are facing, and win the support of your fellow students.

district, then to the California Department of Education. But you don't always have to go through every step. Under certain circumstances you can skip steps to speed up the process.

You are supposed to go to your principal first. You have the option of skipping this step and going directly to your district, but keep in mind that your principal may be the person with the power to solve the problem faster. Under certain conditions, however, it may be in your best interest to skip this step. For example, if your complaint involves a faculty member and you feel uncomfortable talking to your principal, if you are concerned about confidentiality or fear retaliation, or if your principal has been negligent in the past, you can file your complaint at the district level first.

You can also skip over your district and go directly to the state level if you can show that your school has failed to comply with the Uniform Complaint Procedure, if you can prove that you will suffer an immediate loss of access to education without the intervention of the state, if you fear retaliation, or if

The Uniform Complaint Procedure tells you to go first to your principal or assistant principal, then to your school

you request anonymity. If you do decide to take your complaint directly to the state level, make sure that you include your reasons in the complaint you submit. The Department of Education will notify your school immediately, and still give them 10 days to respond.

It may be a good idea to give your school a chance in the beginning, because your school administrators have a greater ability to influence the conditions at your campus than the state does. But if you feel that your circumstances are extreme enough to skip your school and district, take your complaint directly to the state level.

If the harassment or discrimination you are experiencing cannot wait through this long process, keep in mind that you have other options. At any point, you have the right to seek civil law remedies. This means that you can talk to a lawyer, and possibly take your school to court. A judge can issue something called "injunctive relief," which is an order that a judge gives your school that your school has to comply with. If your problem needs to be solved immediately, seeking legal help may be your best bet. See the legal resources listed in the Resources section of this manual.

Throughout this process, you also have the option of activism. Activism can help you put pressure on your school, empower you and your allies, give exposure to the issue you are facing, and win the support of your fellow students. There are several strategies you can use that can help you — "Chapter 5: Strategies for Making It Real" can give you ideas about where to start and what to do.

chapter 3

student activism:
the essentials

1 Starting Out

2 Choosing an Issue

3 Developing a Strategy

student activism: because I'm worth it (and so are you)

What is activism? A lot of it is just standing up for yourself or for others (because you're imaginative enough to see the connection between yourself and other human beings). Do you and other people deserve a fair shot at an education? Do you and other students deserve to walk down the hallway and not be taunted? Do you and

**a lot of people become
activists because they
respect themselves and
other people. . .**

everyone else at your school deserve to be who you are and not have to be afraid that someone will attack you for it?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then you're already halfway to becoming an activist. A lot of people become activists because they respect themselves and other people too much to let anyone be treated like second-class citizens. They believe in the basic worth of all human beings, including themselves. That's why so many students, including straight allies, are coming together to fight sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination at their schools.

What if you believe in doing the right thing...but don't know how?

You're not alone. Like any other talent, activism involves skills that can be learned, and takes practice and good advice from someone who knows how to do it.

This section provides a good way to start thinking clearly and strategically about how to create change in your school.

1 starting out

Student groups serve different functions. Some are support groups, some are social groups, some work to raise awareness of important social justice issues, some serve to change the curriculum of the school, some work to change the rules and regulations that govern their education, and some do all of these things. What makes a student group an activist organization is that members have made it a part of their mission to address and take action around the issues that affect their lives.

what are the goals of a student activist group?

1. To win concrete improvements in people's lives
2. Make students aware of their own power
3. Alter the relations of power

how can a student group organize to create change?

1. Identify the problem.
2. Turn the problem into an issue. An issue is a specific solution to a problem that you choose to work for. The issues are always the solutions to the problems we have encountered.
3. Develop a strategy.
 - a. What are our long- and short-term goals?
 - b. What are our organizational strengths and weaknesses?
 - c. Who are our potential allies?
 - d. Who has the power to give us what we want (the target)?
 - e. What tactics can we and our constituents use to apply our power and make it felt by those who can give us what we want?
4. Involve large numbers of students face-to-face with the target.
5. The target reacts to us.
6. Win and go on to the next campaign, or if you lose, regroup and come back more powerful.



Student activists cheer at a rally.

2 checklist for choosing an issue

A good issue is one that matches most of these criteria:

- Results in real improvement of people's lives
- Gives people a sense of their own power
- Alters the relations of power
- Is worthwhile
- Is winnable
- Is widely felt
- Is deeply felt
- Is easy to understand
- Has a clear target
- Has a clear and reasonable time frame that works for you
- Does not seek to create divisions among groups
- Builds leadership
- Sets your organization up for the next campaign
- Is consistent with your values and vision

If you need help thinking about how to turn your group into an activist organization, or have questions about how to choose an issue, identify a target, and develop a strategy, contact Gay-Staight Alliance Network.

Source: *Organizing for Social Change: A Manual for Activists in the '90s*, Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall and Steve Max, Seven Locks Press, 1996. Contact (800) 354-5348 for more information.

3 developing a strategy

Okay, so you know your issue and now you're ready to act. How do you know what to do?

That's where developing a strategy comes in. People who are inspired to be activists on behalf of some cause often jump right to proposing a particular tactic. For example, students in a GSA say they want to stop the anti-LGBT slurs in their school and someone proposes holding a school assembly. That's a tactic that everyone is familiar with and may get excited about planning. However, it might be the case that the reason anti-LGBT slurs happen at the school is because teachers aren't trained on how to intervene. In that case, a teacher training would probably be a more effective tactic than a school assembly. If you jump to figuring out what your tactics are before you've thought through the overall strategy, you might not actually solve the problem.

the strategy chart

The strategy chart at the end of this chapter can be used as a guide to help you develop a strategy that best suits the situation at your school and the group of people who are involved in planning the action.

Before you sit down to fill out the strategy chart with your activist group, you may want to gather more information. For example, you may want to bring the student handbook that outlines school policies, a list of all the staff and teachers at the school, a list of all the district employees and school board members, and any other materials that provide information about key people or policies related to the school.

goals

The strategy chart at the end of this chapter is designed with the assumption that implementing AB 537 at your school is your **long-term goal**. Then, you'll want to come up with **intermediate goals** which are the smaller steps towards your long-term goal. Your **short-term goals** are the even smaller steps which you'll need to achieve along the way. For example, your intermediate goal might be getting the categories of sexual orientation and gender identity included in the nondiscrimination policy in the student handbook. To do that, a short-term goal might be getting a meeting with the principal at your school. At some schools, the meeting with the principal to discuss LGBTQ issues for the first time is a small victory in and of itself.

resources

Next, you'll want to discuss your **organizational resources**. These are the strengths and weaknesses within your own activist group. For example, strengths might be money you have or access to a photocopier or the number of people that you have in your group. Weaknesses might be lack of money or internal division within your group.





groups

The third column on the strategy chart is all about **groups** of people. This is where you answer the question, who cares about this issue, what do they stand to win or lose, what power do they have, and how are they organized. First, your **constituents** are the people who you can bring into your campaign because they care about the issue. For example, other students at the school may be your constituents. Your **allies** are the people who will also support you but aren't necessarily going to become members of your group. These may be teachers or parents in the community who care about what's happening to students at the school. Your **opponents** are all the people that stand to lose or be very upset if you win your issue. Try to figure out how they are organized and how they could oppose you. Be most concerned about the people who may organize to actively stop you, and less concerned with the people who may privately disagree with your actions but won't do anything to stop you.

targets

It is very important to have a clear **target**. The **primary target** is the person with the power to give you what you want. The target is always a person, not an institution or group such as the school board. If the school board is the group that has the power to give you what you want, figure out which specific individuals on the school board are the people whose minds you want to change. You can have more than one target but you must be able to name the individuals. A **secondary target** is a person who has more influence over the primary target than you do. But, you have more influence over this person than you have over the primary target. For example, it might be a particularly powerful parent in the school district who has the ear of the school board members and happens to be the parent of one of your key constituents.

tactics

Lastly, once you have considered everything on your chart, you can determine your **tactics**. These are the steps in carrying out your overall plan. They are the specific things that the people in column 3 can do to the people in column 4 to put pressure on them. When you list tactics, put down who will do what, and how. Tactics could be accountability sessions with school officials, public hearings, meetings with teachers, or a petition drive. You may also want to include research and media as important elements in implementing your tactics.

STRATEGY CHART

Issue: Implement AB 537 In Our Schools

| Goals: | Resources: | Groups: | Targets: | Tactics: |
|---------------|-------------|---------------------------|------------|----------|
| Intermediate: | Strengths: | Constituents: | Primary: | |
| Short Term: | Weaknesses: | Allies: Opponents: | Secondary: | |

strategy chart

chapter 4

**making it real:
~~the queer youth action team's story~~**

by Ravi Rangi

the queer youth action team's story making it real:

When the Queer Youth Action Team (QYAT) took on the task of trying to implement AB 537 in our local Contra Costa County school districts we knew we were getting into a long hard battle. Sure the bill was passed and signed into law, but no one even knew it existed. How was a group of queer teenagers like us from the middle of nowhere going to use a little heard of law to reduce homophobia in our schools? No one else had done it before, but we were ready to accept the challenge. But where should we start?

I think we all felt a little clumsy in the beginning phases, but slowly out of what seemed like chaos came some order. Brainstorming, we decided that we needed to figure out exactly where to start by collecting information on each region of Contra Costa County. In doing a needs assessment of each district in the county we asked ourselves some basic questions like:

- How many sensitivity trainings has each district had regarding queer issues?
- How many potential allies do we have in each district?
- How many GSAs are there to join us in our efforts in each district?
- Have there been major incidents of homophobia in each district?

