

Is it Chess Club or a Gay-Straight Alliance?



The Middle School Advisor Challenge!

We often hear (and are guilty of making) the remark, “Advising a GSA isn’t like advising Chess Club!” The underlying assumption is that advising a GSA is much, much more complicated and involved than advising Chess Club.

But is this true?

In an effort to honor the work of Chess Club advisors everywhere (thank you!) while at the same time recognizing the unique challenges and opportunities afforded GSA advisors, we decided it was time to identify some of the similarities and differences in advising the two groups.

Ways advising GSA is **similar** to advising Chess Club:

- Both clubs provide youth opportunities to navigate the tasks of adolescence and continue developing interpersonal and relational skills (working with others, navigating conflict, problem solving, etc.).
- Both clubs provide an opportunity for intellectual engagement and critical thinking.
- Both clubs are likely to engage students who feel isolated or don’t have another group to which they feel they belong. They also provide a place for students with a common interest to be on a regular and consistent basis.
- In order to be successful advisors need to have some background in the topic at hand.
- Members of both clubs are likely to face stereotypes and stigmas (eg, “Chess Club is all nerds and GSA is all gays.”)

- Both clubs provide opportunities for successful youth-adult partnerships that allow students to try out and develop life-long skills.
- Both clubs require advisors to provide varying degrees of structure and direction. Adult supervision and guidance needed.
- Regardless of the club, snacks are critical.

Ways advising GSA is **different** from advising Chess Club:

- GSA advisors help students connect with activities that meet their desire for civic engagement and social justice.
- GSA advisors get to help students think about the intersections between sexism, racism, heterosexism, etc.
- GSA advisors have the opportunity to help students discern and evaluate social & cultural messages about what it means to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ), as well as male, female, etc.
- Chess Club is usually not met with resistance from students, teachers, administrators, school board members, parents, and other community members.
- Parents and other school personnel are less likely to harbor stereotypes and suspicions about the purpose and activities of Chess Club.
- GSA advisors are more likely to become a target for criticism for advising GSA than for advising Chess Club.
- GSA advisors get to be a part of a larger network of adults working with similar clubs who have opportunities to connect with others in order to support their work and learning.
- While both (should) provide opportunities for recreation, a GSA is more likely to focus on providing opportunities for support, education, and activism.
- GSA advisors are more likely to have the opportunity to teach leadership, planning, meeting facilitation, and other skills to students and/or student leaders.
- GSA advisors are more likely to be in a place to need to receive and sometimes respond to vulnerable and/or sensitive information shared by club participants.
- GSA advisors get to be that ONE teacher or supportive adult who is often the lifeline for LGBTQ students in schools.

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