

GSA Newsarama  
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Read GSA Newsarama online at [www.GSAforSafeSchools.org](http://www.GSAforSafeSchools.org). Visit our website to download past Newsaramas in clean, easy-to-read PDF format.

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This newsletter is created by Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools to keep students, school professionals and other community members up to date on the issues, events and news items that may be of interest to those working within Wisconsin schools, communities, gay-straight alliances and similar clubs. If you are no longer interested in receiving this update, simply reply to this email requesting that your name be removed from the list. Please include your current school, or previous school if you have graduated or are no longer in school.

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### Feature

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Help Us Help You by Filling Out the Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Do you identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ)? Are you between the ages of 14 and 18? How many servings of potatoes would you say you've eaten in the past seven days?

You're probably thinking, "That last question seems a little strange." But that's the kind of information the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) would like to know.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is designed to help our state improve its health education, and asks students questions about exercise, alcohol and other drug use, feelings of personal safety, and sexual activity. The YRBS is administered in public high schools every year, but past versions of the survey didn't tell DPI very much about the sexual orientation or gender identity of the respondent.

By taking the time to fill out this more inclusive version of the YRBS, you will be helping the Department of Public Instruction find out more about LGBTQ youth in Wisconsin, which will better tell your story when leading trainings for educators and administrators or lobbying for more comprehensive and inclusive educational environments.

The results of the survey are completely confidential, and it takes about 15 minutes to fill out.

Fill out the YRBS online here: [www.GSAforSafeSchools.org](http://www.GSAforSafeSchools.org)

The deadline for completing the survey is January 21st, so please: tell your friends, tell your GSA, and take the time to respond to the YRBS yourself.

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Headlines  
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1. GSA for Safe Schools Activist Retreat One Week Away

Thank you to everyone who has registered online to attend the GSA for Safe Schools Activist Retreat on Saturday, January 12th. The student planning group is working tirelessly to put together a fun and worthwhile event.

If you haven't signed up yet, it's not too late! The deadline to register has been extended to January 8th (next Tuesday!). Sign up online today at [www.GSAforSafeSchools.org](http://www.GSAforSafeSchools.org).

The Activist Retreat will take place from 10AM to 4PM on January 12th at First Baptist Church in Madison, which is located at 518 North Franklin Avenue (not

Street!). The cost to attend is \$5.00, and scholarships are available for folks who need one: Just let us know.

If you have any questions about the retreat or about signing up, email Tim Michael at [timm@gsaforsafeschools.org](mailto:timm@gsaforsafeschools.org) or call him at (608)661-4141.

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## 2. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – How Will You Spend Your Day Off?

“An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is on Monday, January 21st this year, and is one of only four U.S. federal holidays set aside to commemorate the life and achievements of an individual. It was observed for the first time in 1986, but was not recognized by all 50 states until the year 2000.

MLK Jr. Day provides a great opportunity for activists and organizers to reach out to one another, across the various social justice movements, and demonstrate the power of working in collaboration.

The Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) has established the weekend of January 18th - 21st as “Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Organizing Weekend”, and encourages students involved with the safe schools movement to help organize an event to honor and celebrate the progress that has been made thanks to great civil rights leaders like Dr. King.

For some great ideas on events and activities to commemorate this holiday, visit: <http://www.dayofsilence.org/mlk.html>.

And for information about just a few community activities happening around MLK Jr. Day, check out one of the following websites:

Madison - <http://www.ulgm.org/youth/Pages/MLKDay.aspx>

Milwaukee - [http://www.marcuscenter.org/mlk\\_day.html](http://www.marcuscenter.org/mlk_day.html)

Green Bay - <http://www.nbc26.com/features/calendar/12849612.html>

Stevens Point - <http://tinyurl.com/yppgpy>

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### Related Readings: Resources and Opportunities

GSA Newsarama is a publication of GSA for Safe Schools (GSAFE). Events, resources, and news items listed under the "Related Readings" sections of GSA

Newsarama are not sponsored by GSAFE and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of GSAFE.

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### 3. 2008 PFLAG National Scholarships – Applications Now Available

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) has announced the availability of 16 scholarships for high school seniors who plan to attend an institute of higher education in 2008. PFLAG will be awarding three \$5000 scholarships, three \$2500 scholarships and up to ten \$1000 scholarships to students who self identify as LGBT or a straight ally, and demonstrate an interest in service to the LGBT community.

The application process may be completed online, or a hard copy of your application may be mailed in to the National PFLAG office.

APPLICATIONS MUST BE POSTMARKED BY MARCH 15TH TO BE ELIGIBLE.

To read more about the available scholarships and find out how to apply, visit: <http://www.pflag.org/Scholarships.1236.0.html>.

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### 4. Sign Up to Run Concessions for the Madison Gay Hockey Association

Has your GSA taken a turn running concessions for the Madison Gay Hockey Association yet? There are only two months left in the season!

Madison Gay Hockey Association (MGHA) is the premier LGBTQA ice hockey league in Wisconsin, providing an environment free of harassment and discrimination for members and friends of the queer community to play ice hockey and fulfill their athletic aspirations. MGHA is looking for GSAs and student clubs to run the concessions table at their games.

There are six teams in the league, and they compete in three back-to-back games every Sunday night. The games start at 6:40PM and each game lasts about 45 minutes.

The following dates are still up for grabs:

January 6th, January 20th, January 27th, February 3rd, February 17th, & February 24th.

So, if you and your GSA want to sell some hot chocolate and watch some hockey (while making money in the process!), call Tim at 608.661.4141 or email him at [tim@gsaforsafeschools.org](mailto:tim@gsaforsafeschools.org) to get on the schedule. Once you're scheduled for a game, Tim will discuss the details with you (where to go, what to bring, etc.).