After each of these questions was answered, as well as many others, we decided to target a school district that we felt needed our efforts the most, yet at the same time was going to be somewhat receptive of the idea. We wanted our first district to be a success. Everyone agreed that West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) was our

best bet. Our next step was to develop and refine our strategy in approaching WCCUSD. Using the knowledge we already had, we developed a strategy chart outlining our long-term and shortterm goals, identifying our allies and constituents, as well as listing our primary and secondary targets in our campaign. We also asked ourselves questions such as what were our strengths and weaknesses as a group as well as what type of tactics we were going to use. We finally decided to begin work with in WCCUSD by doing a needs assessment specific to the district. But once again where should we start? Looking over the strategy chart, it became apparent that we needed to get directly out to the youth as soon as possible to find out how they felt about our campaign. It was decided that the best way to reach the youth would be to hold a youth forum.

On March 8, 2000, QYAT organized a youth forum called "Give us the 411" at the Richmond Unity Church in West Contra Costa County, specifically for students in the district. The event was a major success, with youth both queer and straight showing up from all over the district to tell us what they thought about homophobia in their schools. With some animated discussion, everyone came to the conclusion that there were some major problems that needed to be addressed in the district regarding homophobia and the implementation of the new law. We also came up with some potential solutions to those problems.

Yet undoubtedly, the most unforgettable part of the forum was the school climate surveys and personal stories the youth left. As we read each story, I felt something inside of me begin to stir. Why are we treated differently because we're queer? It seemed so unfair to me, and I think the rest of the QYAT members began to feel something similar. Reading about some of the painful situations where youth were treated differently because they were queer reminded us of our own personal struggles in school. That was the moment we all became emotionally invested in this fight.

We finally had a purpose and we presented that purpose to the WCCUSD Board President Glen Price and El Cerrito High School teacher Jennifer Rader. Glen and Jennifer suggested we take our potential solutions and create a

resolution to present to the school board. Unaware of what a resolution was or how to write one, we consulted the older edition of the AB 537 handbook as well as an old resolution that was presented to the San Francisco Unified School District Board. Using these resolutions as models, a couple of QYAT members and myself wrote our own resolution. After exhausting revisions through school board members and school officials, our version was complete and ready to officially present to the board. Outlining the wishes of the students it was to protect, our resolution was the first of its kind to be legally backed by AB 537.

The resolution was complete, but the monumental task of organizing a community had only just begun. The school board put us on the agenda, but only after we agreed to let them cut out large portions of our resolution. Our work had been butchered, but nonetheless we were on the agenda to present what was left of our original version. We were on the school board agenda to present our resolution, but without allies our battle would be a lost cause. In the following weeks, we went out into the community and collected over 200 signatures of WCCUSD constituents. We created QYAT postcards of support, hundreds of which were sent to different board members. Finally, we collected 40 letters of support from parents, teachers, PFLAG members, community organizations, various religious organizations, PTA groups, as well as the teachers' union, all of which urged the board to pass our original version of the resolution. Unimpressed, the school board refused to budge on their decision and would not put our version of the resolution on the agenda.

After working so long and hard on our campaign, it hurt us personally that everything wasn't coming along as planned. Even so, the watered down version of our resolution needed to be presented, and we went about the task of collecting testimonies from students and recent graduates of WCCUSD. As we collected testimonies, students from WCCUSD began to call the superintendent's office seeking the original version of the resolution on the agenda. In response to the students, the board downgraded the resolution from an agenda item to a consent item leaving us worse off than before. As a consent item there would be no discussion

allowed on the issue. This sparked a public outcry in the community and the office was flooded with calls asking that our resolution be pulled from the consent items and placed back on the agenda. The public was successful in getting the watered down resolution back on as a regular agenda item.

On February 7, 2001, a year after our efforts had first begun, came the day of the WCCUSD Board meeting where the fate of our resolution would be decided. It was a challenging, stressful, and scary time for everyone involved including not only QYAT, but also the many students and supporters that joined in the campaign. A few days prior to the event, QYAT sent out media advisories to local news agencies, and in response KQED, KPFA, KGO, the San Francisco Chronicle, the Contra Costa Times, and Contra Costa Television showed up to witness this

historic event. With the community out in full force and wearing hot pink stickers in support of QYAT, we began our presentation with legal information, statistics, and personal testimonies of students. Many students felt uncomfortable being seen at the meeting, so their stories were told by other youth, who pointed out the authors' reluctance to be identified. There were more than thirty speakers in favor of QYAT's resolution including a member of the statewide taskforce on AB 537, an attorney, two ministers from West Contra Costa, teachers, parents, students, and representatives from various community organizations.

I sat in the second row and watched as an endless line of people went to the podium and gave spectacular speeches on why the resolution was so important to all students regardless of real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. Speech after speech, the community pummeled the board for butchering the original version of our resolution. One of the most memorable speeches was given by a minister of a local church that started off, "I am queer, and I am proud!" The emotions within the room were soaring higher and higher with each speech.

I sat in the second row and watched as an endless line of people went to the podium and gave spectacular speeches on why the resolution was so important to all students.

As all of the speeches ended and the noise died down, a nervous feeling began to grow in my stomach. The moment was fast approaching when the final decision on a year's worth of our hard work was to be made. The crowd grew more anxious as the board discussed the issue, and biases became more evident as the board members discussed their views of the resolution. Suddenly, during her time to speak Board Member Pat Player stood up and introduced an amendment attaching the content of our original resolution to the watered down version. With a unanimous vote, the board passed the amendment, and the crowd simultaneously broke out in a roar of cheers. At that moment my eyes flooded with tears as I hugged my fellow QYAT members in celebration of our victory. It was the greatest feeling ever to watch the crowd of students and adults light up with hope and enthusiasm where once only fear and hopelessness existed.

The victory didn't die there in the boardroom as everyone shuffled out; WCCUSD students reported a change in their school atmosphere that even they didn't expect. One El Cerrito High student told us that after the passing of the resolution she expected for people to now simply keep quiet about their homophobic views. Yet, in the weeks following the board meeting, students said they felt a renewed sense of empowerment throughout their campuses. Homophobic comments continued but now students and teachers were no longer standing by idly. Many students who had been silent in the past were now making it clear that slurs were no longer tolerated by either gay or straight allies alike. No longer silent, students felt a greater feeling of pride in themselves as well as a stronger sense of community. Instead of pretending they didn't hear homophobic comments, many queer students felt good about who they were and started to stand up for themselves. The biggest lesson that all QYAT members shared, including myself, is that we all have the power to create positive change within our communities.

On February 7, 2001, the West Contra Costa Unified School District became the first district in Contra Costa County to pass a resolution specifically implementing AB 537 within a school system. The passing of our resolution was a momentous victory for queer youth across the county. Ironically, the board president took time to also remind us in his closing speech of



AB 537 poster developed by QYAT

the long battle that is yet to be fought against homophobia.

Four months after our resolution was passed, we tried to assess the effects of our resolution in individual schools. We realized that it was too early to tell. The task force to advise and assist the WCCUSD Safety Committee regarding implementation of our resolution had not yet been created. We were still in the early stages of the implementation process. Nonetheless, the residual effects of the board meeting were greatly beneficial. Teachers, administrators, and community members were educated by the students' testimonials read that night. No one in the district could deny that LGBTQ students face harassment and discrimination. Also, because of the media coverage, on February 7, most people in West Contra Costa learned that AB 537 is the law.

The fight against homophobia is far from over. The Queer Youth Action Team will continue working to implement AB 537 in other school districts in Contra Costa County as well as work on enforcement of our previous efforts including those within the WCCUSD. QYAT as well as other queer activists must fight until homophobia is no longer the norm. Until that day our struggles must go on.

chapter 5

strategies for making it real

1 Do Your 'Homework'

2 The Principal Principle

3 Teach It, Teacher

4 Parents: You Can't Live Without 'Em

5 Pull Together: Create a Student Group or Coalition

6 Move the Student Body

7 Cast a Wider Net: Media Activism

8 Take It To the Top (Lobby Your School Board For an Equity Compliance Plan)

making it real in school

For AB 537 to become a reality in your school, what will need to happen?

That's a complex question, and this chapter of the *Make It Real* manual attempts to offer you only the beginning of an answer.

We do, however, strongly believe that you will need to involve as many people as possible, and they will need to be all of the people who have a major stake in how schools are run now: students, parents, administrators, teachers, and school board members.

That's why many of these strategies focus on making these five key groups your allies. Two of these strategies, media work and research, are critical to advancing your agenda with all of these groups.

In each of these strategies, you will be doing much more than just telling people about AB 537 and how students have a legal right to a school experience that's free of harassment, violence, and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. You will be educating people about LGBT students' humanity. Always try to include a discussion of the law, but always go beyond it, too — to the human heart of the issue.

strategy #1: do your homework (research)

You've already explained to your principal that there's a problem at your school with harassment, but nothing seems to happen...sound familiar? Sometimes a huge part of the problem is that the people in charge would rather not acknowledge there's a problem. When something bad happens, they'd prefer to think of it as an "an isolated incident," rather than part of a pattern. If you think there's a pattern of discrimination and harassment at your school, and your principal or school board says "isolated incident," you'll have to prove it. Even if your principal isn't stuck in denial mode, there are lots of really good reasons to do some research. You'll be able to use the knowledge you gather and build to get your message out and advocate for change. There are a lot of ways to do that. But your very first step is to develop a research plan.

