



Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools



One of our "Rainbow Teams" at Leadership Training Institute poses for a group tree hug. Rainbow teams give students a smaller community within our leadership camp where they can get to know each other more deeply, process personal things that are coming up, and lean on each other for support.

FOR FREEDOM OF (GENDER) EXPRESSION

One of the most frequent questions we hear in our work at GSAFE is how to support transgender and gender non-conforming students. More and more often we hear from parents of elementary-age students (4- 5-, and 6-year-olds) who clearly assert that their gender is not the one their parents assumed it was. Parents are sometimes isolated and confused, often times unsure they'll know how to adequately support their child, and almost always just want what's best for their child. We hear from educators, administrators and other school staff who are often unaware of how to intervene when a student is being harassed for their gender identity and don't know how to start a conversation about gender diversity. We work with middle and high school-aged youth who are both learning to work on issues of gender diversity in their GSAs and leading change in their schools to create all-gender bathrooms, respect people's names and pronouns, and create transgender-inclusive curriculum.

In this newsletter, we're focusing on issues of gender diversity and highlighting some of the experiences and work being done across Wisconsin to create schools where all students can thrive regardless of their gender identity or expression. From a mom's personal story of her 4-year-old being transgender to information about Wisconsin's lack of protections for transgender and gender non-conforming students, to a therapist's conversation about the importance of not "outing" someone as transgender, we hope you find

these stories and resources both informative and inspiring. If you're looking to deepen your knowledge even further, make sure to register for the Conference on Supporting Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Youth on October 19 in Madison. As you'll see in the following pages, we're excited to announce a new initiative to organize for more Wisconsin school districts to add gender identity and expression to their student non-discrimination policies—a first step in ensuring equal opportunity and freedom from discrimination for transgender and gender non-conforming students.

We hope you'll help us to advocate for this policy change in your own school district. Look inside for more information on how!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian Juchems'.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kristen Petroshius'.

Brian Juchems & Kristen Petroshius, Co-Directors



MY SON WAS BORN A GIRL A WISCONSIN FAMILY'S STORY

My son was born a girl. We added her to our family, baptized her, and watched her grow. Before she started to speak, she pulled out her pigtails, messed up pretty dresses with stains, played with all things "boy" and nothing "girl," and had a room filled with trucks, cars, blocks, and Batman. For her 4th birthday she only wanted two things—to be Darth Vader for Halloween and to have a hair cut like her best friend who was a boy.

Finally, she refused to wear anything "girly" and kept saying "Mom... I boy." So you see, I had a son. It just took us a while to understand what he was saying.

Now try thinking about if this was your child and you have to tell them they can't be who they are. They can't go to the bathroom, play sports, dress, express, or simply live as they are. Think about constantly defending your choices and your child's right to exist. I know he is young, but it's about who he really is. Yes, children know their gender. At age 3 my son knew his dad was a boy, his mom was a girl, and that he is a boy.

My son is entering 4K this year and I am scared to death. We want to register my son as a boy. Before he goes to school we'll need to have a talk, though. I'd like you to imagine this conversation for just a moment, "Hey son, you know you're a boy and I know you're a boy and everyone who knows you loves you and supports you. You're going to go to Big Boy school soon and you'll ride a big bus and have a

Batman backpack, but we need to talk about something. At home and daycare everyone uses the same bathroom; but at school, boys and girls use different bathrooms, and when you're at school and you're

going to go to the boy's bathroom you'll need to use the stall, and shut the door tight. If anyone finds out you don't have that one boy part, some people could get confused or even angry so this is what we're going to need to do for now okay?" I haven't had this conversation. I can't quite bring myself to say this, to tell him that he needs to hide himself away.

Now I'd like you to imagine going to a therapist at least once a month, scheduling an endocrinologist before he is 8, trying to find a way to pay \$1,000 monthly for a prescription that isn't covered by your insurance but will give him more time and pause his development. I'd like you to imagine being denied gender testing for possible intersex issues, eventually having to pay for hormones when your son is 14 because it can't be delayed any further without consequences and knowing the minute they get that shot they will be infertile for the rest of their lives. I'd like you to imagine knowing that if you deny them they statistically have the highest suicide rates in the world.

