A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF THE EXPERIENCES
OF HIGH SCHOOL GAY-STRAIGHT
ALLIANCE ADVISORS

by

MELISSA S. CAVINS

PATTI HARRISON, COMMITTEE CHAIR
HEATHER BRITNELL
JOHN PETROVIC
STEVE THOMA
RICK HOUSER

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has recognized the positive impact of participating in high school gay-straight alliances (GSAs) on the psychosocial adjustment of LGBTQ students. Research suggests GSA advisors are in a position to facilitate learning, social support, and psychosocial well-being for students. As student-led groups, past studies have focused on the perspectives and outcomes of students while the roles of advisors remain unclear. The barriers to GSA development have been explored; however, there is no current study that examines how advisors navigate barriers and facilitators of their environment in order to support students toward achieving their GSA’s purpose. The purpose of this dissertation study was to better understand how GSA advisors fulfill their roles. Specifically, the current study sought to identify how GSA advisors perceive missions of GSAs, the obstacles they must navigate, and facilitators that help support their roles. This qualitative case study recruited four GSA advisors from a single school district. Data included semi-structured interviews and documents which were coded, categorized, and themed in response to the research questions. Results suggest advisors perceive their GSA’s mission by understanding the framework of the GSA, the roles of students, and the roles of advisors. Barriers advisors overcome include supporting students regardless of parental approval, effectively navigating school policy, supporting the development of students’ skills, and helping students clarify their GSA’s mission. Facilitators include aligning with supportive administrators, relying on colleagues as co-sponsors, utilizing outside resources from advocacy groups, and supporting transitions of student leadership in order to maintain the existence of the group.
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CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION

Experiences of bullying, harassment, and discrimination can all contribute to the negative school-based experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students (Graybill, Varjas, Meyers, & Watson, 2009; Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), 2011; Williams, Connelly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005). The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and the American Psychological Association (APA) support the stance that all students should be afforded equal opportunities to benefit from educational and mental health services in schools regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression (APA & NASP, 2014). Gender nonconforming and LGBTQ students are more likely to be targeted for harassment and discrimination at schools compared to their heterosexual peers. In addition, LGBTQ youth are at an increased risk for social and emotional problems such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal risk, as well as academic problems (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, & Russell, 2011).

LGBTQ students may benefit from participating in Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs). GSAs are student-led, school-based organizations where LGBTQ students and their heterosexual allies can socialize, support each other, and educate their schools and communities (National Association of GSA Networks, 2011). Open to all students regardless of gender or sexuality, GSAs are developed in order to provide a safe place for students to meet, receive support, discuss important topics, and advocate for issues (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network
GLSEN], 2007; Griffin, Lee, Waugh, & Beyer, 2004; MacGillivray, 2007). GSA advisors are adults in schools who support, advocate, and mentor GSA students (National Association of GSA Networks, 2011; Valenti & Campbell, 2009; Watson, Varjas, Meyers, & Graybill, 2010). Individual GSAs vary depending on the mission of the GSA, the framework of the GSA, and the contexts in which GSAs exist. The purpose of this study was to identify how GSA advisors fulfill their roles within the various contexts of GSAs.

**LGBTQ Youth in Schools**

Several previous studies suggest LGBTQ youth experience more hostile school climates than their heterosexual peers (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael 2009; Gutkin, 2009; Poteat, 2007; Williams et al., 2005). School violence, oppression, and destructive social conditions are often experienced by these students. LGBTQ youth feel less safe at school and as a result, are more likely to engage in truancy, have academic problems, and drop out. Peer relationships are often the source of turmoil for these students as a student’s sexual identity or orientation often makes him or her a target for bullying, harassment, victimization, and violence (Poteat, 2007; Williams et al., 2005).

LGBTQ youth may experience difficulties with psychosocial adjustment and well-being (Toomey et al., 2011). LGBTQ students often experience emotional distress, symptoms of anxiety and depression, engage in self-harm, and have suicidal thoughts and ideation (Almeida et al., 2009). In addition, LGBTQ students may feel powerless, hopeless, and disconnected to their school and home communities as they often experience ostracism and isolation (Grossman, Haney, Edwards, Alessi, Ardon, & Howell, 2009; Walls, Freedenthal, & Wineski, 2008). Due to the psychosocial stressors related to negative school climates, LGBTQ youth are at a higher risk
for substance abuse, engaging in risky sexual behavior, and running away from home (Toomey et al., 2011).

However, in spite of risk factors, protective factors also exist among individuals and within their environments. Individual-level protective factors such as empowerment, belongingness, and coping strategies can mediate risk factors and improve the psychosocial well-being of LGBTQ students (Lee, 2002; Sterrett, Jones, McKee, & Kincaid, 2011; Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012). Protective factors within the environment include positive school climates, an availability of community and school-based resources, and supportive peers and adults (Lee, 2002; Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002; Toomey et al., 2012; Williams et al., 2005). Positive school climates may protect LGBTQ students from bullying, depression, drug use, and academic problems. Adults in schools who intervene when students are bullied contribute to LGBTQ youth feeling safer at school. Access to resources, such as information or safe spaces, help students feel less hopeless and more empowered to be comfortable with their identities and improve their psychosocial well-being (Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009).

Gay-straight alliances (GSAs) in schools can be a particularly strong protective factor for students. Research has revealed that participating in a GSA can lead to improved psychosocial well-being, better peer relationships, and a greater sense of community at school (Fetner & Kush, 2008; Griffin et al., 2005; Russell et al., 2009). Moreover, participating in a GSA empowers students to act against oppressive conditions and discriminatory school-level policies (Lee, 2002).
Gay-Straight Alliances

Purposes of GSAs

As there is no standardized approach to GSA development and maintenance, the purposes of GSAs may vary depending on the type of GSA. Three major frameworks or types of GSAs are social, support, and activist (Fetner & Kush, 2008; National Association of GSA Networks, 2011). A GSA may adopt one or more of these frameworks in the development of their organization’s purposes. (See Figure 1.) Social GSAs offer students the opportunity to socialize with peers, meet new people, and develop a sense of community among participants. Support GSAs provide a safe and confidential space to students who are struggling with their sexuality and assist students who are suffering from bullying, harassment, and discrimination. Lastly, activist GSAs advocate for its members and educate students, school staff, and community members on LGBTQ issues within the school as well as the community at large.

![Figure 1: Types of Gay-Straight Alliance Frameworks.](image-url)
Again, the types of GSAs are not mutually exclusive as individual GSAs may adopt one or more of these frameworks. With the adoption and implementation of a GSA’s framework, its purposes and missions are developed and the applications of such ideas will follow. Thus, variations may exist across various GSAs. In general, however, the goals of GSAs typically include improving school climate for LGBTQ students, educating students and staff, and giving LGBTQ students a safe space to be (Fetner & Kush, 2008; Griffin et al., 2005; National Association of GSA Networks, 2011; Williams et al., 2005).

Outcomes of GSA Membership

Social justice. With regard to advocacy, GSAs can act as a vehicle to raise awareness and educate others in the schools and communities (Griffin et al., 2004). Specifically, students and their GSA advisor (e.g., school psychologist, counselor, or teacher) educate other students and adults on relevant issues in order to promote equality and fairness. Advocacy in the community, such as pride events, may take place. Depending on the social context of the school and community, students may face varying levels of adversity and resistance. Advocacy against harassment, discrimination, and victimization and education on such issues, can help facilitate growth and change in existing cultural norms and values. Other topics relevant to individual GSAs may also be addressed.

Safe space. GSAs hold meetings outside of standard class instructional time where students are allowed to comfortably socialize with other students with shared interests (Lee, 2002). Individual school climates may vary across GSAs; however, a GSA as an organization offers students an inclusive, safe refuge free from negative remarks or experiences they may encounter in their schools and communities. GSAs may be oriented toward promoting social interaction, educating others, raising awareness, advocacy, and/or providing social and emotional
support. Though the specific roles and activities of GSAs can be unique, students who participated in GSAs reported that GSAs act as a safe space independent from other areas in their lives.