1. Before you set out to conduct any research, formulate the questions you're seeking to answer. These are your OBJECTIVES. Basically, what do you want to find out? For instance, your objective might be: To find out how frequently students experience or witness bias incidents and name-calling on the basis of both race and sexual orientation at (your school's name) high school.
2. Also, think about what you're going to do with your research. Have a clear plan. Will you present it to your principal? Will you publish it in your school newspaper? Will you present the results at a school assembly, or perhaps to teachers as part of a presentation at a faculty meeting? Will it be part of a presentation you ultimately make to your school board? Research can be used for all of these purposes and more. Once you finish it you can really take it on the road to make sure as many people as possible hear about it and help start planning appropriate responses.
3. Plan to present a report. Make sure there's a statement concerning your objectives, a description of your methods, the results you found, a discussion, and conclusions. These are the basic building blocks for any kind of report, and you might be familiar with them through science or other classes: OBJECTIVE, METHODS, FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS. Make sure your report is polished. Type it. Keep it clean, well written, and clear. You don't need a fancy layout or expensive paper. But you do need to make sure it's free of errors and easy to read and understand.

tactic #1

find out what's happening now

What happens now at your school when a student is harassed because of his or sexual orientation or gender expression? Is there a standard procedure for dealing with complaints of harassment? Do students who have been harassed feel satisfied by the school's action? Before you can lobby for change, you definitely need to know the answers to these questions.

how to gather evidence about your school's current practices:

1

Some schools may have a harassment incident report form that is inclusive of LGBT students. If your school doesn't, then it should. Go to your principal and ask to examine the harassment report form (see Sample Harassment Incident Report Form in the Samples section of this handbook for an example of a good form).

2

Ask the following questions: Is your Harassment Incident Report Form inclusive of harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity? Who is responsible for filling out the form? What does your school do with the form once it is completed? Is your school aware that students have a right to file confidential complaints? (Lack of confidentiality can deter some youth from reporting.) Are the people taking the reports trained to deal with issues of sexual orientation and gender sensitively?

3

Interview students who have reported harassment to your school administrators. What were their experiences? Were they satisfied with the outcomes? Do they feel that the harassment was taken seriously? Was the person who harassed educated and disciplined? Did the harassment stop?

4

Interview the administrator at your school who is primarily responsible for enforcing nondiscrimination laws and dealing with harassment. If you don't know who that is, ask. If no one knows, interview your principal and make a note of the fact that no one knows. In order to find out if harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity will be adequately addressed at your school, find out what the administrator thinks counts as harassment and what consequences are appropriate. Ask what he or she has done to actively reduce bias, harassment, and slurs on campus.

5

Compile all of the information you gather about current practices — good and bad. Both will become useful to you as you try to help your school improve. Your group should keep a file and take notes during every conversation. You may want to prepare an Assessment Report using all of the information you've gathered. Simply describe what you've done and what you've learned about how your school deals with discrimination.

tactic #2

get the facts

Put together a basic information packet. There's a lot of information out there about LGBT students, and it's easy to find. Go to the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) website at www.glsen.org or to the Safe Schools Coalition of Washington website at www.safeschools-wa.org. (Check out the publication "83,000 Youth" for some serious number-crunching, scientifically sound studies). Both sites contain good research and materials. So does the P.E.R.S.O.N. Project website at www.youth.org/loco/PERSONProject

But secondary research from across the country is best used as background support for your own research. Without local results, your principal and school board members can still claim, "It doesn't happen here."

Don't assist them in their fantasy by showing up empty-handed. Take the time to do some research of your own and show them what's really happening at your school. Publicizing your results will also be a great way to educate the entire school and local community.

tactic #3

conduct a survey

Students at several California schools recently decided that their schools needed to know that all was not well in terms of sexual orientation and gender-related harassment and name-calling. Some administrators didn't want to hear about the problem. It would destroy their illusion of running a perfect school. The students decided to act. They wrote and conducted a survey.

A survey can be as simple or as long as you wish. Just keep in mind that it will be much harder to get surveys completed if it takes a long time to fill out. The more surveys you can get filled out, the more convincing and powerful your results will be. Try to ask people you don't know and get as wide a cross-section of the student body as possible. You can also approach a department of your school

(e.g., the English or Social Studies Department) and ask them to help you distribute your survey to all of the students in a cross-section of the classes. If you conduct a survey, seriously consider including questions about discrimination and harassment targeting people on the basis of race/ethnicity and religion as well and co-sponsoring the survey with another student group concerned about discrimination at your school. It's an excellent way to create more allies. What do you want to know? What do you need to prove? Usually, a few simple questions are enough to demonstrate that a pattern exists. (See the Sample Survey in the Samples section of this handbook, which you are free to copy and use).

what to do with your findings:

1

Publish! Make a write up of why you did the survey, the results, quotes, and submit it to your school newspaper.

2

Wave your findings everywhere. Everyone at school, from the principal to teachers to students, should learn about the results of your survey. If you do a survey and sit on the results, then there's no point in doing it other than satisfying your own curiosity.

3

Identify some of the major issues with your school environment as indicated by the survey results (e.g., teachers don't intervene when homophobic comments are made in the classroom) and design projects to address them (e.g., coordinating a teacher training).

4

Think about giving out another survey at a later date to measure if your school climate is changing.

t a c t i c # 4

take a tally

Surveys aren't the only way to do research, and since they rely on people's memories, which can sometimes fade or lump things together, it's often a good idea to supplement a survey with another approach.

Students in Des Moines, Iowa, for example, decided to take a tally of the number of times they heard anti-LGBT harassment or slurs every day at school.

For each incident, they also recorded whether a teacher was present, and, if so, whether the teacher intervened.

They used a standard form that they kept in a notebook and filled out throughout the day as name-calling events occurred (or as soon as possible afterward) over a two-week period. At the end of the period, they tallied their results and found that in their school, each one of the tally takers had heard anti-LGBT slurs an average of 25.8 times a day!

They made national news when they publicized the results of their research.

You can do the same thing at your school.

t a c t i c # 5

testing, testing...1,2,3

One of the ways the Department of Justice and other civil rights law enforcement agencies determine whether people are being treated fairly is to use people who are known as "testers." Testers are given a specific task and are asked to behave in the exact same way and set up the same circumstances to the best of their abilities. There's only one difference. One tester might be a man and the other a woman. One tester might be African-American and the other tester white. If they're applying for a bank loan, or asking to rent a hotel room, or applying for job, they should all be treated the same.

Often they're not, and that's proof of discrimination.

Here's how you could use testers in your school: train pairs of students to pretend to be couples. (They don't really have to

be, but for some of the testing, they probably would be more comfortable if they were.) Half of the couples should be same-sex couples, and half of the couples should be opposite-sex couples. Create a list of public displays of affection (holding hands, hugging, walking arm in arm, dancing together, kissing hello or goodbye, making out), and be very clear about limits at each level. Also create a list of places at school where the public displays of affection might occur. Try to include a variety of places, so that the widest number of people might potentially react. Make sure you definitely list a place where a school administrator is likely to view the display of affection. Definitely do not choose a place where you might be alone with potentially hostile witnesses, thus exposing yourself to attack.



Next, stage the public displays of affection. Be absolutely sure to stage the displays so that they're equivalent in every respect (same total number of displays at each level of affection and in the same places). Have another student be an observer who records the responses from students, from teachers, from administrators, and from other school personnel for each and every incident. Compare the results and compile a report.

You can use testing for almost any form of discrimination. Are boys and girls at your school allowed to express themselves in ways that do not conform to

their gender (e.g., wearing clothes or grooming themselves in ways that are not traditionally associated with their sex)?

Testing requires a great deal of personal bravery and strength, as well as the ability to remain safe. Experiencing discrimination is psychologically stressful, even if you're experiencing it as part of a controlled experiment. Still, there's sometimes no better way than testing to demonstrate differential treatment. Never test in an unsupervised or unsafe space and never test without a designated witness.

tactic #6 keep journals

You can use journals as a research tool to illuminate the actual experience of observing or being targeted by harassment. What are the circumstances surrounding instances of harassment or discrimination, and how do they affect the individual who witnesses or experiences them? These are important questions that can't really be illuminated by the more numerical, cut-and-dried approach of surveying and tallying.

Here's the idea: a team of journal recorders agrees to record their observations of and feelings about the harassment and discrimination that they witness or experience at school for an agreed upon period of time (a month is a good target). Every night, each recorder answers a series of standard, open-ended questions in a notebook that she or he will turn back in to you. Each entry should be dated.

Use a standard set of questions: that way, when the journals are finished, it will be easier for you to compare the results, draw conclusions, and make a report.

A multi-student journal project can be a critical part of making your case to your school district. You might want to arrange to publish it in the school newspaper or present it as part of a report to the school board.

Sample journal questions might include: Please describe any anti-LGBT behavior you observed or experienced today. Who was involved? Who was targeted? How did the incident make you feel? Did you do anything about it? If so, what? If not, why?

strategy #2: the principal principle

The principal principle is a simple one: the person in charge sets the tone and controls the climate. If he or she is hostile toward LGBT people or people who don't conform to gender expectations, then the school environment will suffer, and negative conditions will flourish unchecked. If he or she is well-meaning but ignorant, he or she may act sporadically but without a larger, consistent vision of a truly supportive school environment. And if he or she is supportive, your school can move forward to create a positive, respectful, safe environment for all.

That means it's critical to educate your principal, keep the lines of communication open, and keep at it until you see signs of progress!

Consider this: at one Los Angeles area high school, a principal was asked a question about LGBT students. She responded, "We don't have that problem here." Years later, because of teachers, students, and community members who took the time to educate her, she enthusiastically supports the LGBT student group on campus and points to it as one of her school's successes.

It might sound intimidating, but with preparation and persistence, you can turn your principal into your ally.

t a c t i c # 1 educate your principal

If you learn about a bias incident at your school, make sure your principal knows it occurred. Make sure, however, that you respect the confidentiality of the student who did not report.

Encourage students to report bias incidents they experience. If a teacher was present and didn't intervene, make sure your principal knows about that.

If you hear of a successful program or project in another school or community, let your principal know.

If you read a good article in a magazine or newspaper, photocopy it and pass it along to your principal.