I wouldn't want to be in my shoes either, but here we are. Please help us! We are running out of time. Here is what we need. We need unisex bathrooms and/or the right to be who we are in the bathroom of our choice. We need to be able to play sports on the team where we are most comfortable. We need affordable treatments. We need educated staff, nurses, and therapists. We need more education, more studies, and more support. We need to be able to have documents like driver's licenses and birth certificates that reflect our identity. We need protections under the law to keep us safe and allow us to pursue our happiness.

We need your compassion and support.

NEED TO
KNOW
MORE?

Here is a good start:

genderspectrum.org/child-family • imatyfa.org • safeschoolscoalition.org
familyproject.sfsu.edu • huffingtonpost.com/news/transgender

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THINGS YOU CAN DO TO SUPPORT TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

1. Honor all students' names and pronouns.
2. Understand that students' gender identities and expressions are impacted by their race, class, ability, national origin, language, etc. The words students use to talk about their gender identity and the ways they think about and express their gender is largely informed by race, ethnicity, and culture.
3. Update policies and forms to reflect gender-inclusive language.
4. Develop guidelines for transgender students regarding issues such as school IDs, locker rooms, bathrooms, overnight trips, athletic clubs, etc. (NOTE: The Madison Metropolitan School District has developed a guide sheet to help schools navigate these issues.)
5. Provide staff, parent, and student trainings and/or advocate to have trainings in your school.
6. Organize to amend your school district's student non-discrimination policy to include "gender identity/expression" as a protected class.
7. If you know someone is transgender, respect their right to choose with whom they share this information. Don't "out" them by saying "So-and-so is transgender" without their permission.
8. Examine your own beliefs and attitudes about gender and gender expression. **Notice where in your own life you become the gender police—with young people, with adults, and with yourself.**
9. Learn more about the link between transphobia and homophobia. **Remember that when a person calls someone "fag" or "dyke" it usually is based on gender expression and not real sexual orientation.**
10. Provide enthusiastic support for transgender and gender non-conforming young people you know. This is most critical.

Note: Tips 1 and 3-5 come from The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals by Stephanie Brill and Rachel Pepper (2008). All other tips come from GSAFE.



"I'VE NEVER FELT SO PROUD TO BE GAY!" was one of the many comments we heard from youth about the impact of our Leadership Training Institute.

THANK YOU!

GSAFE WOULD LIKE TO GIVE THANKS AND APPRECIATION TO THE TRANSPARENT GROUP, A PEER SUPPORT GROUP FOR PARENTS OF TRANSGENDER AND GENDER NON-CONFORMING YOUTH.

The TransParent Group meets the second Monday of every month from 6-8 p.m. in Madison. For more information, please call Liz Lusk at (608) 663-8499.



Students from LaFollette High School and Sennett Middle School (Madison) attend the 2012 Day of Silence rally on the Capitol steps. Day of Silence is a national youth-led effort using silence to protest the actual silencing of LGBTQ youth in schools due to harassment, bias and abuse.

STRENGTHENING PROTECTIONS FOR TRANSGENDER AND GENDER NON-CONFORMING STUDENTS

DID YOU KNOW?

Wisconsin currently lacks legal protections for transgender and gender non-conforming students. While the Pupil Non-Discrimination Law includes “sexual orientation” as a protected class, there is no mention of “gender identity or expression.”

WHAT IMPACT DOES THIS HAVE?