**Psychosocial well-being.** In addition to being a safe space for LGBTQ students, GSAs also promote positive social interactions for students (Graybill et al., 2009; Toomey et al., 2011). Students are given an opportunity to regularly share ideas and engage in conversations to develop better relationships with supportive peers. Students may gain a sense of group belongingness and collectiveness through their participation in GSAs. In addition to the group implicitly boosting social support, GSA advisors may facilitate support and offer counseling and advice on issues applicable to a group of students or situations relevant to individual students.

Previous literature has focused on the psychosocial adjustment of LGBTQ students. The term “psychosocial” refers to the connection between an individual’s mental health and his or her social interactions and experiences (Williams et al., 2005). Psychosocial well-being is a broad construct under which many subcategories or elements may be included. Psychosocial well-being includes characteristics such as academic functioning, belongingness, pride, and self-esteem (Griffin et al., 2004; Lee, 2002; Russell et al., 2009; Sterrett et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2005). Meanwhile, depression, anxiety, hopelessness, and suicidal thoughts are indicative of poor psychosocial well-being. Coping strategies, psychosocial support, and resilience can mediate risks and improve psychosocial well-being (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell, 2010; Ueno, 2005).

Research has shown that participating in a GSA helps students build their strengths, cope with bullying and discrimination, and establish social bonds with their peers (Szalacha, 2003). Moreover, the positive impact of participating in a GSA on psychosocial well-being can last into
young adulthood (Toomey et al., 2011). GLSEN (n.d) maintains a database of registered GSAs. Currently, there are more than 4,000 GSAs registered in GLSEN’s database and this number continues to grow with the inception of new GSAs across the country.

Gay-Straight Alliance Advisors

Who Are GSA Advisors?

Although GSAs are student-led groups, advisors are recommended as school policies may require sponsors for extracurricular groups. GSA advisors are often teachers, but may also include school psychologists, school counselors, and administrators. GSA advisors are in a unique position as adults within a student-led club. Their experience and participation may offer more visibility from administrators as well as in the community. Further, as adults, GSA advisors have a more meaningful understanding of institutional barriers in their school and community as well as the greater social and cultural contexts in which they live (Graybill et al., 2009; Mayo, 2013). Choosing to become a GSA advisor may be a challenging decision met with resistance from colleagues and ostracism at work (Valenti & Campbell, 2009). However, in spite of institutional and social barriers, GSA advisors are in a critical position to assist students, advocate for important issues, and offer psychosocial support to students (MacGillivray 2007; Mayo, 2013; Murphy, 2012).

Role of GSA Advisors

GSA advisors are in a unique role to make substantial contributions to both individual students and the organization as a whole. Advantages of having GSA advisors include maintaining the group’s presence on campus as students leave the organization, understanding the dynamics of student affairs with faculty and staff, having access to school resources such as office space, and legitimizing the group’s existence to administration (Poynter & Tubbs, 2007).
Duties of GSA advisors may include assisting with nondiscrimination and anti-bullying policies, intervening when conflicts arise, educating students and staff, directly supporting students facing adversity, and promoting supportive attitudes and perceptions of LGBTQ students (Graybill et al., 2009; Murphy, 2012; NASP, 2011). In addition, supportive adults can help LGBTQ youth feel less rejected, empower students, and assist them during difficult times (MacGillivray, 2007; Mayo, 2013).

**GSA Advisor Guidelines**

Although no formal training is required for school personnel to act as a GSA advisor, resources are available to help guide advisors during meetings, in the school, and in the community. Most notable, the National Association of GSA Networks (2011, p. 10) offers a handbook with a guide for GSA advisors to adopt when trying to identify their roles within the group.

1. Provide and identify regular opportunities for skill building, leadership, and learning.
2. Teach students how to navigate the ins and outs of the school systems in terms of laws and policies, and serve as a liaison between faculty and the GSA.
3. Train students to resolve conflict among officers and within the club when it arises.
4. Support students in fostering a safe environment for all students to participate, including challenging language and behavior from within the GSA that perpetuates discrimination.
5. Assist students in managing club funds.
6. Educate and support students in keeping records of meetings and decisions and only if need be, keeping records for the GSA.
7. Set students up to succeed, but allow for little failures as teachable moments that are followed with conversations that help them reflect and learn.

8. Support changes within the GSA – which may include shifting goals or the mission of the group or being more than one type of GSA.

**Perceptions of GSA Advisors**

Previous research focusing on GSA advisors has primarily examined their motivations and obstacles rather than identifying the strategies employed and resources needed to serve a GSA (Watson et al., 2010; Valenti & Campbell, 2009). Motivations to serve as an advisor may include a protective attitude toward LGBTQ students and/or a personal connection to an individual or issue within the school. Although advisors may be motivated to assist students, worries and concerns also play into their decision-making process. Obstacles potential advisors face may include intolerance to sexual diversity, ostracism from colleagues, compromised job security, and a lack of training on LGBTQ issues and ethics. However, advocacy efforts may be facilitated by antidiscrimination policies, school-wide safety programs, and community resources. Overall, research has demonstrated that advisors face challenges within their respective ecological systems (i.e., schools; communities; school-community relations; and societal views) when advocating for LGBTQ youth, assisting students within GSAs, and serving as a GSA advisor.

**Statement of the Problem**

As school organizations, GSAs may have missions (sometimes called goal or purpose statements) that drive their actions and maintain their existence. However, there is no standardized approach to running a GSA. Each GSA is unique and the perceptions of its members and advisors drive the actions of the GSA. Depending on the type of a specific GSA,
an advisor’s role may vary. In general, advisors help facilitate discussion within the group, identify interests and needs of students, and advocate for students.

Although GSAs are led by students, faculty advisors may be required by individual schools. Regulations pertaining to faculty advisement vary across state and local boards of education. GLSEN (2012), a national organization which advocates for safe schools for LGBTQ students, endorses the use of faculty advisors. However, the role of a GSA advisor is loosely defined and can vary across GSAs. Advisors typically advocate for LGBTQ youth, help students feel safe, supported, and empowered, help educate adults, and provide varying levels of support to the group depending on the type of GSA (Graybill et al., 2009; Murphy, 2012; National Association of GSA Networks, 2011; Walls et al., 2008). GLSEN recommends that GSA advisors be teachers or faculty members who are allies and mentors who support student decision-making (GLSEN, 2012). Other than this guideline, GLSEN does not set forth a specific framework or code for GSA advisors to adopt. How each advisor chooses to serve a GSA is a decision that is made locally depending on the unique needs of the GSA. Specific qualifications are not mandated on a national level in order to serve as a GSA advisor, so adults across many roles within schools (e.g., teachers, counselors, school psychologists) may take the position.

As GSAs are student-led organizations, previous literature focuses primarily on the students’ points of view. For example, multiple studies have examined positive psychosocial outcomes due to GSA membership, with quantitative and qualitative methods used in studies. Published studies investigating the perceptions of GSAs advisors and other adults in schools have been oriented toward identifying barriers to GSA development and challenges faced when advocating for LGBTQ students (Killelea & McEntarfer, 2011; Valenti & Campbell, 2009; Watson et al., 2010).
Currently, there are no studies that specifically explore the strategies employed and obstacles faced within a GSA in order to work toward achieving a GSA’s mission. The type of GSA (i.e., social, support, activist) adopts its own mission and provides a framework and context for the purposes and goals of a particular GSA and its advisor. For example, the strategies of social GSAs and activist GSAs may vary due to the nature of their goals. Activist GSAs may employ techniques which are aimed at educating the community and raising awareness about issues whereas social GSAs may remain more school-based as they strive to create a safe zone for students at school.