If your principal rejects your ideas and doesn't take action, don't shut down or give up. Keep up a friendly but challenging relationship and work on finding other allies in the school community and beyond. Let your principal know of the work you're doing and of your successes. At some point, after enlisting as many allies as possible, you'll want to go over your principal's head, to the school district superintendent, to your district's equity compliance office, or even to the school board.

t a c t i c # 2 meet with your principal

If no one talks to your principal about the issues that LGBT students face, then don't be surprised if he or she remains ignorant. Schedule a meeting between your principal and a group of student allies to discuss the campus conditions for LGBT students. Make sure you prepare for the meeting in advance.



holding an effective meeting:

1

Always have a written meeting agenda.

It's like a road map for a group conversation, and it helps you move forward. Make sure you review the agenda as a group before the meeting, so everyone knows what's happening and when he or she will be expected to speak. Here's what your agenda should include:

1. Introductions
2. Overview of why you're having the meeting
3. Students' individual stories
4. Presentation of research
5. Ask for specific action
6. Principal's time to respond
7. Summarize and confirm actions and commitments
8. Thanks

2

Be prepared to educate. Present your research. Tell personal narratives of relevant experiences, which you've practiced in advance.

3

Move toward agreement in principle first.

After you present your research and personal experiences, ask your principal if he or she supports the principle of fairness, respect, and safety for all students, including LGBT students. If the answer is yes, then you're part way there, and you'll need to proceed to the next step...if the answer is no (and even the most hostile administrators should be reluctant to say no), then your school has a real problem, and you'll need to speak to your principal's supervisor. End the meeting by informing your principal that regardless of his or her personal opinions, the law requires him or her to provide safe and equal access to an education to all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Most principals will agree to the general idea, but some may be reluctant to do much of anything about it. Hopefully, your presentation has moved your principal to a new position.

4

Ask for specific action. The next step in the meeting is to ask your principal to take action. Here are some things you can ask your principal to do:

1. Commit to clear, consistent disciplinary procedures when students use derogatory names or target another student on any basis. Ask your principal to let the entire student body know on a regular basis the school's disciplinary policy for bias incidents such as name-calling, verbal harassment, threats, and physical harassment. This sends a signal. Advocate for a disciplinary strategy that is focused on:

- a. Stopping the harassing behavior
- b. Ensuring safety
- c. Preventing the behavior through education
- d. Providing options for counseling to both parties, and
- e. Clarifying a clear chain of consequences for the behavior.

2. Hold an all-school assembly, where the entire school community will learn about what discrimination and harassment are, how they hurt people, how each community member is responsible for reporting and stopping it whenever it occurs, and how the school will respond.

3. Conduct a staff training on how to intervene and report incidents of bias on any basis and how to support students who are targeted.

4. Send a letter to parents asking for their help in making sure the school is safe and doesn't discriminate against any students, regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, or disability. Rather than simply listing each category, the letter should actually discuss each one. Encourage parents to report bias incidents they become aware of and to talk to their children about the importance of safety and respect for all.

5

Negotiate a deal. If your principal won't commit on the spot to taking one of specific actions you suggested, get some form of commitment. You can ask what she or he feels comfortable committing to. You can ask how long he or she will need to formulate a plan. Or you can ask what steps he or she needs to take before deciding on a specific action. Offer to help with any one of those steps.

6

Wrap-up. Always summarize your discussion at the end of the meeting and list what you see as points of agreement. Thank the principal for his or her time, and let him or her know that you consider this the beginning of a good partnership in making the school community safer and healthier.

7

Follow up on your meetings. Write a letter to your principal thanking her or him for meeting with you. Summarize any agreements or commitments made during the meeting. This duplicates the last step in your meeting, but it duplicates it in writing, showing the principal that you're serious and expect follow-through.

strategy #3: teach it, teacher

One high school teacher decided that she heard too many anti-LGBT slurs at her school; some students even felt comfortable using them in class. Her school had a policy against name-calling, but nothing had been done to enforce it. She decided to intervene whenever she heard a slur.

Each time she heard a slur, she spoke to the person who used it. What did they mean? Why were they using those words? How did they think this made other people feel? And did they understand that the school had a policy against slurs of any kind, including anti-LGBT slurs?

Right away she noticed a change. Students stopped using slurs within her hearing. When a student who didn't know about her policy used a slur, she found that other students would intervene, and she rarely had to herself. She had successfully created a microclimate of respect within her school's larger climate of inattention to these issues.

That's what a teacher ally can do, and that's why you'll need as many of them as you can possibly find.

Teachers are in the classrooms, the hallways, and throughout the grounds of the school. Their attitudes, actions, contributions, oversights, and mistakes profoundly affect the school environment.

Secure active teacher allies through education and conversation.

t a c t i c # 1

find teacher allies

Start with the easy allies: do you have any teachers at your school who are members of the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN)? Are there any teachers who advise a Gay-Straight Alliance or a Project 10? Are there teachers who regularly intervene when they hear homophobic slurs? Those are the teachers to talk to first. Ask them to assist and guide you in your effort to help teachers at your school understand their responsibility to stop slurs and harassment and learn specific ways to do that.

Ask teachers to take a specific action. Sometimes the best way to earn an ally and to educate someone is to ask for a concrete action. That requires some conversation. Here's an example: an organization called NYAC (National Youth Advocacy Coalition) has a program called "Safe Zone," using posters. Teachers and counselors who put up a "Safe Zone" poster are making a promise to all students who see it: this is a safe place for a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender person — you will not be expected to endure slurs, and you can

talk about sexual orientation and gender issues without fear. You can use the actual "Safe Zone" poster or you can use the idea. You can even make your own posters and distribute them to willing teachers. They might say "Bias-Free Zone," "No Slurs of ANY Kind," or anything you think expresses the basic idea. Include an agreement with the poster, something that teachers actually sign, so that they make a behavioral as well as a visual commitment. It might read, "Teachers who post this sign promise to intervene whenever they hear slurs, to discuss with students the reasons for not using them, to report slurs to the principal, and to incorporate into their teaching and their everyday interactions with students examples of respecting and valuing diversity of race, culture, religion, sexual orientation, gender, and disability."





t a c t i c # 2

create educational opportunities for teachers

You can conduct sensitivity trainings, facilitate discussions, or make a student presentation at a faculty meeting.

Find out what teachers know and think about the issue. One way is to design a survey especially for teachers. This can help your principal understand what teachers really know, and it can get teachers started thinking about the issue more clearly.

Lobby to make a student presentation at your school's faculty meeting: students can lead your presentation alone or you can partner with a community agency (see the Resources section of this handbook). Find out from one of your teacher allies how you can get on the agenda. Present any research you've done, both secondary and first-hand, and narrate personal experiences. Be ready to make suggestions about what teachers can do.

(For tools to use in training and educating teachers, go to GLSEN's web site www.glsen.org.)

Don't get locked into one vision. Although a mandatory, in-service training around issues that LGBT students face might sound like the best idea, there's more than one way to get the job done. You can accomplish the work in small groups, in conversations with teachers one by one, or all at once, in a training.

When you hear of a teacher who fails to respond to anti-LGBT slurs, or who has been heard saying them, you should certainly report this to your principal, but you can also set up a meeting with that teacher to discuss the problem. The teacher may not be aware of his or her own behavior.

strategy #4: parents: you can't live without 'em

Anyone with two or more parents or stepparents understands the time-honored strategy of carefully choosing which parent to ask which question. If one parent is paranoid about your driving, ask the other if you can borrow the car. You get the idea. This is a basic form of ally building. Identify your supporters, make your case, and rely on them for cover. Parents can be powerful allies, whether speaking to other parents, to your principal, or the school board.

In the Orange Unified School District in the Fall semester of 1999, when a controversy erupted over a Gay-Straight Alliance, parents spoke up on both sides of the issue, which helped convey the message to the general public that the conflict wasn't students vs. parents, or activists vs. parents, but one that divided an entire community.

If your own parents aren't totally supportive, don't assume that other parents will be just like them. The truth is, a lot of parents are strong supporters of safe schools, fairness for all students, and equality for everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender conformity or nonconformity. A lot of parents "get it."

A lot of parents don't yet get it, but are open to learning. A large percentage of parents probably fall into this category.

If you can get these parents on your side, you're doing things right.



GSA organizers show their pride.

t a c t i c # 1

create parent allies

Locate as many allies or potential allies as you can. Remember, if you can't find any right away, you can create allies through education and outreach.

First, you have to find a committed and enlightened parent. Start with your group or circle of friends: does anyone have an enlightened, supportive, committed parent?

If you can't find a supportive parent among your group's parents, contact a PFLAG chapter, a Unitarian church, a GLSEN chapter, or the ACLU chapter in your area, and ask if anyone there knows of a parent in your school district who is supportive.

Once you've located someone, you need to invite that parent to a meeting where you basically do the same thing you've done with your principal. Present your research and personal experiences. Ask for his or her (or their) support in principle, then make a specific request — in this case, to help you create broader support among parents for safe and respectful schools.



Parents, students, and allies gather at an anti-hate rally.

t a c t i c # 2 activate your parent allies

When you've built a small group of committed ally parents, it's time to put them into action.

Put parents and parental concerns front and center. Have your ally parents lead the way and make the case for safe schools from a parent's perspective. Many parents have dealt with the issue of their child being teased, harassed, or picked on for a number of different reasons, and most parents want to protect their children.

One way you can use their support to build more support is by asking them to take a comprehensive nondiscrimination compliance resolution to the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) or to other parent groups.

advocating for a PTA resolution:

1

Ask for the PTA or other parent groups to support a resolution in support of school safety. (Use the Sample Board Resolution in the Samples section of this handbook as a model for your parent resolution: it provides a detailed plan for how the school district can implement California's school nondiscrimination laws).

2

Make sure your parent allies begin attending Parent Teacher Association meetings before they plan to make a presentation or ask for a resolution to be passed. They should find out about the group's process for deciding on matters and acquaint themselves with other members of the Association, as well its officers.

3

Provide the student perspective, either through personal testimony, letters, surveys, journals, or other research you carried out at your school.