While issues of gender diversity impact ALL students (as no one fits perfectly into the stereotypes of “man” or “woman”), this lack of legal protection regarding gender identity or expression most harshly impacts transgender and gender non-conforming students. In most Wisconsin schools, transgender and gender non-conforming students regularly experience the following forms of discrimination:

- Students’ names and gender pronouns not being respected
- Inadequate access to bathrooms and locker rooms, resulting in many students not drinking water all day to avoid going to the bathroom
- School staff “outing” a student’s gender identity to their family members without permission
- Dress code requirements being distinct for “girls” and “boys” and transgender and gender non-conforming students being forced to adhere to a dress code policy that does not match their gender identity and/or expression.
- Transgender and gender non-conforming youth face increased harassment from both peers and adults

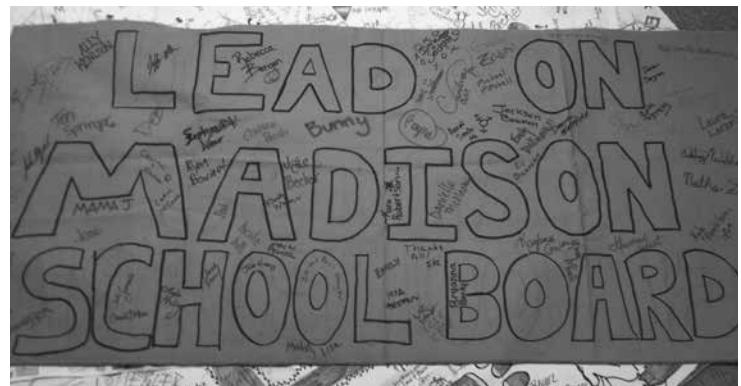
DO ANY WISCONSIN SCHOOL DISTRICTS HAVE THIS PROTECTION?

Currently the Madison Metropolitan School District and Wisconsin Rapids prohibit discrimination of students based on gender identity or expression. We do not know of any other districts which have this protection, though it is possible that others do.

WHAT HAVE GSAS DONE ABOUT THIS?

Gay-Straight Alliances often serve catalysts to make schools better for transgender and gender non-conforming students. GSAs in Kenosha, South Milwaukee, and Green Bay have successfully gotten their schools to add all-gender bathrooms. The GSA at McFarland High School has successfully gotten their health education classes to be more inclusive of the experiences of transgender people. The GSA in Wisconsin Rapids has successfully added “gender identity/expression” to their student non-discrimination policy and is now working with the board to implement policy changes that

would affect the day-to-day practices in schools around such issues as bathroom and locker room use, participation in extracurricular activities, respecting a student’s name and pronouns, and respecting student privacy.



In 2005, GSAFE helped the Madison Metropolitan School District add gender identity/expression to their student non-discrimination policy, paving the way for transgender and gender non-conforming students to have equal opportunity and freedom from discrimination in school. Our new initiative is to have more Wisconsin school districts add gender identity/expression to their student non-discrimination policies.

WHAT IS GSAFE DOING ABOUT THIS?

GSAFE would love to see gender identity and expression added as a statewide protection in Wisconsin’s Pupil Non-Discrimination Law. As a way to build momentum in this direction, this year (and over several years to come) GSAFE is focusing our work on supporting local school districts in adding gender identity and expression to their district-level student non-discrimination policies. It is our hope that through mobilizing and supporting GSAs, educational staff, and families to advocate for this change, we can have at least 2-4 districts add this policy by the end of this year—and launch a movement!

**HOW CAN
I GET
INVOLVED?**

If you’re interested in joining the movement to have gender identity/expression added to school district policies, please contact us! Together we can ensure transgender and gender non-conforming students have equal opportunity and freedom from discrimination in every Wisconsin school!

WHEN DISCLOSURE EQUALS EXPOSURE: A THERAPIST'S PERSPECTIVE ON OUTING

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Written by Nyle Biondi and published in *Our Lives Magazine's* May/June issue of 2012.



Recently I have heard several stories from trans people I know about being outed by their peers and allies. The circumstances I have heard of have, perhaps surprisingly, been situations where the person doing the outing was an LGB person, an ally, or even another transgender person. The people doing the outing rarely had malicious intentions, yet their actions, in many cases, were harmful.

Respecting the lives of transpeople, and everyone, involves being mindful of how we are sharing stories.