**Purpose of the Dissertation Study**

The purpose of the dissertation study is to better understand how GSA advisors fulfill their roles. Specifically, this study seeks to identify how advisors perceive the missions of their GSAs, the obstacles GSA advisors must navigate, and the facilitators that help encourage their role in supporting LGBTQ students. As there is no standardized approach to GSA development and implementation, GSAs across the country may adopt different policies and practices for their groups. There is a notable gap in the literature investigating how GSA advisors work within their environments in order to support students toward achieving their GSA’s mission. In other words, it is unclear how GSA advisors work within, and possibly across, the constraints of their schools in order to fulfill their roles as GSA advisors. This study seeks to examine the strategies employed, resources needed, and obstacles overcome by GSA advisors within their schools.

Given the limited research on GSA advisors as well as contexts that influence their roles, the use of qualitative methods appeared most fitting for the purpose of this study. Qualitative research is a broad approach of inquiry that aims to understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena within natural settings from participants’ perspectives (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative
research is typically conducted “in naturalistic settings, draws on multiple methods that respect the humanity of the participants in the study, focuses on context, is emergent and evolving, and is fundamentally interpretive” (Marshall and Rossman, 2011, p. 2). Further, qualitative inquiry is an appropriate approach as it recognizes and emphasizes on environmental contexts when understanding individuals’ experiences and meanings (Merriam, 1998).

Case studies methods, a technique in qualitative research, is an appropriate approach for the current dissertation study as this study includes “how” and “why” questions, the behaviors of those involved cannot be manipulated, the study aims to reveal contextual conditions experienced by GSA advisors, and the boundaries between the experiences of GSA advisors and their contexts are difficult to separate. Stake (2006) wrote, “one purpose of a multicase study is to illuminate some of these contexts, especially the problematic ones” (p. 12). Further, the situational experiences the individuals within these settings are examined. This study aimed to reveal how GSA advisors perform their roles within the multiple contexts of their environment.

**Research Questions**

In order to identify how GSA advisors work within their environments to serve LGBTQ students, the dissertation study was guided by the following research questions:

**Research Question 1: What are GSA advisors’ perceptions of their GSA’s mission?**

What is the mission of the GSA? In order for a GSA to fulfill its mission, students and advisors both function as part of the GSA. What are the roles of the students? What are the roles of the advisor?
Research Question 2: How do GSA advisors address environmental obstacles to their roles within GSAs?

What environmental barriers prevent GSA advisors from performing their roles? How do GSA advisors perform their roles within the constraints of their environment? What strategies, resources, or combination thereof, if any, are used to overcome barriers? Strategies may include actions undertaken (such as collaborating with colleagues) to support their role. Resources may include tangible items (such as audiovisual equipment) to support their role.

Research Question 3: How do GSA advisors address environmental facilitators to their roles within GSAs?

What environmental factors help facilitate the roles of GSA advisors? How do GSA advisors perform their roles with the support of these factors within their environment? What strategies, resources, or combination thereof, if any, are used to facilitate the roles of GSA advisors? Strategies may include actions (such as collaborating with colleagues) used to support their role. Resources may include tangible items (such as audiovisual equipment) to support their role.

Significance of the Dissertation Study

Research examining experiences of LGBTQ youth has shown that participating in GSAs can lead to improved mental health outcomes, a greater sense of community at school, more awareness and education of LGBTQ issues, and safer schools. Although previous research suggests participating in a GSA leads to positive outcomes, the roles of GSA advisors have yet to be thoroughly examined. This study aims to explore the perspectives of GSA advisors assisting LGBTQ students within the contexts of their schools. In doing so, this study may reveal helpful
skills to serve future GSAs, advisors, and students as well as contribute to the growing body of literature investigating high school GSAs.

**Implications for the Practice of School Psychology**

The results of the current study have implications for research and practice within the field of school psychology. Current research studies have focused largely on the development and outcomes of GSAs. Additional inquiry is needed to examine the activities taking place within GSAs. Discovering this information may have implications for GSA advisors as well as practicing school psychologists as they can promote effectiveness of GSA advisors, advocate for LGBTQ youth, and promote positive psychosocial well-being for students. Through the identification of specific approaches used by GSA advisors to serve LGBTQ, school psychologists may act as GSA advisors themselves, or they may consult with existing GSA advisors in order to help facilitate positive outcomes for LGBTQ students. A meaningful understanding of the circumstances experienced by GSA advisors, and the impact of those circumstances on students, can assist school psychologists when analyzing problems within schools pertaining to LGBTQ students.

**Limitations of the Dissertation Study**

One major limitation of the current study was its lack of multiple points within a variety of contexts to triangulate data. Specifically, observations of actual GSA meetings were not conducted as part of this study. Thus, data were limited to the semi-structured interviews and documents posted on the GSAs’ websites. Further, the understanding of how GSA meetings are run is exclusively understood from the perspectives of advisors. Therefore, another limitation of this study was the lack of direct investigation of students’ perspectives. While GSAs are run by students, actual students were not interviewed for this study. Therefore, the findings of this study
reflect only the perceptions of GSA advisors and do not directly measure outcomes for students. Data collected directly from students may help support findings and provide a more detailed view of GSAs. However, as previously stated, this dissertation study is focused on perceptions of GSA advisors.

Another major limitation related to participants was the lack of control over mental health training that GSA advisors may have received. GSA advisors are typically teachers in schools and their training may vary greatly depending on their individual backgrounds. The National Association of GSA Networks’ (2011) guide to advising was selected as a framework for advisors’ roles within this study because is specifically designed for GSAs and also takes into consideration the contexts of schools. Although offering support is addressed in the GSA Network’s guide, mental health services are framed more narrowly within the guides offered by professional organizations in fields of psychology and counseling (e.g., NASP, 2011; NASP, 2014; APA & NASP, 2014; APA, 2009, ASCA, 2016). However, due to the uncontrollable nature of potential participants’ training in mental health, the guide provided by the National Association of GSA Networks appears more appropriate and suitable for all GSA advisors.

**Definitions of Key Terms**

The following terms have been defined for this study:

**Gender identity**: An individual’s internal sense of being male, female, or something else (APA, 2011).

**Gender expression**: The way an individual conveys gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, voice, or body characteristics (APA, 2011).

**Heterosexism**: “An ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community” (Herek, p. 316, 1990).
**Homophobia**: Negative attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and stereotypes toward individuals who are not exclusively heterosexual (Wright, Adams, & Bernat, 1990).

**Sexual identity**: An individual’s sense of self-concept and identification with regard to sexual orientation (Preciado & Johnson, 2014).

**Sexual orientation**: The pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to men, women, or both sexes. Based on these attractions, sexual orientation also refers to an individual’s sense of identity, related behaviors, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions (APA, 2008).

**LGBTQ**: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (NASP, 2011).

**Conclusion**

LGBTQ students face many challenges in school such as bullying, discrimination, and victimization (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008). Such negative experiences can compromise the mental health and psychosocial well-being of students. However, protective factors, specifically GSAs, can mediate these negative impacts (Goodenow, Szalacha & Westheimer, 2006; Toomey et al., 2010). Although GSAs are student-led clubs, advisors can play an active role within the group (Watson et al., 2010). GSA advisors may work toward educating students and staff about policies and issues, supporting students, teaching skills, and providing safe spaces for students. Further, their roles are carried out within the contexts of their environments (i.e., schools and communities). Through the use of qualitative case study inquiry, the purpose of this study was to identify how GSA advisors view their group’s mission and how they fulfill their roles within the various contexts of GSAs.
CHAPTER II:
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of the scholarly literature that informed the current dissertation study. Several important areas examining LGBTQ students are addressed with an emphasis on mental health and school experiences. Current literature examining the role of GSAs and advisors are also presented in this chapter.

Several factors can influence the social and emotional development of LGBTQ youth. Multiple ecological systems such as cultural context, political climate, and school environments influence both the development of the individuals within the systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as well as the likelihood of organizing LGBTQ advocacy and support groups (Valenti & Campbell, 2009). Discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation may victimize students and adversely impact their psychosocial development. However, students can develop and utilize protective factors such as empowerment, resilience, and social support.

Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) are one type of social support group specifically developed to foster the psychosocial well-being of LGBTQ students. GSAs allow LGBTQ students and their allies to emotionally support each other, advocate for justice and equality, and facilitate self-esteem and comfort with one’s own sexual identity (Lee, 2002). GSA advisors are in a position to support students, promote their psychosocial well-being, and act as advocates for their needs (Valenti & Campbell, 2009; Watson et al., 2010).
LGBTQ Youth and Mental Health

Previous research suggests that LGBTQ students are more likely to experience psychosocial problems such as depression, hopelessness, social isolation, suicide risk, academic problems, substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, running away from home, and school truancy (Berger, 2005; Halpert, 2002; Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2011; Meyer, 2003; Scourfield, Roen, & McDermott, 2008). Adolescent sexuality may be viewed at a microsystem-level within the contexts of schools and peer and family values (Williams et al., 2005). Psychosocial adjustment issues may be linked to contextual risks of peer victimization and a lack of social support experienced by adolescents. These contextual variables can significantly impact psychosocial adjustment in addition to the process of identifying sexual orientation alone.

Research also suggests that victimization and discrimination from peers due to LGBTQ status can adversely impact the mental health of students (Almeida et al., 2009; Espelage et al., 2008; Poteat, 2007; Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Russell, Diaz, Rafael, & Sanchez, 2011). Students who identify as LGBTQ are more likely to experience emotional distress such as self-harm and suicidal thoughts, depression, and substance use. However, in spite of risk factors, protective factors can also exist within environments such as supportive peers and adults, stable friendships, and availability of community and school-based resources.

Victimization at School

Grossman and colleagues (2009) examined LGBTQ youth experience with school violence and oppressive and destructive social conditions in their schools. Qualitative methods using focus groups resulted with two emergent themes in relation to the LGBTQ students’ experiences of interpersonal school violence and their thoughts as to ways it can be prevented in the future: 1) lack of community and 2) lack of empowerment with a concurrent lack of a sense of human
agency. The students reported that they had no sense of being a part of their school’s community; therefore, they had no sense of empowerment or feelings of influence that come from belonging to a collective inclusive group for LGBTQ youth. LGBTQ students not only felt disconnected from their communities, but also felt powerless to take control of or change their circumstances. LGBTQ students reported heterosexual youth using name-calling, hate speech, harassment, and physical violence to ostracize. The actions took place most frequently in the absence of adults in schools. Students who experienced this victimization felt such a lack of human agency and empowerment that they chose not to report these actions to adults.

Russell and colleagues (2011) specifically examined school victimization among LGBTQ youth and its association with psychosocial adjustment and well-being into young adulthood. They noted that school victimization is linked to academic problems such as lower achievement and absenteeism as well as substance use, compromised emotional health, suicidal ideation, and aggression. Through the use of retrospective young adult surveys, the researchers found that LGBTQ students who experienced victimization in high school were more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior while also demonstrating higher levels of depression and suicidal ideation. Of particular note, this study specifically illustrated the discrepancy between male and female LGBTQ students who experience victimization at school. Their findings highlighted the link between homophobia and masculinity as adolescent males who experienced higher levels of victimization had poorer psychosocial adjustment into adulthood.

In another study, Toomey and colleagues (2010) investigated psychosocial adjustment of LGBTQ students. Through the use of retrospective surveys, the researchers examined associations among reports of adolescent victimization due to sexual orientation compared to current reports of life satisfaction and depression. They found higher levels of self-reported
adolescent gender nonconformity were associated with more at-school victimization. Gender nonconforming students who were victimized presented with long-term psychosocial adjustment problems such as depression and poorer life satisfaction. At-school victimization experienced by LGBTQ youth accounted for compromised long-term psychosocial adjustment into young adulthood.

**Homophobic Attitudes at School**

With regard to social interactions with peers at school, Poteat (2007) examined homophobic attitudes and behavior of high school students. The results of this study also established a link between homophobia and masculinity as more negative attitudes were held toward gay male students, and these negative attitudes and behaviors continued to grow over time. The attitudes were examined within the social context of peer groups with members sharing beliefs as students responded to surveys measuring homophobic attitudes, homophobic behavior, and friendship identification. Contextual socialization was noted as peer group members influenced beliefs and became more similar to each other. This study highlights both the influence of individuals on their social environment and of the social environment on the individuals. Moreover, within this study, the origins of homophobic victimization were identified as stemming from smaller, select groups of students rather than the majority of students. Thus, certain groups within schools may be responsible for the majority of homophobic attitudes and behavior permeating school climates.

The negative repercussions of homophobic attitudes and behavior were also examined by Almeida and colleagues (2009). In this study, the researchers specifically investigated emotional distress of LGBTQ students due to discrimination based on their sexual orientation. The researchers used survey data from the Boston Youth Survey (covering a range of topics with a
particular emphasis on violence) and measures on depressive symptomatology, emotional distress (specifically suicidal ideation and self-harm), and perceived discrimination due to sexual orientation. Their results indicated that LGBTQ youth experience more discrimination and emotional distress than their heterosexual peers. LGBTQ status was associated with significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and self-harm. Similar to previous research, this study also found a discrepancy between male and female students; perceived discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation accounted for higher levels of depressive symptoms for LGBTQ boys compared to LGBTQ girls.

**School Safety**

With regard to school safety, Toomey and colleagues (2012) examined perceptions of safety at school for gender nonconforming students. Through the use of survey data, the researchers measured perceptions of school safety, personal experiences of gender nonconformity-based harassment, school violence, school safety strategies, and perceived heteronormativity. Harassment and bullying due to gender nonconformity was prevalent in their study. Consistent with findings from earlier research, this study also found gender nonconforming male students feel less safe at school than female students. One notable point from this study was its analysis of heteronormativity and school safety. The researchers argued that the pervasiveness of heteronormativity in school climates compromises perceptions of school safety. While LGBTQ students reported bullying and harassment due to their gender nonconformity, the majority of students perceived their schools as safe for LGBTQ students. The disconnect, they argued, is an indicator of the pervasive heteronormative values maintained in schools. At the individual student level, their findings showed that when students report inclusion of LGBTQ issues in the
curriculum, have access to resources regarding LGBTQ issues, and when teachers intervene in biased harassment, they perceive their schools as safer.

**Self-Destructive Behavior**

With regard to behavioral manifestations of psychosocial maladjustment, Scourfield, Roen, and McDermott (2008) explored relationships between sexual orientation and self-destructive behavior through the use of qualitative focus groups. They discovered that self-destructive behavior, specifically self-harm and suicide, can act as a form of self-punishment. Their study noted that over time, LGBTQ youth may be pushed to engage in self-destructive behavior by an external locus of control. Suicidal actions were often due to homophobic reactions, discrimination, and isolation as a result of coming out to others. However, while some students became ambivalent about their situation (struggling with being both out and comfortable with their sexual identity), the researchers also found that LGBTQ students developed a sense of resilience after experiencing discrimination.

**Protective Factors**

**Parental support.** The influence of adults on school victimization due to LGBTQ status was investigated by Espelage and colleagues (2008). In their study, high school students in the Midwest responded to a survey that asked questions about their school experiences (bullying, homophobia, and school climate), parental support, mood, and substance use. Victimization in the form of homophobic teasing as well as general peer victimization (non-biased or due to LGBTQ status) was measured. LGBTQ students reported significantly higher levels of homophobic teasing and victimization compared to their heterosexual peers. Moreover, LGBTQ students reported higher levels depression, suicidal thoughts, and substance use. While this study did not discover significant differences in perceptions of school climate between LGBTQ and
heterosexual students, it did find that parental support can moderate negative effects of victimization of LGBTQ students.