4

Find other allies and include them, too. A supportive teacher. A member of the clergy. A counselor. A representative from a civil rights or community group. It can be difficult to get in touch with allies outside the school community. Call a community center, a PFLAG chapter, or one of the numbers listed on the resource page in the back of this book in order to get started.

5

Use this opportunity to garner support for any specific action you are undertaking. For instance, if you're working on lobbying for a teacher training, then make sure the resolution explicitly supports it.

pull together: create a student group or coalition

strategy #5:

A lot of students who aren't gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender understand the need for equality and believe in a vision of social justice. Some of the most dedicated and convincing supporters of LGBT students' rights have been their straight ally peers. And according to a survey conducted in Seattle, the majority of students targeted with anti-LGBT harassment and violence aren't LGBT, but are straight youth perceived as LGBT. Discrimination on the basis of *actual or perceived* sexual orientation and gender is prohibited under California's nondiscrimination policy.

There are two ways to involve other students in your effort to make your school environment safer and more committed to the principles of equality, diversity, respect, and nondiscrimination.

The first is to find allies to join your effort to reduce homophobia and anti-LGBT harassment and violence. The second is to work with a coalition of students and student groups on a broader joint aim — for instance, to create a school environment that discourages bias in all its forms and expressions. These are not mutually exclusive methods.

tactic #1

create a student group

Once you find a group of students who are eager to work for social justice, you can create a task force or group geared towards increasing awareness, responding to bias incidents, and creating change on campus.



Student groups march together.

starting your own group:

1

Find an advisor who believes in activism. Some teachers understand the importance of politics and local activism more than others. Talk to prospective advisors about their vision for your student group, and make sure the advisor you choose has a vision of your group helping make your school a better place.

2

Start a campus chapter of the ACLU. The American Civil Liberties Union stands for equality and for upholding the principles our nation was founded on. The ACLU has been one of the leaders in almost every social justice fight in this country, from LGBT rights to students' rights to racial and economic justice campaigns. Starting a campus chapter gives you a place where all social justice issues, including LGBT rights, can safely be explored, and where key alliances can be built.

3

Start a campus Gay-Straight Alliance. A Gay-Straight Alliance is exactly what it says: the very idea of it is to build a bridge in pursuit of a common goal. LGBT and straight students together work to reduce homophobia on campus, make sure that harassment is addressed fairly and consistently by teachers, and that the school's administrators carry out their responsibility of providing all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender, fair and equal access to school programs, activities, and facilities. To learn more about how to start and run a Gay-Straight Alliance, check out the Gay-Straight Alliance Network's website: www.gsanetwork.org.

4

Start a special Anti-Bias Task Force if groups like the ones above already exist at your school.

t a c t i c # 2
activate your group

Determined and committed student groups can make a huge difference in your school climate. As a group you can take on big issues and find meaningful solutions for them.

making sure your group is active:

1

Outreach is forever! One invitation to join isn't enough. Keep reaching out to students, and keep working hard. The more successes you build as a group, the more people will want to be a part of it.

2

Eventually, when your group is active and well-established, reach out even further. Invite representatives from athletic teams and other activity-focused groups — extracurricular activities and athletics are an important area where equity efforts sometimes fail

3

Don't set yourself up for failure by trying to do everything at once.

4

Respond as a group each and every time you hear of a bias incident on your campus. Ask teachers to address the issue when bias incidents come to light. Pass out fliers denouncing the incident. Send a statement to your school newspaper. Ask peers to sign a petition condemning it and supporting every student's right to an education without harassment on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or disability.

t a c t i c # 3
work in coalition
with other groups

A coalition is an organization of already existing organizations. If there are several groups on campus dedicated to student activism or social justice, you can work together in a coalition on any project or idea you find in this handbook.

Make sure as many student organizations as possible are represented, especially organizations that have a direct interest in civil rights, for instance, organizations committed to equality for female students, or organizations that represent students of a particular cultural identity. If you're a member of such an organization, you'll be well positioned to ask for their support.

Invite representatives from student government to broaden the coalition's membership.



Student activists gather to strategize about implementing AB 537.

strategy #6: move the student body

That's right: move that body. No matter what changes a principal makes, no matter what messages parents preach, or teachers teach, there's still a group you're going to have to engage with directly: your peers.

Fortunately, they're also a group who can be moved and educated. Peer education works! It's been proven in study after study as one of the most effective ways to communicate to students. Peers listen to one another and learn.

So start talking.

There are a lot of ways to raise awareness on campus. Some of them have been discussed already (starting a club), and some of them will be discussed in the next section ("Cast a Wider Net: Media Activism"). These will mesh with other strategies you choose, such as winning your principal over.

tactic #1 hold a school assembly

School assemblies are a great way to reach a whole bunch of students at once, so they're a logical idea when you need to get an important message out to everyone. Be realistic, though, about the amount of planning, preparation, and practice that have to go into an undertaking this large. You will definitely want a lot of allies involved in the planning and carrying out of an assembly that addresses the issue of bias on campus: your principal, a teacher, outside speakers, and other students. This is something you might work on for a whole semester, or even a year, to make happen.

tactic #2 change the student handbook

One very easy and direct way to reach a lot of students is to ask for a change in the student handbook clarifying the school's policies against name-calling, harassment or other bias incidents directed against a person because of his or her race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or disability. The more specific the language gets, the better. Advocate for a section devoted to bias, the school's values, and procedures for reporting incidents of harassment or discrimination.



Gay-Straight Alliance members from around California deliver a message of pride and equality.

holding a school assembly:

- 1** Propose the idea to your principal (see "The Principal Principle" for tips on setting up and carrying out a meeting). Be prepared for your principal to ask for a more detailed plan from you.
- 2** Flesh out your proposal. Pick a theme. Pick one or two outside speakers willing to address your theme in front of a school assembly. They should be experienced, strong speakers who are knowledgeable about the subject. Include student speakers, and include a speech from the principal to clarify the school's policies, reporting process, and discipline procedures, and why they're so important.
- 3** Involve as many campus groups as possible. You might even ask your cheerleading squad to present a cheer about "Unity," or "Coming Together."
- 4** If a bias incident or a hate crime happens on your campus, that's a good time to suggest an all-school assembly.

t a c t i c # 3
set up in-class presentations for students

Classroom presentations can be a great way to reach lots of students at your school. Develop presentations that students who are part of your group or task force can give to classes they're taking.

making in-class presentations:

1

This is a case-by-case approach, which is its beauty and its weakness. Members of your task force or organization who want to make a presentation simply need to ask their teachers' permission. Some may give it; some may not. Most will probably admire the initiative of a student making such a request.

2

Prepare, prepare, prepare. Think of a supportive teacher, and ask for his or her help.

3

Telling personal stories can be one of the most effective parts of a student presentation. If there are students at your school who are out and willing to share their stories, they're the most effective messengers. If not, contact LGBT alumni. And if you can't find any current students or alumni, bring in outside speakers from a speakers bureau as part of your presentation.

4

Make sure you use visual aids.

5

Bring reading materials for students. Put together a resource list for students so they can be referred to hotlines, their local PFLAG chapter, and community-based support groups. If your school has a task force, a GSA, or an ACLU club where they can get more involved, list your meeting time and place.

6

Think of a relevant classroom exercise.

7

Think of an assignment that could grow out of your presentation.

8

Make it relevant to the class you're presenting in. You might work together on a report about the history of civil rights, including the LGBT civil rights movement, and ask individual task force members to present it to their history or social studies classes.

t a c t i c # 4
engage the student government

The student government can play a key role in helping establish and publicize the student body's values. Request a meeting with the student government, make a presentation, and present a specific request, either a resolution or a course of action, for their approval. Plan your meeting in the same way that's described in "The Principal Principle."

strategy #7: cast a wider net: media activism

Media help you reach more people, and they help create a community's values. Use your school media to reach more people and start shaping shared values of respect and fairness.

Student journalists are always looking for real and timely stories that happen on campus and that connect to broader social issues. Schools are responsible for protecting all students from harassment and discrimination, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, but different schools will act on this responsibility in different ways. Some schools will be very active and thoughtful about how they do this, while others will not be. Each school's response is a story. Some students will be thinking of new and creative ways to help their schools understand their responsibilities, and each of those efforts is a story too. Stories abound in the process of Making It Real.

tactic #1 use your school newspaper

Use your school newspaper as a forum for exploring the issues, breaking the stories, and continuing to solidify a campus value system that opposes bias.



Youth activists create a video to help fight homophobia in schools.

working with your school newspaper:

1

Write a letter to the editor of your school newspaper about the AB 537 and how LGBT students are legally protected at school for the first time in California's history. (See the Sample Letter to the Editor in the Samples section of this handbook and feel free to use any or all of it. Make sure you personalize it by adding details about your personal experience and your school).

2

Find out how your newspaper works and who makes feature story, news story, and editorial decisions, as well as what the paper's guidelines for freelance submissions are, both for editorial and news pieces.

3

Work with your school newspaper to get a story published about the law and its effects. Encourage the reporter to do an in-depth piece, with interviews of teachers, administrators, and students.

4

Work with your school newspaper to have regular reports (preserving confidentiality, of course) of all incidents harassment and discrimination (get the numbers from the principal).

5

Whenever your school newspaper ignores an important story, misrepresents it, or even when it does a good job with it, you have a chance to chime in. Write a letter to the editor.

6

If you have done any campus research (including journaling), provide the results to the school newspaper staff and encourage them to do a story.

7

If your task force of allies responds to an incident, make sure the school newspaper knows about it.

8

Write an opinion piece about the law or about any incidents of harassment or discrimination at your school.

t a c t i c # 2
explore other media outlets

try out these other media outlets:

1. Radio/closed circuit TV (Ask media students to help you create a public service announcement against harassment.)
2. Intercom/ morning announcements
3. Poster/announcement boards in hallways (Design a poster or better yet, hold a contest.)
4. Boards in teachers' rooms
5. Your school district's website
6. Any newsletter that goes out to teachers, parents, or anyone else associated with the school district or school

Assess what other public communication forums exist in your school and make sure they also help get the word out about the AB 537 and about efforts to reduce discrimination on campus.

