

Program Highlights

Rhode Island

“Band-Aids Don’t Cut It” — Rhode Island Develops First Statewide Plan for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQQ) Youth

Violence, threats of violence, and harassment make many places unsettling and unsafe for LGBTQQ youth. According to a statewide community assessment of the LGBTQQ community in Rhode Island, 84% of LGBTQQ youth report being bullied daily. To address the high rates of bullying and ensure that all LGBTQQ youth are safe at school, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) collaborated with Youth Pride, Inc. and members of the Rhode Island Task Force on LGBTQQ Youth to develop the first-ever statewide plan dedicated to identifying and addressing the needs of LGBTQQ youth. The statewide plan, released in August 2006, outlines recommendations related to education, child welfare, health and social services, mental health, and collection of data. Successfully addressing the recommendations will create a safe school environment for LGBTQQ youth and will ensure that LGBTQQ youth receive quality education, care, and services.

One of the plan’s education recommendations — to ensure that all public schools support the establishment of Gay/Straight Alliances (GSAs) when recognition for such organizations is sought by students — has received attention from many schools. Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) are student-led clubs, usually at the high school or middle school level, that work to address anti-LGBT name-calling, bullying, and harassment in their schools and promote respect for all students. Since the release of the statewide plan, the number of requests for technical assistance on how to establish GSAs in schools has increased 20%, and the number of active GSAs in Rhode Island high schools has increased from 29 in 2006 to 35 in 2007.