The protective influences of positive school climates and parental support on mental health outcomes of LGBTQ students have been examined (Espelage et al., 2008). This study found that LGBTQ youth were more likely to report high levels of depression, suicidal thoughts, and drug use. Particularly vulnerable were students questioning their sexual identity and orientation as they reported more teasing, greater drug use, and more feelings of depression and suicide than heterosexual and gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. Sexually questioning students who experienced homophobic teasing were also more likely than other students to perceive their school climate as negative. However, positive school climate and parental support protected students against risk factors.

Non-parental social support. Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, and Rounds (2002) explored various types of social support (i.e., emotional, appraisal, instrumental and informational) available to LGBTQ students during high school. The researchers sought to examine the connection between social support and sexual identity development. Through retrospective interviews with lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults (aged 18-21), they found that non-familial adults (e.g., teachers) and peers were more supportive of sexual identity than family members. Heterosexual and LGBTQ-identified friends and non-familial adults provided emotional support in the form of love, caring, trust, listening, and similar affective behaviors as well as instrumental support in the form of resources or aid such as money, time, and labor. However, there were limitations to the emotional support they received from heterosexual peers to whom they disclosed their orientation. LGBTQ peers and adults provided valuable informational (advice and suggestions) and appraisal support (positive feedback and affirmation) in addition to emotional support. The
process of sexual identity formation was characterized by varying degrees of confusion, denial, and acceptance. Most participants did not disclose their sexual identity to their parents during high school and perceived their parents and family members as offering limited emotional, appraisal, and informational support. However, several participants discussed coming out to their teachers and reported receiving multiple forms of support as a result.

**Presence of a gay-straight alliance.** Walls and colleagues (2008) found the presence of a GSA in schools can be a protective factor against psychosocial risks related to suicidality. Their results found that hopelessness, drug and alcohol use, homelessness, and in-school victimization were all predictors of suicidality. Their results indicated that GSAs can act as a mediator by protecting LGBTQ students from such risk factors. In their study measuring school safety, victimization, and GSA presence, LGBTQ students who attended a school with a GSA or have an adult ally exhibited a lower likelihood of psychosocial risks. In addition, students whose school had a GSA, regardless of GSA membership, reported significantly feelings of school safety as well as significantly higher levels of awareness on how to find a safe adult in school. Differences between LGBTQ students who attended a school with a GSA and those who did not were centered on experiences of safety (feeling unsafe, ability to find a safe adult), academic achievement, and absenteeism due to fear. Overall, actual as well as perceived influences of school culture can affect the likelihood of psychosocial well-being and risk factors for LGBTQ youth.

**Gay-Straight Alliances**

Creating safe school environments calls for individual, school-wide, and systems-level intervention efforts (Griffin et al., 2004; NASP, 2011). Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) are student-led, school-based clubs that provide a safe place for students to meet, hold discussions,
and advocate for issues related to LGBTQ students (GLSEN, 2007; Griffin, et al., 2005; MacGillivray, 2007). GSAs are open to all students regardless of sexual orientation, sexual identity, or gender. The goals of GSAs often include improving school climate for LGBTQ youth and educating the school community about LGBTQ issues (GLSEN, 2012.) A primary focus of GSAs is offering social support among students and from advisors in order to mediate feelings of isolation and alienation from peers (Williams et al., 2005). The presence of GSAs has continued to grow across college and high school campuses in the United States. GLSEN (n.d.) maintains a database of registered GSAs with a total of over 4,000 with numbers continuing to grow. As the existence of these groups have grown, so too has the body of research examining a variety of topics related to GSAs including its purposes, influences, and the positions of its advisors.

Background of GSAs

Prior to the creation of the first GSA, Project 10 is widely recognized as the first major step to provide organized support and education to LGBTQ youth in schools (Goodenow et al., 2006; McCready, 2004). Project 10 was initially developed as a support group and dropout prevention program for LGBTQ students. Founded in 1984 at Fairfax High School in the Los Angeles Unified School District, Project 10 was originally led by teacher and counselor, Dr. Virginia Uribe. Later, in 1988, the first high school GSA was formed under the advisement of Kevin Jennings, then a history teacher (MacGillivray, 2007). The group was initially organized by a group of students at a high school in Massachusetts. Since then, over 4,000 GSAs have been established on high school and college campuses across the United States (GLSEN, n.d.; Murphy, 2012). Although the presence of GSAs continues to grow, supporters have encountered institutional barriers to the development of GSAs (Murphy, 2012; Griffin et al., 2004).
Resistance from administrators, school personnel, and members of the community may prevent the establishment of a GSA.

Although organizers of GSAs may experience obstacles, courts have ruled against banning GSAs from school campuses (MacGillivray, 2007; Murphy, 2012; Griffin et al., 2004). While GSAs may be met with controversy, the Federal Equal Access Act of 1984 protects these groups. Initially designed to protect the rights of Christian students to participate in school-based Bible study clubs, this legislation protects the rights of all students who attempt to form school-based organizations. The Equal Access Act (1984) requires all secondary schools receiving federal funding to provide equal access to extracurricular clubs. According to the act, public secondary schools must ensure a fair opportunity for students to conduct meetings without being discriminated against on the basis of religious, political, philosophical, or other content of the speech at such meetings. Thus, schools must allow GSAs to organize; otherwise, they must completely ban all non-curricular groups from meeting on school campuses. Although protected under this act, resistance to GSAs may still inhibit development (Lee, 2002; MacGillivray, 2007). Additionally, GSAs are less prevalent in small towns, rural areas, the Midwest, and the South (GLSEN, 2007).

**Purposes of GSAs**

Defining the purpose a GSA may be challenging for students and advisors (MacGillivray, 2007). However, GSAs with well-defined purposes can lead to more significant changes at both individual and institutional levels. GSAs may be broadly defined into three major types: social, support, and activist (Fetner & Kush, 2008; National Association of GSA Networks, 2011). Social GSAs are ones in which students convene in a social manner. GSAs with a social orientation are developed to provide a safe place where students can meet new friends with
whom they may relate, provide a sense of community for participants, and ultimately lessen feelings of isolation among students. Support GSAs function to provide safety and confidentiality to students who are struggling with their sexuality, are experiencing harassment and discrimination, and offer a confidential forum for students to express themselves. Finally, activist GSAs work toward educating themselves, the school, and the community on LGBTQ issues. These GSAs may participate in local activism or political events to raise awareness of important topics. Although the Gay-Straight Alliance Network outlines three major types of GSAs, these orientations are not mutually exclusive. Individual GSAs may adopt one or more of these frameworks in the development of their specific group’s purpose.

Griffin, Lee, Waugh, and Beyer (2004) described four major roles that GSAs played in schools: counseling and support, providing a “safe” space, acting as a vehicle for raising awareness and increasing visibility, and educating about LGBTQ issues in school. The advantages and disadvantages of each role were discussed in terms of addressing broader issues of heterosexism in schools, providing safety for LGBTQ students, and sustaining long-term organizational level changes in schools. GSAs can provide counseling and support to help individual students work through identity issues and the accompanying stresses. However, when GSAs are the only LGBTQ-related school resource or safe space, student may have fewer opportunities for counseling services. In schools where the GSA is a safe place, its members can meet with peers who share similar values. Within GSAs, LGBTQ students can develop support and a sense of community that can break down their frequent isolation. For heterosexual members, the GSA can be a vehicle for acting on the value of inclusion and for supporting LGBTQ family members and friends. The visibility created by GSAs can normalize LGBTQ issues and remind the rest of the school that LGBTQ students are a part of the community.
However, the presence of GSAs does not necessarily address school-wide climate and safety. The focus of a GSA is often more about individual behavior and awareness rather than institutional change.

**Influences of GSAs on Students’ Psychosocial Adjustment**

Heck and colleagues (2011) examined the benefits of GSAs with regard to overall school experiences and mental health outcomes. After surveying LGBTQ students with measures of school victimization, school climate, substance use, depression, and general psychological distress, the researchers found that membership in a GSA in high school was associated with higher levels of belongingness in high school, lower levels of substance use behaviors, and lower levels of depressive symptoms and psychological distress. LGBTQ youth who attended a high school with a GSA reported significantly more favorable psychosocial outcomes related to school experiences, substance use, and general psychological distress compared to students who did not attend a high school with a GSA.