For any of these forums, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Who controls it?
2. What's the process for getting a story included in it?
3. How can I use it to promote a message supporting nondiscrimination and respect?
4. How can I develop suitable material for it?



A student activist addresses the media at Queer Youth Lobby Day.

t a c t i c # 3
start a newsletter

Don't feel that you need to limit yourself to the media that already exist. Your task force, GSA, or ACLU chapter can start a newsletter of its own and distribute it!

t a c t i c # 4
go outside of your school media

If you feel the need to communicate to the community beyond your school, Go outside of your school media. A good place to start is by contacting local newspapers, radio stations, and television stations.

strategy #8: take it to the top

(lobby your school board for an equity compliance plan)

When you've made the changes that are necessary at your school, you can have an even broader impact by advocating for those same changes for the entire school district. Presenting a plan to a school board is a huge undertaking, but it can have a real impact in schools where students haven't been able to get organized and, especially, in middle and elementary schools, where students may have a harder time advocating on their own behalf.

Throughout your school district, you will create lasting change if you can help your school pass a comprehensive plan for compliance with AB 537.

Another reason to go to your school board is if your school principal is reluctant to help make the important changes you suggest, or if he or she actively frustrates and suppresses your efforts to create changes in the campus environment.

In 1999, students in the Grossmont Unified School District, led by the student representative on the school board, succeeded in passing a proposal to add sexual orientation to that school district's nondiscrimination policy. Now, since all public schools are covered by state law, the important thing to focus on is your district's implementation and compliance procedures.

See the comprehensive suggestions in the Sample Board Resolution/Compliance Plan in the Samples section of this handbook. You may want to use all of these suggestions or craft a narrower proposal. Work with a friendly school board member, teacher, community advocate, or administrator on your proposal. Here are some things you might consider asking your school board to do:

t a c t i c # 1

work with your school board

Working with your school board isn't as intimidating as it sounds. If you develop a clear proposal and proceed step by step, you can win a significant victory for all of the students in your district. The Queer Youth Action Team from West Contra Costa County did just that. Read about their experiences in "Chapter 4: Making It Real: The Queer Youth Action Team's Story."

asking your school board to implement AB 537:

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>1 Ask your school board to develop clear student/parent complaint procedures and to use a Harassment Incident Report form that explicitly includes sexual orientation and gender identity. (See the Sample Harassment Incident Report form in the Samples section of this handbook).</p> | <p>5 Ask your school board to establish school-based compliance teams (teachers, students, and parents).</p> |
| <p>2 Ask your school board to create a plan for letting students, teachers, parents, and all other school personnel know on a regular basis what the complaint and reporting procedures are.</p> | <p>6 Ask your school board to institute consistent reporting policy for all incidents and complaints and to report to the public and the school communities regularly about the number and kind of incidents that occur on the district's school campuses.</p> |
| <p>3 Ask your school board to assign a staff member at each school responsible for investigating and reporting all incidents.</p> | <p>7 Ask your school board to mandate special staff trainings on nondiscrimination laws and staffmembers' responsibilities.</p> |
| <p>4 Ask your school board to train school administrators.</p> | <p>8 Ask your school board to make a commitment to developing curricular materials that will help students develop a deeper understanding of diversity and the principles of nondiscrimination as spelled out in state law.</p> |

working with your school board:

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>1 Develop a clear proposal. Use the testimony you've gathered from group members and others. Include the research you've done at your school and the research others have done elsewhere. Explain why students, teachers, administrators, and parents need to understand better what their responsibilities are, how to intervene to stop harassment and bias, and how to report any incidents that occur.</p> | <p>4 Set up individual meetings. Personal meetings with school board members help them understand the human part of the issue. By telling your stories and educating individual school board members, you can create valuable allies. Use the same tactics you used in meeting with your principal, teachers, and parents.</p> |
| <p>2 Involve all of your allies. It pays to involve all of your allies in your effort. You'll definitely want everyone who is supportive to help you as you plan to approach the board.</p> | <p>5 Attend committee hearings. School boards often have committees, and committee hearings are often the first step in passing a resolution. Attend the committee hearings with all of your allies and speak (if your board has committees that refer proposals on to the full board).</p> |
| <p>3 Find out who your school board members are. If you identify a friendly one, ask for their help. Also, find out who the student representatives are to your school board. Meet with them to help make them an ally for your cause.</p> | <p>6 Pack the public meeting with supporters. Bring speakers from all of your ally groups you've developed: parents, teachers, students, members of the clergy; sign-up for public comment on the agenda item, and be prepared to state your case!</p> |

caution: avoid the "zero tolerance" policy trap

When you advocate for a school policy on harassment and discrimination, advocate for a fair, flexible, strong policy, but not a "zero tolerance" policy. Here's why:

1. "Zero tolerance" discriminates. Studies of "zero tolerance" policies have shown that they are applied in a discriminatory fashion, disproportionately being used to suspend or expel students of color. For instance African-American students in South Carolina schools (where "zero tolerance" policies are prevalent) represent just 42% of the student population, but 69% of those who are disciplined for minor infractions.

2. "Zero tolerance" puts administrators in a bind. They end up feeling that have no discretion to distinguish between serious and minor infractions, and sometimes administrators just won't understand the difference between the two. For instance, a "zero tolerance" policy on name-calling and slurs might treat a hostile student who harasses another student with the word "queer" in the same manner that it would treat a lesbian student who refers to herself and to other students as "queer." "Zero tolerance" policies have resulted in suspensions for "weapons" such as squirt guns, Tweety-Bird key chains (in one notorious case), and a peanut thrown on a school bus.

3. "Zero tolerance" doesn't mesh with civil rights values. "Zero tolerance" is a fear-based, authoritarian, and unfair solution to a problem that requires active engagement, education, and promoting an environment of welcome and fairness for all. Any solution we look for should be consistent with our ultimate goal of fairness and respect for all.

4. "Zero tolerance" doesn't get at the root of the problem. A student who harasses other students needs to learn *why* that's not okay. What will happen when a student who is suspended returns to school unchanged?

Instead of "zero tolerance" advocate for a policy of "constructive engagement" in which all harassment and discrimination will be taken seriously; will be addressed immediately; will be recorded and tracked; will be met with a combination of discipline, counseling, and support; and will be countered by campus-wide measures to promote a positive climate, such as a special training or reminder on the intercom about the school's values and rules.

chapter 6

other strategies for creating change at school

1 How To Start a Gay-Straight Alliance

2 Other Strategies For Making Change

how to start a Gay-Straight Alliance

what is a Gay-Straight Alliance?

A Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) is a student-run club, typically in a high school, although some middle schools have GSAs too, which provides a safe place for students to meet, support each other, talk about issues related to sexual orientation, and work to end homophobia. Many GSAs function as a support group and provide safety and confidentiality to students who are struggling with their identity as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning.

In addition to support, some GSAs work on educating themselves and the broader school community about sexual orientation and gender identity issues. They may bring in outside speakers to cover a particular topic such as LGBTQ history. They may organize a “Pride Week” or “LGBTQ Awareness Events” and offer a series of educational workshops, panels, and pride celebrations. Many participate in the Day of Silence, a day when participants remain silent all day as a way of acknowledging the silence induced by homophobia in our society. Some GSAs organize a “Teach the Teachers” staff development day, which focuses on teaching school staff how to be better allies for LGBTQ students. For example, GSA members would present scenarios about discrimination or harassment and get teachers to brainstorm how to respond to those situations.

Other GSAs are activist clubs and have worked to get LGBTQ issues represented in the curriculum, LGBTQ related books in the library, and progressive non-discrimination policies implemented at a district level. All of these different types of GSAs also provide a social outlet for LGBTQ students and their straight allies. Lots of GSAs organize barbecues or movie nights, go to an LGBT Prom or a Pride Parade, and attend conferences together. GSAs are a great way to build community at your school and lessen the isolation that LGBTQ students might otherwise experience.

how can I start a GSA?

1. Follow Guidelines

Establish a GSA the same way you would establish any other group or club. Look in your Student Handbook for the rules at your school. This may include getting permission from an administrator, finding an advisor, and/or writing a constitution.

2. Find a Faculty Advisor

Find a teacher or staff member whom you think would be supportive or who has already shown themselves to be an ally around sexual orientation issues. It could be a teacher, counselor, nurse, or librarian.



3. Inform Administration of Your Plans

Tell administrators what you are doing right away. It can be very helpful to have an administrator on your side. They can work as liaisons on your behalf with other teachers, parent groups, community members, and the school board. If an administrator is resistant to the GSA, let them know that forming a GSA club is protected under the Federal Equal Access Act.

4. Inform Guidance Counselors And Social Workers About the Group

These individuals may know students who would be interested in attending the group.

5. Pick a Meeting Place

You may want to find a meeting place which is off the beaten track at school and offers some level of privacy or confidentiality.

6. Advertise

Figure out the best way to advertise at your school. It may be a combination of school bulletin announcements, flyers, and word-of-mouth. If your flyers are defaced or torn down, do not be discouraged. Keep putting them back up. Eventually, whoever is tearing them down will give up. Besides, advertising for your group and having words up such as “gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning” or “end homophobia” or “discuss sexual orientation” can be part of educating the school and can actually make other students feel safer — even if they never attend a single meeting.

7. Get Food

This one is kind of obvious. People always come to meetings when you provide food!

8. Hold Your Meeting

You may want to start out with a discussion about why people feel having this group is important. You can also brainstorm things your club would like to do this year.

