

Establishing and Supporting Gender and Sexuality Alliances to Reduce Mental Health Disparities

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Background

- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students are at higher risk for depression and suicide when compared to their non-LGBTQ peers
- In a large, urban school district, LGBTQ students are 2.75 times more likely to report depression and 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers
- With 22.7% of the high school students identifying as LGBTQ and 1.2% of middle school students identifying as transgender in this district, it is important to address any mental health disparities
- Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) are school clubs for LGBTQ students and their allies. GSAs have at least one staff advisor at the school level who sponsors the club. GSAs have been shown to improve:
 - Perceived support and mental health outcomes for LGBTQ students
 - School climate for all students
- A program to increase support for GSAs could be beneficial for LGBTQ students

Purpose

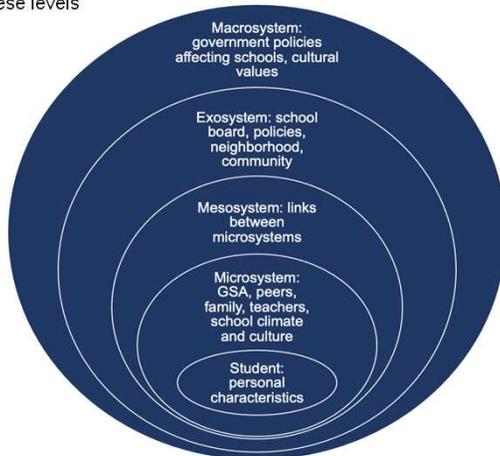
- Provide support for established and new GSAs
- Increase the number of schools reporting a new GSA
- Develop a comprehensive GSA support plan consisting of three components:
 1. A digital GSA resource binder
 2. Trainings to improve confidence of GSA Advisors to support LGBTQ population
 3. A GSA Advisor Leadership Committee (ALC), composed of advisors from across the district

Frameworks

- The Ecological Model was used as the guiding conceptual framework. It emphasizes that children are part of a system of nested ecological levels that interact to influence their behavior and development
- The PRECEDE-PROCEED Model was used to guide the population assessment and project implementation and evaluation

Ecological Model Applied to a School Setting for an LGBTQ Student

Each circle represents an ecological level, with the student at the center of these levels



Methods

Program Implementation

- Schools were surveyed about the existence of a GSA or interest in starting one. This data was used to develop a list of current and prospective GSA Advisors.
- Project consisted of three components:
 1. Digital Resource Binder:
 - Created using resources and guidelines from GSA Network and GLSEN, two national GSA and LGBTQ support organizations.
 2. GSA Advisor trainings:
 - Developed based on guidelines from GSA Network. Separate 90-minute, live-virtual trainings were conducted for middle and high school advisors in August 2020.
 3. ALC:
 - Members were recruited from the list of current GSA advisors and at the GSA advisor training. By the end of this project, the goal was to establish a committee of at least six members and meet once to team build.

Program Evaluation

Subjects

All participants in the GSA Advisor trainings

Measures

10 item pre-post survey measuring confidence on a 5-point scale [1=not at all confident and 5=extremely confident]

Procedures

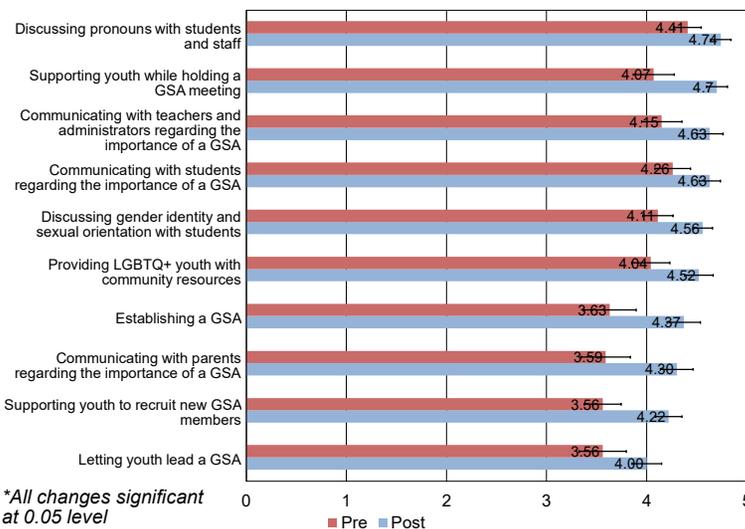
Confidence measure administered via a digital survey one week before and then immediately after GSA Advisor trainings

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Results

- Digital resource binder: sent via email link to current advisors (n=63) at 46 schools and prospective advisors (n=33) at 28 Schools
- GSA Advisor trainings: held in August 2020 with a total of 49 attendees
- ALC: By August 2020, six current GSA advisors committed to being members of the committee and four attended the first meeting. This committee now has over ten members and is meeting monthly
- Within two months after the training, three new schools started GSAs
- Pre- and post-training surveys were completed by 52 and 29 individuals, respectively. Of 49 training attendees, 55.1% (n=27) completed both the pre- and post-training surveys. 96% (n=26) reported being very or extremely confident to support youth while holding a GSA meeting. There was a statistically significant increase in all ten measures of participant confidence using a paired t-test. The analysis is based on those who responded to both pre- and post-training surveys

Results of paired t-test of responses to ten confidence measures related to starting and maintaining a GSA, pre- and post-training (n=27)



Conclusions

- Overall, the implementation of the support plan in one urban school district resulted in significant improvement in confidence in GSA Advisors to provide support to the LGBTQ student population
- Evaluation of the data showed areas of continued concern after the training (e.g. letting youth lead a GSA; recruiting new members). Confidence in these areas started low and increased, but remained low
- Future research could study follow-up confidence data after implementing skills taught in the trainings
- A targeted GSA support plan has the potential to increase district-wide support for current and prospective GSA Advisors and to increase the number of schools with a GSA
- The support's long-term effects were beyond the scope of this project. However, a comparison of Youth Risk Behavior Survey data from 2019 and 2021 could reveal if rates of depression and suicide among this group have declined
- As this project was implemented virtually, associated costs were minimal. It could be trialed in other districts as an attempt to increase support of GSAs and GSA Advisors. This in turn could reduce mental health disparities among LGBTQ students