Lee (2002) identified a number of influences GSA membership had on students by interviewing members of Utah’s first high school GSA. According to Lee’s study, participation in a GSA improved academic performance, positively affected relationships with school administrators, teachers, faculty, parents, and peers, increased feelings of safety and decreased beliefs of harassment, and gave students a sense of belongingness and identification to their school. Further, GSA involvement promoted students’ comfort with their sexual identities and provided students with the sense that they could make a difference and positively contribute to society. Lee noted that students were aware they were living in a heterosexist society, but could not identify specific strategies to handle heterosexist assumptions. However, students still reported that attending a high school with a GSA and participating in their GSA made them feel
safer at school, even within a heteronormative culture. While previous research suggests LGBTQ students lack a sense of agency, community, and empowerment due to heterosexist social conditions (Grossman et al., 2009), this study showed that GSA membership can protect students from these risks and positively impact the psychosocial well-being of students.

In another study, Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, and Russell (2011) specifically examined the positive impact of GSAs and psychosocial adjustment. This study looked at the potential for GSAs to support positive youth development and to reduce associations among LGBTQ-specific school victimization and negative young adult psychosocial well-being. After surveying LGBTQ young adults with retrospective questions, the researchers found that the presence of a GSA, participation in a GSA, and perceived GSA effectiveness in promoting school safety were differentially associated with young adult well-being, specifically depression, lifetime suicide attempts, and substance use. In some cases, these factors (GSA presence, GSA participation, and perceived effectiveness of GSAs) buffered the negative association between LGBTQ-specific school victimization and psychosocial well-being. Implications of this study demonstrate the potential value of high school GSAs on the psychosocial adjustment and well-being of LGBTQ students in high school and into young adulthood.

Empowerment among LGBTQ youth who participated in GSAs has also been investigated (Russell et al., 2009). After holding focus groups with participants, the researchers identified facets of empowerment which emerged. Empowerment was described as having and using knowledge, the act of using the knowledge to make changes, being part of a larger social movement, and being a part of a GSA. Personal empowerment included feeling good about oneself, having a voice, and having control or agency. Relational empowerment was described as group membership in the larger community, commitment/passing on the GSA legacy, and
empowering others. The authors noted that empowerment can be contextually embedded as it changes across settings. Overall, multiple levels of empowerment are facilitated through participation and leadership in GSAs. These dimensions empower youth to directly influence social and sexual justice through social and institutional change, primarily through changing their schools.

LGBTQ students benefit from safe school climates for sexually diverse students and the influences of GSAs (Szalacha, 2003). Goodenow and colleagues (2006) found that support groups for LGBTQ students, such as GSAs, and supportive adults in schools are associated with increased feelings of safety and positive school climates while also associated with lower levels of victimization and suicidality. Moreover, research has shown that participating in a GSA helps students build their strengths, cope with bullying and discrimination, establish social bonds with their peers, and facilitates psychosocial support (Szalacha, 2003; Heck et al., 2011). Finally, the positive impact of participating in a GSA on psychosocial well-being can last into young adulthood (Toomey et al., 2011).

In a qualitative study, McCormick, Schmidt, and Clifton (2016) examined social and academic outcomes for LGBTQ students participating in GSAs. Academically, students who participated in GSAs revealed a better sense of school connectedness, felt accountable to their school-based group, and held a greater feeling of hope due to the actions of the GSA. School connectedness, the authors state, is, “one of the strongest predictors of academic success” (2016). Having a regular group meeting to attend, as well as GSA members to check in with, gave students a sense of accountability that had not previously been experienced. The momentum of the GSA’s activities and comfort found in learning of others’ successful experiences, gave students a sense of hope that they too would experience success. With regard to psychosocial
outcomes, the authors found participating in GSAs normalized thoughts, feelings, and experiences of individual students within the group. Students developed a better sense of self-concept and esteem. Further, students embraced their unique differences and appreciated the differences of others. Interpersonally, GSA involvement helped facilitate relationships among students within the group through open dialogue within a safe space.

**Gay-Straight Alliance Advisors**

**Defining Advisors**

Adults in schools may serve as an advisor to a GSA in order to provide support, promote advocacy, and offer continuity over time as student leadership changes (National Association of GSA Networks, 2011; Valenti & Campbell, 2009; Watson et al., 2010). Adults who serve as advisors are often teachers, but may also include school psychologists, counselors, nurses, and administrators. GSA advisors are in a critical position to work within multiple ecological systems in order to promote advocacy and overcome obstacles to develop and maintain a GSA while also supporting students within the group. The decision to become an advisor to a GSA may be a challenging one as adults may fear job loss and ostracism at work (Valenti & Campbell, 2009). Although potential advisors face challenges in their decision to advocate for a GSA, these individuals are in a unique, advantageous position to assist students (MacGillivray 2007). Advisors are in a position to be aware and possess knowledge of the barriers and obstacles facing students in school and their community thereby better equipping them to circumvent or tackle such barriers (Mayo, 2013).

**Advising LGBTQ Students**

With regard to LGBTQ students, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) suggests a number of strategies for advisors to utilize when working with students
(Moorhead, 2005). Advisors must be aware of their own cultural values and the ways in which those are exhibited by individuals and institutions. First, advisors must treat all students equally and be aware of the language they use, such as labels and expressions, in order to be sensitive to the individual views of each student. Advisors should attempt to promote understanding of LGBTQ issues, speak up about challenges, decisions, and actions adversely affecting students, and also ask questions about LGBTQ topics. Although asking questions runs the risk of appearing uniformed or offensive, this prevents advisors from making incorrect assumptions about students. Advisors may work with students directly to brainstorm solutions to problems, increase visibility of students, and get involved in campus activities, such as LGBTQ events. When working with and for LGBTQ students, advisors should facilitate and support students, rather than overprotect them, in order to empower students to further advocate for themselves. Finally, advisors should be aware of resources available such as LGBTQ-related courses and curriculum, community resources for health concerns, and any additional guidance available specifically to LGBTQ students.

**Advising Gay-Straight Alliances**

Previous research focusing on GSA advisors has primarily examined their motivations and obstacles rather than identifying the strategies employed and resources needed to serve a GSA (Watson et al., 2010; Valenti & Campbell, 2009). Motivations to serve as an advisor may include a protective attitude toward LGBTQ students and/or a personal connection to an individual or issue within the school. Although advisors may be motivated to assist students, worries and concerns also play into their decision-making process. Obstacles potential advisors face may include intolerance to sexual diversity, ostracism from colleagues, compromised job security, and a lack of training on LGBTQ issues and ethics. However, advocacy efforts may be facilitated
by antidiscrimination policies, school-wide safety programs, and community resources. Overall, research has demonstrated that advisors face challenges within their respective ecological systems (i.e., schools; communities; school-community relations; and societal views) when advocating for LGBTQ youth, assisting students within GSAs, and serving as a GSA advisor.

Watson and colleagues (2010) examined challenges to GSA advisors’ advocacy efforts for LGBTQ youth within the context of schools. Common challenges may include intolerance to sexual diversity, fear of ostracism among colleagues, futility of advocacy efforts, and a lack of training on LGBTQ issues and ethics. Meanwhile, facilitators to advocacy efforts may include antidiscrimination policies, school safety programs, LGBTQ themes in course curricula, and community resources. The findings of this study illustrate the challenges within an ecological system as the researchers found that sociocultural, school-based, and individual factors impact advocacy efforts. Sociocultural factors such as parents, public policy, cultural norms, and community resources were identified as major obstacles facing advisors. School-based factors included students, administration, school policy, and school-based resources. Finally, individual factors of the advisors included consequences to advocacy, sexual identity, knowledge of LGBTQ issues, personality characteristics, and personal experiences.