9. Establish Ground Rules

Many groups have ground rules in order to insure that group discussions are safe, confidential, and respectful. Many groups have a ground rule that no assumptions or labels are used about a group member’s sexual orientation. This can help make straight allies feel comfortable about attending the club.

10. Plan For The Future

Develop an action plan. Brainstorm activities. Set goals for what you want to work towards. Contact Gay-Straight Alliance Network. See the Resources section of this handbook for contact information.

other strategies for making change

1. **Bring an LGBTQ Speakers' Bureau To Your School**

You can offer a speakers bureau as part of a student diversity day, a teach the teachers day, for a single class, for an all-school assembly, for a student council meeting, for a PTA meeting, or for the school district employees and school board members. Be sure to videotape the event so that other groups or classes can watch it in the future. If you do several, videotape them all and edit to create a resource video about LGBTQ issues at your school.

2. **Attend Pride Rallies And Marches**

Find out when the local pride events are in your community and organize other LGBTQ youth and allies to attend. June is generally Pride Month. October is Gay and Lesbian History Month.

3. **School Display Cases**

Sign up for one of your school's display cases and design a display about your club or LGBTQ history or famous LGBTQ people. Don't forget to include resources for students who may be LGBT or questioning. You can also find out if you can put up a display in the school library.

4. **Host a Conference**

Many Gay-Straight Alliances have hosted a mini-conference for the other Gay-Straight Alliances and LGBTQ students in their area. This can help you share ideas, network, and build your community.

5. **Diversity Day**

If your school doesn't already have a "Diversity Day," start one by getting all the student clubs that address different identities involved.

6. **Bring In Speakers, Performances, And Displays**

Often, cultural events and performances are the best way to help raise awareness about issues facing a particular community. They can also be a good way to send a message about tolerance and respect. For example, consider bringing in the Love Makes A Family display, a photo-text exhibit about alternative families. For more information, visit www.lovemakesafamily.org or email famphoto@aol.com.

7. Participate In the Day of Silence

The National Day of Silence Project is a campaign to increase awareness about the silence that LGBTQ people face. On April 7th, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., participants remain silent all day and pass out cards to explain their reasons for remaining silent. The cards say, “Please understand my reasons for not speaking today. I support lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights. People who are silent today believe that laws and attitudes should be inclusive of people of all sexual orientations. The Day of Silence exists to draw attention to those who have been silenced by hatred, oppression, and prejudice. Think about the voices you are not hearing. What can you do to end the silence?” For more information, visit www.youth-guard.org/dayofsilence.

8. National Coming Out Day Activities

On National Coming Out Day in October, hold a campus assembly or speak out where people can come out as LGBTQ or come out as straight allies who want to take a stand against homophobia. Do this in conjunction with any of the other ideas on this list, such as an “Awareness Week” or “Display Cases.”

9. Host a Read-Out In the Library

Find books, stories, and poems that describe the experiences of LGBTQ people. Read selections during a “Read-Out” in your school library. You can select things to read from famous authors and poets or you can read things that people from your own school have written.

10. Get Books In the Library

Go through your school library and find out what’s there (and what’s missing). Go to your local public library or an LGBT bookstore and find out what you want. Make a list. Present it to your librarian.

11. Make a Zine

Have everyone in your group contribute poetry, drawings, articles, and whatever other kinds of creative expression. Put it all together in a zine, make copies, and distribute “underground” to students.

12. Make a Web Page

Make a web page about your Gay-Straight Alliance or the issues facing LGBTQ youth at your school and link it to your school or district’s web page. To see some sample web sites from Gay-Straight Alliances, visit www.gsanetwork.org

13. Give Out an Award

Give out an award to the student and/or adult who has done the most for the advancement and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth at your school. These sorts of awards can inspire students to work hard on these issues and can also generate publicity for your group. Your group could offer a prize or could try to get a local group, store, restaurant, or company to offer a prize. Encourage the school administration to officially sponsor the award and announce it as part of the end of the year school awards ceremony.

14. Host a Day Or Week of Awareness

You can do this in conjunction with Gay and Lesbian History Month in October or Gay Pride Month in June or just whenever. Ideas for activities can include all of the ideas listed in this section. Additional ideas are:

- a. Research facts about LGBTQ people or LGBTQ history and write a series of daily announcements aimed at educating the school community about LGBTQ issues;
- b. Provide teachers with sample lessons and class discussion topics to be used during the awareness days;
- c. Design awareness and visibility posters that can include facts about LGBTQ issues;
- d. Have a T-shirt design contest for your GSA and then sell the T-shirts as a fundraiser.

15. Pride Symbols

Research the meaning of all the different pride symbols and discuss in your group. (There's lots of info on the web). Hand out rainbow flags, pink or black triangles, or "Safe Space" stickers to teachers, administrators, and students. Encourage teachers to put "Safe Space" stickers in their classrooms.

16. Resources For the School Counseling Office

Find out what resources they currently have that are LGBTQ-sensitive or LGBTQ-specific. If they don't have enough, or don't have any, collect flyers from community groups and make a referral list and give it to the counseling office for them to post on the walls. You can also consider doing an in-service for the counseling staff on the needs of LGBTQ students at your school.

17. Work With Your School's Amnesty Club

Hold a workshop or training on international LGBTQ issues.

~~samples~~

1 Sample Survey

2 Sample Harassment Incident Report Form

3 Sample Letter To the Editor

4 Sample School Board Resolution/Compliance Proposal

sample survey

School Climate Survey

Your responses to this survey will be kept confidential

sexual orientation: describes whether a person is romantically and/or physically attracted to members of the same sex (gay or lesbian), to members of the opposite sex (heterosexual) or to members of both sexes (bisexual)
gender identity: a person's understanding, definition or experience of their own gender regardless of biological sex
transgender: a term for people who don't fit or identify with the gender roles assigned by society based on their biological sex

Grade: 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Gender: Male Female Transgender Questioning Other: _____

Sexual Orientation:

Gay/Lesbian Bisexual Straight/Heterosexual Questioning Other: _____

Race (check all that apply):

American Indian or Alaska Native Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Asian
 Black/African-American Latino/Hispanic White/Caucasian Other: _____

1. Have you had education about lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) issues at school (presentations, speakers, classroom discussions)?
 yes no don't know
 2. Do you know of any vandalism or graffiti being directed against students at your school because people think they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)?
 yes no don't know
 3. Do you know of any physical attacks occurring against students at your school because people think they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)?
 yes no don't know
 4. During the past 12 months, how many times on school property were you harassed or bullied because you are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender or someone thought you were?
 4 or more times 2 to 3 times 1 time 0 times
 5. How often do you hear anti-LGBT slurs directed at specific students, teachers, or staff?
 several times a day once a day once a week once a month or less never
 6. How often do you hear anti-LGBT slurs at school not specifically directed at an individual (example: "that's so gay" to mean something is bad)?
 several times a day once a day once a week once a month or less never
- If you hear anti-LGBT slurs of any kind,
7. teachers or staff step in: always often sometimes never
 8. you or other students step in: always often sometimes never

9. Do you know of students who openly identify as LGBT? yes no don't know
10. Do you know of teachers or staff who openly identify as LGBT? yes no don't know
11. If you wanted information and/or support about sexual orientation or gender identity, would you know where at school to go?
 yes no don't know

12. At school, it's ok for girls to be masculine. (circle one)

13. At school, it's ok for boys to be feminine.

14. I feel my school is a safe place for LGBT students, teachers, and staff.

15. I feel safe at my school.

| | Strongly Disagree | | | | Strongly Agree |
|-----|-------------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| 12. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

16. Is there anything your school could do to make it safer for LGBT students, teachers, and staff? Any other thoughts on these issues? _____

Source: Gay-Straight Alliance Network/Tides Center.

Send the stack of completed surveys to GSA Network at 160 14th Street, San Francisco, CA 94103, and we'll analyze them and send you a report for free!

sample harassment incident report form

| FAIR CITY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT Harassment Incident Report | | | FAX to: _____ |
|---|---|--|--|
| School Name: _____ | | Date: _____ | |
| DATE OF INCIDENT | TIME | PLACE | |
| ____/____/____ mm dd yy | <input type="checkbox"/> School hours <input type="checkbox"/> Nonschool hours | <input type="checkbox"/> On campus <input type="checkbox"/> On school bus | <input type="checkbox"/> Off campus—school event <input type="checkbox"/> Directly to & from school |
| INCIDENT | | TYPE | |
| Type of Conduct (check all that apply) <input type="checkbox"/> unwelcome sexual advances <input type="checkbox"/> requests for sexual favors <input type="checkbox"/> verbal conduct—slurs, threats, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> written conduct—notes, letters, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> visual conduct—body language, gestures, intimidation, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> physical conduct—assault, battery, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> sexual assault, unwelcome touching, rape, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> property damage, destruction, graffiti, arson, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> other: _____ | | Type of Harassment (check all that apply) (see definitions on reverse) <input type="checkbox"/> sexual <input type="checkbox"/> sex <input type="checkbox"/> sexual orientation <input type="checkbox"/> gender/gender identity <input type="checkbox"/> race <input type="checkbox"/> religion <input type="checkbox"/> national origin <input type="checkbox"/> disability <input type="checkbox"/> other: _____ | |
| SUSPECT(S) | | | |
| Suspect No. 1 | Suspect No. 2 | Suspect No. 3 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student at this school <input type="checkbox"/> Certified employee (see definitions on reverse) <input type="checkbox"/> Classified Employee <input type="checkbox"/> Other Name: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Student at this school <input type="checkbox"/> Certified employee (see definitions on reverse) <input type="checkbox"/> Classified Employee <input type="checkbox"/> Other Name: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Student at this school <input type="checkbox"/> Certified employee (see definitions on reverse) <input type="checkbox"/> Classified Employee <input type="checkbox"/> Other Name: _____ | |
| VICTIM | WITNESS(ES) | RESOLUTION | |
| Grade: _____ Gender: _____ Ethnicity: _____ Sexual Orientation: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Student at this school <input type="checkbox"/> Certified employee <input type="checkbox"/> Classified employee <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | Name: _____ Name: _____ Name: _____ | Please check one: <input type="checkbox"/> Informal <input type="checkbox"/> Formal <input type="checkbox"/> Complaint dropped <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | |
| Name of Victim: _____ Birthdate: _____ | | | |
| I certify that the information on this report is true and correct to the best of my knowledge. | | | |
| _____ signature of person filling out form | | _____ print or type name | |
| _____ signature of site/program administrator | | _____ print or type name | |
| | | _____ telephone number | |
| | | _____ telephone number | |

note: the definitions on the next page are a critical part of this form!