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## 5. Gendentity at Project Q – Training Session on Gender Identity/Expression

On Friday, January 25th, Project Q will be leading the first of four modules of the National Transgender Education Project (NTEP) Youth Curriculum: Gendentity.

Gendentity takes a look at gender and everything that word entails. Many people have never really had a conversation about gender or really thought about what it means for them, even though it is something that is all around us. There are lots of opinions out there about gender, the body, and identity, and this training session provides the opportunity to talk about those.

Gendentity will take place at Project Q from 6:30PM to 8:30PM on January 25th. Project Q is located at 315 W. Court St. in Milwaukee.

If you have questions about this training, please email Jay Botsford at [jbotsford@mkelgbt.org](mailto:jbotsford@mkelgbt.org), or call him at (414) 223-3220.

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## Related Readings: News and Publications

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### 6. The Daily Press: Student: Virginia High School Asked Her to Cover Up Lesbian-Themed Shirt

On December 10th, 17 year-old Bethany Laccone was asked by school officials to cover up or remove the t-shirt she wore to school that day, which featured a well-known symbol of lesbian pride: two interlocking female gender symbols. On December 20th, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) wrote a letter to I.C. Norcom High School, informing the administration of the illegality of their actions. And on December 21st, Principal Lynn Briley said “Yes, we did make a mistake” and promised that no mention of the incident would remain in Laccone’s school file, and that the school would not similarly censor students again.

To read the full details of this story, follow this link: <http://tinyurl.com/38apfx>

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## Special Feature

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### Activism Out & Front: Speaking Out with Your T-Shirt

As the news story above demonstrates, sometimes we all need a little refresher when it comes to free speech and first amendment rights at school. GSA

Network of California put together a great piece on knowing your rights when it comes to your clothing. With their permission, we are posting the article here:

The folks at GSA Network know that lots of GSAs design and/or distribute their own t-shirts and pins in school as a way to spread the word about safe schools and LGBTQ student rights. Lots of clubs, for example, hand out shirts to supporters around Day of Silence. To help you prepare for your potential t-shirt action on campus, GSA Network has included below, with permission, excerpts from the ACLU LGBT Rights Project's (<http://www.aclu.org/lgbt/index.html>) resource sheet on t-shirts and students' free speech rights.

#### 1. No obscenities, No Threats, Nothing Lewd or Vulgar:

Wearing an LGBT-positive t-shirt is speech or expression, protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. In *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, the landmark case establishing student free speech rights, the Supreme Court said that students are not required to "shed [their] constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate."

This does not mean that you can put anything on your t-shirt and parade it around the campus. The law allows schools to ban obscene, threatening, or "lewd or vulgar" speech. You probably get what "obscene" or "threatening" speech is, but what is "lewd or vulgar?" The best way to explain that is to give you a real-life example. In *Bethel School District No. 403 v. Fraser*, the Supreme Court ruled that a school could suspend a student for making this speech nominating another student for student government office:

"I know a man who is firm - he's firm in his pants, he's firm in his shirt, his character is firm - but most of all, his belief in you, the students of Bethel, is firm..."

Well, you get the point.

#### 2. Nothing That Will Disrupt Classes:

The law says that other than for speech that falls into one of the banned categories listed above, students may express their views freely. There is a big "but" to this rule and that's where most of the court battles about t-shirts have focused. Students may express themselves freely but this may not significantly disrupt classes or interfere with the rights of others.

In deciding whether school authorities acted lawfully when punishing a student for wearing a particular t-shirt or forcing a student not to wear a controversial t-shirt, courts rigorously examine the facts of the matter to make sure that what's really going on is not flat-out censorship of an unpopular opinion - something the

law is clear that schools can never do.

Courts are clear that a school's concern about other students' possible hostile reactions to a message on a t-shirt does not justify censoring it. This point is critical because school officials often try to justify censoring LGBT-positive expression by claiming that they are fearful of disruptions caused by students offended by the expression.

Two examples:

- In *Boyd County High School Gay Straight Alliance v. Boyd County Board of Education*, a federal court ruled that public protests over the presence of a GSA at a high school, including a sick-out by half of the high school, did not justify shutting down students' expressive activity, which was not itself disruptive.

- In *Fricke v. Lynch*, another federal judge ruled that a principal's concern about other students' possible violent reactions if a gay couple were allowed to attend the prom did not justify suppressing the couple's right to free expression. This judge explained his decision this way: "[t]o rule otherwise would completely subvert free speech in the school by granting other students a 'heckler's veto,' allowing them to decide through prohibited and violent methods what speech will be heard."

### 3. Legal Tips:

If you end up in a fight with school authorities over your t-shirt, the facts are critically important, so collect and write them down.

- Find out, for example, whether the same or similar t-shirts have been worn to school and what, if anything, happened.
- Keep track also of when school authorities stepped in to tell you to turn your shirt inside out or to send you home to change. If it happened before classes started, for example, it's pretty hard to say that your t-shirt disrupted anything.
- Find out, too, whether other students have been allowed to express opinions at odds with yours at school.
- If you're censored, keep things cool and simple. Remain calm and polite and comply with any order from your principal or teacher. Obeying an order from a school official does not mean you agree with it and does not affect your right to challenge it through the proper channels later on.
- Refusing to change t-shirts or getting into an argument with school officials only muddies the issue, and not cooperating might provide the school with an excuse to deflect blame for its censorship onto you by saying you were insubordinate or disruptive.
- Remember to keep a copy of any written document the school gives you on this matter and to write down the name and contact information of any person who witnessed any exchange between you and a school official over your t-shirt.

You should know that the law about expressive t-shirts in school as described above applies just to students in public schools. Private school students have fewer rights.