Research on content-specific strategies used by GSA advisors has been investigated in one study (Graybill et al., 2009). When advocating for LGBTQ students, advisors respond to homophobic teasing and bullying most frequently by educating these students about their negative behavior. Other strategies to address bullying include reprimanding the student, sarcasm, and personalizing insults. When homophobic or discriminatory statements were made, GSA advisors had either reactive or proactive responses. Reactive responses were more common to address bullying by other students. Overall, strategies for advocacy of LGBTQ youth vary
across GSA advisors depending on the content of comments. This study revealed strategies specific to addressing negative comments by students and school personnel.

Specific strategies employed by GSA advisors may include assisting with nondiscrimination and anti-bullying policies, intervening when conflicts arise, educating students and staff, directly supporting students facing adversity, and promoting supportive attitudes and perceptions of LGBTQ students (Graybill et al., 2009; Murphy, 2012; NASP, 2011). In addition, supportive adults can help LGBTQ youth feel less rejected, empower students, and assist them during difficult times (MacGillivray, 2007; Mayo, 2013).

**Framework for GSA Advisors**

GSA advisors are in a unique role to make substantial contributions to both individual students and the organization as a whole. Advantages of having GSA advisors include maintaining the group’s presence on campus as students leave the organization, understanding the dynamics of student affairs with faculty and staff, having access to school resources such as office space, and legitimizing the group’s existence to administration (Poynter & Tubbs, 2007). Although no formal training is required to act as a GSA advisor, resources are available to help guide advisors during meetings, in the school, and in the community. The National Association of GSA Networks (2011) has set forth a guide for GSA advisors to adopt when trying to identify their roles within the group.

1. Provide and identify regular opportunities for skill building, leadership, and learning.
2. Teach students how to navigate the ins and outs of the school systems in terms of laws and policies, and serve as a liaison between faculty and the GSA.
3. Train students to resolve conflict among officers and within the club when it arises.
4. Support students in fostering a safe environment for all students to participate, including challenging language and behavior from within the GSA that perpetuates discrimination.

5. Assist students in managing club funds.

6. Educate and support students in keeping records of meetings and decisions and only if need be, keeping records for the GSA.

7. Set students up to succeed, but allow for little failures as teachable moments that are followed with conversations that help them reflect and learn.

8. Support changes within the GSA – which may include shifting goals or the mission of the group or being more than one type of GSA.

**Conclusion**

A review of the literature on LGBTQ students, GSAs, and GSA advisors reveal several significant findings relevant to the proposed study. LGBTQ students face unique social challenges within their environment (Bos, Sandfort, de Bruyn, & Hakvoort, 2008; Valenti & Campbell, 2009; Watson et al., 2010). These challenges may be school-based factors (e.g., victimization, school safety), community values, and sociocultural norms (e.g., heteronormative and heterosexist values) which impact LGBTQ psychosocial development as well as the likelihood of organizing LGBTQ advocacy and support groups (Valenti & Campbell, 2009; Watson et al., 2010). Negative school climates where victimization, bullying, harassment, and discrimination are prevalent are especially harmful to the mental health of LGBTQ youth (Grossman et al., 2009; Poteat, 2007; Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Russell, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2011; Scourfield et al., 2008; Toomey et al., 2012; Toomey et al., 2010). Psychosocial risks associated with such factors for LGBTQ students include increased likelihoods of depression, substance
use, suicidality, risky sexual behavior, and poorer academic achievement (Berger, 2005; Halpert, 2002; Heck et al., 2011; Meyer, 2003; Scourfield et al., 2008).

In spite of these risk factors, protective factors in schools for LGBTQ students can offset psychosocial risks. Particularly, GSAs and supportive adults can help promote empowerment, resilience, and a sense of belongingness for students (Espelage et al., 2008; Lee, 2002; Russell et al., 2009; Toomey et al., 2011). GSA advisors are in a unique position to offer support to students, resolve conflicts, teach students about school policies, and foster a safe environment for students (Fetner & Kush, 2008; National Association of GSA Networks, 2011; Poynter & Tubbs, 2007). While they must work within the contexts of their environments, the visibility, stability, and position as GSA advisors in schools allow them to continue these actions over time.
CHAPTER III:

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 offers detailed information about the methodology for the study. Discussion about the study’s setting, participants, and data collection is provided. In addition, this chapter includes sections about procedures, research questions, and data analyses designed to investigate the experiences of GSA advisors. This study utilized qualitative case study methods to gain a more meaningful understanding of the perceptions and roles of GSA advisors.

**Purpose of the Dissertation Study**

The purpose of this study was to better understand GSAs and how GSA advisors fulfill their roles. Specifically, this study sought to identify how GSA advisors perceive their group’s mission, the obstacles they face, and the facilitators that help encourage their role in supporting LGBTQ students. As there is no standardized approach to GSA development and implementation, GSAs across the country may adopt different policies and practices for their groups. There is a notable gap in the literature investigating how GSA advisors work within their environments in order to support students toward achieving their GSA’s mission. In other words, it is unclear how GSA advisors work within, and possibly across, the constraints of their schools in order to fulfill their roles as GSA advisors. This study sought to examine the strategies employed, resources needed, and obstacles overcome by GSA advisors within their schools.
Research Questions

In order to identify how GSA advisors work within their environments to serve LGBTQ students, this study was guided by the following research questions:

Research Question One: What are GSA advisors’ perceptions of their GSA’s mission?

What is the mission of the GSA? In order for a GSA to fulfill its mission, students and advisors both function as part of the GSA. What are the roles of the students? What are the roles of the advisor?

Research Question Two: How do GSA advisors address environmental obstacles to their roles within GSAs?

How do GSA advisors perform their roles within the constraints, if any, of their environment? What strategies, resources, or combination thereof, if any, are used when GSA advisors perform their roles? Strategies refer the methods and skills utilized by GSA advisors in order to perform their roles. Resources refer to tangible and intangible supplies and supports needed to carry out their roles.

Research Question 3: How do GSA advisors address environmental facilitators to their roles within GSAs?

What environmental factors help facilitate the roles of GSA advisors? How do GSA advisors perform their roles with the support of these factors within their environment? What strategies, resources, or combination thereof, if any, are used to facilitate the roles of GSA advisors? Strategies may include actions (such as collaborating with colleagues) used to support their role. Resources may include tangible items (such as audiovisual equipment) to support their role.
Methodology of the Dissertation Study: Qualitative Case Study

Brief Overview of Qualitative Research

Given the limited research on GSA advisors, the use of qualitative methods was most fitting for the purpose of this study. Qualitative research is a broad approach of inquiry which aims to understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena within natural settings from participants’ perspectives (Merriam, 1998). According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), “qualitative research typically is enacted in naturalistic settings, draws on multiple methods that respect the humanity of the participants in the study, focuses on context, is emergent and evolving, and is fundamentally interpretive” (p. 2). Qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to understand individuals and their experiences along with the contexts in which their experiences take place (Merriam, 1998).

Philosophical assumptions undertaken with qualitative research include beliefs regarding ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (what counts as knowledge), axiology (the roles of values in research), and methodology (the research process) (Creswell, 2013). The ontological assumption of qualitative research supports the idea of multiple realities, recognizing that both the researcher and the individuals being studied construct different views of realities. The job of qualitative researchers is to conduct a study with the intent of reporting these multiple realities through the use of multiple forms of evidence such as using participants’ actual words and presenting different perspectives of participants. Epistemologically, qualitative research assumes knowledge is known through the subjective experiences of individuals. Therefore, when conducting a qualitative study, the researcher must attempt to get as close as possible to participants in the field (where participants live and work). This enables the researcher to understand the subjective, contextual nature of participants’ experiences and knowledge. The
axiological assumption of qualitative inquiry is characterized by the researcher’s recognition of research as laden with values and subject to biases. Researchers must reflect on their own positionalities within the research and admit the values and biases they bring to the research when presenting interpretations of findings. Finally, the methodology of qualitative research is “inducting, emerging, and shaped by the researcher’s experience in collecting and analyzing the data” (Creswell, 2013 p. 22).