Harassment Incident Report Definitions

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is verbal, visual, written, or physical conduct of a sexual nature that tends to annoy, humiliate, upset, or intimidate someone. Students who are targeted because of their race, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other characteristic might also have been sexually harassed if the conduct of the harasser was also sexual in nature.

Sexual Orientation And Sexual Orientation Harassment

Sexual orientation harassment is verbal, visual, written, or physical conduct that tends to annoy, humiliate, upset, or intimidate someone and which targets a person because of his or her actual or perceived sexual orientation. Sexual orientation means whether a person is gay (a male primarily attracted to other males), lesbian (a female primarily attracted to other females), bisexual (a person of either sex attracted to members of both sexes), or heterosexual (a person of either sex primarily attracted to members of the other sex).

Gender/Gender Identity And Gender/Gender Identity Harassment

Gender harassment or gender identity harassment is verbal, visual, written, or physical conduct that tends to annoy, humiliate, upset, or intimidate someone and which targets a person because of his or her gender or gender identity. Gender is a person's actual or perceived sex and includes gender-related identity, appearance, or behavior, whether or not that identity, appearance, or behavior is different than that traditionally associated with the person's sex at birth.

Certificated Employee

A certificated employee is any employee whose profession requires some form of certification by the state. Certificated employees include teachers, counselors, principals, deans, and other employees in similar positions.

NOTE:

This report form is intended to be used for statistical purposes. It is typically filled out by an administrator. It's important that your school district have a similar form and a system to keep track of harassment incidents. Use this form as an example of how your district could keep good track of harassment. Other forms are useful, too: students should be able to fill out a more detailed student harassment report form that has room for them to explain what happened and that automatically triggers filling out this form.

The definitions on this page should not be overlooked when you show this form to your administrator. They help administrators understand harassment better and categorize it properly. If your school has a form, but the form doesn't have definitions, suggest that it be revised to reflect the definitions listed here.

sample letter to the editor

Dear Editor:

On January 1, 2000, AB 537, “The California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000” became law in California. AB 537 prohibits discrimination and harassment based on real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity.

AB 537 is important because of the widespread harassment and discrimination faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students or those who are perceived to be LGBT. A recent national study found a 34% increase in anti-gay violence at public schools and colleges. Attacks against straight youth that were perceived to be gay also increased by 36%. As a result, 22% of LGBT and questioning students skip school at least once a month because they fear for their safety in the classroom.

Our school has had its own share of discrimination and harassment against students. TELL YOUR STORY HERE. BE AS SPECIFIC, YET AS CONCISE AS POSSIBLE.

AB 537 was an important victory for student safety, but it is incumbent on all of us, students, teachers and administrators, to do everything in our power to ensure a safe learning environment for all of the students at NAME OF YOUR SCHOOL. Take a moment to ask yourself this simple question: What you are going to do to make our school safe for everyone?

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME OR SCHOOL CLUB NAME

sample board resolution/compliance proposal

BOARD RESOLUTION/COMPLIANCE PROPOSAL

Fair City Unified School District

Board Resolution No. XYZ2000

COMPLYING WITH CALIFORNIA'S NONDISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION LAWS

WHEREAS: The State of California, as of January 1, 2000, prohibits discrimination in public schools on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, recognizing that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender nonconforming students often face serious obstacles to learning because of harassment and violence at school; and

WHEREAS: The State of California already prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, ethnic group identification, national origin, religion, mental or physical disability, and sex, recognizing that students targeted with harassment or discrimination on any of these bases are effectively denied equal access to an education; and

WHEREAS: The Fair City Unified School District (FCUSD) has been made aware through the testimony of students, teachers, administrators, and parents, that problems of discrimination, including harassment and violence, on many if not all of the above listed bases, continue to persist; and

WHEREAS: California and Fair City grow more diverse every year; and

WHEREAS: One of every two hate crimes committed in California is committed by a juvenile; and

WHEREAS: Students who are the victims of bias harassment and violence are much more likely to skip school because they are afraid and much more likely to participate in activities which endanger themselves or others; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED: That FCUSD develop clear procedures for recording, tracking, and responding to all bias-related harassment and violence incidents, including the newly protected categories of sexual orientation and gender; that the procedures developed include creating and publicizing a clear anti-slur policy that covers at a minimum all the categories protected by state nondiscrimination law; that the procedures developed clearly articulate disciplinary guidelines that emphasize counseling, education, and prevention of future harassment incidents and take any and all steps necessary to ensure that such counseling and education programs for offenders are available; that the District train all administrators and teachers in bias issues and bias incident procedures; that the District undertake to inform all parents and students on an annual basis about California's nondiscrimination laws, the importance the District places on enforcing them, what the District's policies and procedures are, and how students and teachers can respond to and report such incidents; that District personnel prepare an annual report on all bias-related harassment and violence incidents reported within the District and make this report available to members of the public, and that each school site appoint a compliance team headed by an administrator responsible for the school's compliance with California's nondiscrimination laws and including, at the middle and high school levels,

members of the student body, to investigate, report on, and respond to each and every instance of bias harassment and violence at the school, and be it further

RESOLVED: That FCUSD every two years will undertake to measure scientifically the levels of bias harassment and violence within the district, developing in partnership with community organizations and academic experts a standard quantitative tool (survey), which will create baseline data to track the problem of bias in the district over time; that qualitative measures be created in partnership with community organizations and academic experts to supplement the quantitative report and to illuminate the subjective experience of being targeted with bias; that these reports will be a matter of public record, and that they will be assessed by the appropriate Committee of this board which will make follow-up recommendations, and be it further

RESOLVED: That a multi-grade-level human relations curriculum program be developed by the District within two years and administered from thence throughout the district; that this curriculum at each grade level address age-appropriate aspects of discrimination and respect in relation to race, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, gender and gender identity, religion, physical or mental disability, and national origin; and that teachers and administrators be trained in dealing with issues the curriculum raises among students and parents, and be it further

RESOLVED: That the District shall support in principle and in practice student-led efforts to improve the school human relations environment; that student clubs that seek to reduce bias, such as campus chapters of the American Civil Liberties Union, the NAACP, MECHA, NOW, or Gay-Straight Alliances may apply for grants of up to \$500 for specific projects they undertake, totaling district-wide no more than \$20,000 a year; that appropriate district personnel will assist any student or group of students who wishes to develop an educational event or training for peers and will also assist that student or group of students in gaining approval for implementation of that educational event at the local school site, and that a staff member who advises a student group that seeks to combat bias on campus shall receive a salary bonus of \$250 for carrying out and reporting on those duties and in cases of exceptional and time-consuming human relations work, no more than one per school per year, may apply to the appropriate office for a reduction in teaching load of one class.

resources

resources

Countless organizations throughout the State of California provide resources for LGBT students and student activists, and have been instrumental in making AB 537 a reality in California schools. This is by no means a complete list of resources for LGBT youth in California, as there are far too many to include in this manual. This list of organizations, while it barely scratches the surface of the resources available to you, is a good place to start for information and support for AB 537 activism.

The organizations listed below have been actively involved in passing AB 537, implementing AB 537, and supporting students who work for school safety:

Make It Real Project

www.ab537.org

Gay-Straight Alliance Network

www.gsanetwork.org

Statewide office

160 14th Street

San Francisco, CA 94103

415.552.4229

Central Valley Regional Office

4403 E. Tulare Ave.

Fresno, CA 93702

559.453.9040

Southern California Regional Office

605 W. Olympic Blvd., Suite 610

Los Angeles, CA 90015

213.534.7162

Project 10

1320 W. 3rd St., Rm. 34

Los Angeles, CA 90017

213.625.6411

www.project10.org

LYRIC (Lavender Youth Recreation and Information Center)

127 Collingwood St.

San Francisco, CA 94114

415.703.6150 and 800.246.PRIDE

www.lyric.org

QYAT (Queer Youth Action Team)

Queer Youth Action Team

c/o Center for Human Development

391 Taylor Blvd., Suite 120

Pleasant Hill, CA 94523

925.687.8844

www.qyat.org

GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network)

GLSEN Western Field Office

870 Market St., Suite 547

San Francisco, CA 94102

415.551.9788

www.glsen.org

ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union)

ACLU of Southern California

1616 Beverly Blvd.

Los Angeles, CA 90026

213.977.9500

www.aclu-sc.org

ACLU of Northern California

1663 Mission Street Suite 460

San Francisco, CA 94103

415.621.2488

www.aclunc.org

ACLU of San Diego and Imperial Counties

P.O. Box 87131

San Diego, CA 92138

619.232.2121

www.aclusandiego.org

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund

Western Regional Office

6030 Wilshire Boulevard

Los Angeles, CA 90036

323.937.2728

www.lambdalegal.org

NCLR (National Center for Lesbian Rights)

870 Market St., Suite 570

San Francisco, CA 94102

415.392.6257

www.nclrights.org

In addition to the resources listed above, many community groups, churches, LGBT centers, and other organizations have drop-in groups and other services for LGBT youth. Many of these groups provide a place for LGBT youth to get together and think of ways to take action.

To find more resources near you, visit www.queeramerica.com or call 800.246.PRIDE