Our personal stories are some of the most powerful tools we have to educate others about our experiences. When we consciously consider what stories belong to us and what stories belong to others, we begin to create a safer community in which people get to choose which parts of their lives they want to share with the people they encounter. Separating our own stories from others' becomes complicated when our stories overlap. The closer you are to someone, the less space there is between where your story stops and where theirs begins. This separation is especially hard when you have witnessed transition, are partnered to a trans person, or are a family member of a trans person.

Some questions that may be useful to ask yourself before you disclose someone else's trans status are: Is disclosing this information about my trans friend relevant to my story? Does my story make sense without this information? And if my story wouldn't make sense, do I need to tell it? Can I tell it without revealing the identity of the person in the story? What am I trying to gain by disclosing this information? Is there a way for me to check in with my trans friend before I disclose their status to others?

The stories I have heard of people being outed have varied from a trans person joining a new organization being given names of all of the other trans people in the organization, to being called upon in class to speak on behalf of trans people, to sharing gender history to make another person at ease knowing that the trans person may have been socialized differently than their gender presentation suggests (i.e. "I know you don't really like men but my friend is trans so I think you'll like him."). In all of these instances, people have good intentions but do not always recognize why their behaviors may be problematic.

When someone outs a trans person to other trans people, they send the message that anyone's status could be disclosed at any time. The person doing the outing may presume that all trans people will want to connect with one another and that their trans status is the thing that would connect them. Asking a trans person to share a "trans perspective" on a particular topic in class can feel violating if that person was not out to the entire class. We all know it's unreasonable to expect one person to represent an entire community. Disclosing status to make another person feel at ease can make the trans person in question feel ill at ease, and like their gender is not seen as real or valid.

OTHER REASONS TO NOT OUT SOMEONE WITHOUT THEIR CONSENT:

SAFETY: Not all trans people are out to their families, employers, landlords, teammates, friends, sexual partners, etc. Outing them may put them at risk for losing family, jobs, housing, friends, etc.

INVALIDATION AND OBJECTIFICATION: Once a person is outed, their status often becomes the focus of others' attention. Frequently, trans people are asked to explain the transition process or other personal medical information about their bodies to people who are curious. Outing them discloses some of this information to others without their consent.

RESPECT: While you may see your friend as [a] safe person to talk about trans people with, it doesn't mean that your trans friend will find that person safe—even if that person is also trans.

DIFFERENCES IN IDENTITIES: Most of us are aware that gender identity and sexual orientation are different. Sometimes LGBQ people out people to each other as a way of indicating who may be in their dating pool. Outing someone as trans ignores the unique safety and privacy concerns of gender variant people.

Asking permission around when and whether to out someone may lend itself to valuable and in-depth discussions with the trans and gender variant people in your life. I hope we can all feel encouraged to ask questions and listen to the stories of the people in our lives in order to be better allies and advocates for each other.



WHAT SHOULD I DO... IF MY FRIEND IS TRANS?



RESPECT CONFIDENTIALITY

Even though they told you, your friend might not be ready or it might not be safe to publicly disclose their identity. Respect their privacy!



DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

Transgender and transsexual people don't all look a certain way. Don't make assumptions about their identity or sexual orientation!



DON'T ASK ABOUT SURGICAL STATUS

It's not appropriate to ask a non-trans person about their genitals—and it's not appropriate to ask a trans person about theirs, either.



WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE

Respectfully ask if you're not sure what pronouns to use. Encourage others to stick with the ones your friend prefers if they're out.



BE PATIENT AND SUPPORTIVE

Your friend might shift back and forth as they figure out what gender identity or presentation is best for them. Give them time, and be there if they need you!



DON'T TOLERATE ANTI-TRANS REMARKS

Confront anti-trans jokes, remarks or attitudes with care, and seek out allies who will support you in the effort. Let others know you don't tolerate hate!



KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Don't be afraid to admit you don't know everything! Point your friend to appropriate resources if an issue is beyond your help.



EDUCATE YOURSELF!

Listen to your friend about their experience, and seek out resources to help along the way. You're off to a great start!



WANT TO LEARN MORE?

There are plenty of online resources! Find some at www.getsomesonar.com.

Created by @TreeGeeKay for @SonarSite. Adapted from American University's Trans 101 Training and Trans/Intersex Ally guide by the University of California, Riverside.

A student makes a sign to advocate for people to respect everyone's gender identities, which includes using the correct pronouns when talking about a person (e.g., she, he, ze, they).

WE APPRECIATE YOUR SUPPORT!

Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools is supported by generous individuals, foundations, and businesses who share our vision of schools where all LGBT youth and students thrive. Below are some of our most generous institutional donors:

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The State Equality Fund
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Wisconsin AIDS Fund of the Greater Milwaukee Foundation
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SAFE SCHOOLS SUSTAINERS

Safe Schools Sustainers are the leading donors that keep the programs of Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools going strong. By investing in our community and the lives of our youth, they give a gift that will change the future.

CHAMPIONS - \$10,000

Purple Moon Foundation*

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MEET OUR YOUTH LEADERS: EMMA

"GSAFE's Leadership Training Institute gave me the chance to learn how to change the world, and I cannot express my gratitude enough for that."

TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF AND HOW YOU GOT INVOLVED IN YOUR GSA?

My name is Emma and I'm a junior at East High School in Madison. I joined my Gay-Straight Alliance in freshman year, because I was looking for a safe space to explore my identity as a queer student, and for a group with which I could influence my school for the better.

WHAT PROBLEMS DO LGBTQ STUDENTS FACE AT YOUR SCHOOL AND WHAT IS YOUR GSA DOING TO ADDRESS THEM?

I am lucky in that I personally do not receive much negative attention for my sexuality or my gender identity, but we at Madison East definitely do have issues with bullying and harassment, especially of students who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming. That's something that I really want to work to combat with my GSA. We also want to focus on getting gender inclusive bathrooms in our school.

HOW HAS GSAFE HELPED YOU DEVELOP YOUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS?

I wanted to be able to make a difference in my high school, improve my leadership skills, and work on my public speaking—particularly in front of my peers—so I attended GSAFE's Leadership Training Institute (LTI) this past August. I had heard from some people who went to LTI that it changed them in ways they didn't expect, that there was a self-discovery aspect to it, and that appealed to me. LTI challenged me to step out of my comfort zone and explore new ideas, but in a safe space. It was such an incredible feeling of safety and acceptance. I loved being surrounded by people who love and care for and about me, and who are genuinely interested in what I have to say. The experience of learning and sharing with other young queer activists was



Emma (right) and another student show off their pride with the rainbow flag at GSAFE's Leadership Training Institute.

invigorating, and I feel as if I have been given new lenses for my glasses—I can see so much more clearly now. LTI transformed me, and it was truly the most wonderful and formative experience of my life. LTI gave me the chance to learn how to change the world, and I cannot express my gratitude enough for that.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF 20 YEARS FROM NOW?

It is my hope that 20 years from now I will have continued my work as an activist and be working with youth to make it better!



Thank you to all the **SUPERHEROES** who made our 6th Annual Walk/Run/Eat for Safe Schools a huge success on October 14! Together we're making it better for Wisconsin's LGBTQ youth!





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Suite 1
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CONFERENCE SUPPORTING TRANSGENDER & GENDER NONCONFORMING YOUTH

The 2nd Biennial Conference on
Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Youth will be held
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2012
at the American Family Insurance Corporate Training Office
FROM 8:30 A.M. TO 4:00 P.M.

Increase your understanding about the lives and needs of transgender and gender nonconforming youth and their families. Leave with best practices in creating safer environments for all youth.

DOWNLOAD A REGISTRATION FORM AT WWW.GSAFEWI.ORG.

Sponsored by the Children, Youth and Families Consortium in Dane County, this conference is being presented by the Canopy Center, Community Partnerships, Freedom Inc., GSAFE, Madison Metropolitan School District, the TransParent Group, and Youth Services of Southern Wisconsin.