Five major approaches to qualitative inquiry include narrative inquiry, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell, 2013). Narrative research collects stories revealing experiences and concepts of identity for the purpose of producing descriptions of individuals. Phenomenological studies focus on the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences. The basic purpose of a phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of its universal essence. Grounded theory studies move beyond descriptions in order to generate or discover a theory of a process, action, or interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants. Ethnographic research focuses on an entire culture-sharing group. The purpose of ethnographic research is to describe and interpret the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group in order to determine how the culture works. Finally, case study research, the approach applied in this dissertation study, involves studying a case, or cases, within a real-life, contemporary setting with the intent of developing rich, in-depth descriptions and major themes.

**Brief Overview of Case Study Research**

According to Creswell (2013), a case study is a qualitative approach to research in which a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) are
explored “through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case themes” (p. 97). The real-life bounded system and intensive descriptions and analyses are qualities which set case studies apart from other forms of qualitative inquiry such as narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, and ethnographic research methods. Qualitative case studies present an in-depth understanding of a case after the researcher collects multiple forms of qualitative data such as interviews, observations, and historical documents. Merriam (1998) explains that case studies are interested “in the process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation” (p. 19).

Case studies begin with the identification of a specific case such as an individual, small group, or organization. For example, in this current dissertation study, the group under investigation was high school GSA advisors. The intent of a case study may be either intrinsic, where an unusual case in and of itself needs to be described in detail, or instrumental, where the intent is to understand a specific issue, problem, or concern (Creswell, 2013). Through the collection of multiple forms of data, the researcher aims to present an in-depth understanding and a thick, rich description of the case. Following appropriate data analyses, the researcher presents complete findings that include a description of the case and themes or issues that were revealed as a result of the study.

A collective case study, or multiple case study as used in the current dissertation study, investigates multiple cases in order to allow the researcher to compare findings from different sources and gain insight into a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Multiple cases are selected in a collective case study to illustrate the issue in question which also allows the research to show different perspectives on the issue and compare cases. Yin (2003) recommends using the
logic of replication where the researcher follows the same procedures, or protocol, for each case. Generally, qualitative researchers are hesitant to generalize from one case to another as the contexts of cases differ (Creswell, 2013). However, through the utilization of multiple cases, cross-case analysis, and rich, thick descriptions, the possibility of generalizing qualitative findings is enhanced (Merriam, 1998).

**Rationale for Multiple Case Study**

According to Yin (2003), a case study is a form of empirical inquiry which is appropriate when considering the following criteria: (a) the study focuses on answering “how” and “why” questions; (b) the behavior of those involved in the study cannot be manipulated; (c) the researcher wants to reveal contextual conditions because they are relevant to the phenomenon; or (d) the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are unclear and difficult to separate. Stake (2006) writes, “one purpose of a multicase study is to illuminate some of these contexts, especially the problematic ones” while examining the situational experiences within these settings (p. 12). The current dissertation study aimed to reveal how GSA advisors are performing their role within the multiple contexts of their environment.

**Setting and Participants**

**Setting**

The current study took place within a single public school district in the Southeastern United States in the fall of 2016. In 2015, the community surrounding the school district had a population of approximately 900,000 and the median household income was about $60,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Most recent school data reported to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) was provided for the 2014-2015 school year. At that time, the school district
served nearly 200,000 students across over 100 schools and had more than 20,000 employees (NCES, 2016).

GSA advisors in four high schools (grades 9-12) participated in the study. According to NCES (2016), none of the schools receive Title I funding. School A had over 3,000 students, nearly half of the student population was Caucasian, and about a quarter of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. School B had nearly 4,000 students, more than half of the student population was Caucasian, and about a quarter of students received free or reduced lunch. School C had almost 3,000 students, more than half of the student population was Caucasian, and about 10% received free or reduced lunch. School D, the study’s only non-traditional school, had less than 1,000 students, less than a quarter of students were Caucasian, and over 25% qualified for free or reduced lunch.

Participants

Participant selection. Initial recruitment for participants began by searching through publicly accessible information (i.e., school websites). The school district’s high school websites were reviewed for information on GSAs. Across the over 20 high schools, about 75% listed a GSA on their Clubs and Activities page. Principals at each of these schools were contacted for approval prior to requesting an interview from advisors. Nine principals granted permission to contact advisors.

A brief summary of the study and a request to participate in an interview were sent to nine GSA advisors. Of these nine advisors, four were no longer serving as the school’s GSA advisor, one declined to participate, and four agreed to be interviewed. Four GSA advisor participants were recruited in order to allow the researcher to identify themes of individual cases as well as cross-case theme analysis (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998). While multiple adults
may assist with high school GSAs, only those who were listed at the primary advisor or sponsor were asked to participate in this study. For the sake of consistency and clarity, advisors are defined as the adults (for this study, only school professional staff were recruited) who are documented as the advisor to a GSA as established in official records such as organization charters.

After confirming their interest in the study via email, contact information was exchanged and a phone call was made to interviewees to schedule a meeting time. During this pre-interview phone call, the objective of the interview and overall study was provided to each participant as well as information about confidentiality, anonymity, and the ability to withdraw from the study at any time. During the in-person interview, informed consent was obtained from each participant which also allowed the use of audio recording (See Appendix A Informed Consent).

**Participant demographic information.** During the interview, basic demographic information about each participant and her school’s GSA was obtained. All four GSA advisors were Caucasian females with master’s degrees. All four GSAs met every other week (twice a month) for approximately one hour after school.

Advisor #1, a teacher for over 15 years, has been the primary advisor for her school’s GSA for the past four years. Her school’s GSA is about six years old. About ten students regularly attend meetings with the peak attendance at about 20 students.

Advisor #2, a teacher for over 25 years, is her GSA’s primary advisor. Advisor #2’s GSA has experienced regular turnover with advisors changing yearly. This has been Advisor #2’s first year as the primary GSA advisor, although she had occasionally helped as a co-sponsor in the past. Her GSA is at least seven years old, but detailed information prior to her employment at the
high school is unknown. About ten students regularly attend meetings with the peak attendance reaching about 40 students.

Advisor #3 has over 20 years of experience as an educator, formerly as a teacher and currently as a professional support specialist. Her GSA is about ten years old, and Advisor #3 has been the primary advisor since its establishment. Attendance at her school’s GSA ebbs and flows with about 35 to 40 students regularly attending meetings. At times, peak attendance has reached over 50 students.

Advisor #4 teaches in the study’s only non-traditional school. She has over ten years of teaching experience at the high school level. She has been her GSA’s primary advisor for the past two years. Her GSA is about five years old. Ten students attend regularly with peak attendance reaching about 25 students.

Procedures

Approval for Research

Prior to data collection, approval was secured from The University of Alabama’s Institutional Review Board. (See Appendix B for a copy of IRB Approval.) Local school district approval to conduct research was obtained through the district’s research prior to the recruitment of participants. (See Appendix C for a copy of school district IRB Approval.) Permission to contact advisors was granted by school principals for all participants.

Data Collection

After obtaining informed consent, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with advisors (See Appendix D Interview Guide) and through documents such as a GSA’s mission statement (when available). Interviews took place individually, after school hours, in person, and at each advisor’s school.
**Semi-structured interviews.** GSA advisors were interviewed individually by the researcher in semi-structured interviews lasting approximately one hour. All interviews took place at the advisor’s school, three were held immediately after school, and one was held in the afternoon during the advisor’s planning period. Interviews were recorded with the use of a Sony ICD-UX71 digital voice recorder and lasted from 45 minutes to one hour.

As semi-structured interviews are neither closed questionnaires nor everyday conversations, an interview guide (see Appendix D) was developed in order to address the research questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Interviews were conversational and led primarily by the participant. Questions listed on the interview guide were addressed at different points, but were not read in checklist form in order to allow for a free and flowing discussion. In addition to writing field notes during the interviews, all interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder for later transcription and analysis. In order to protect confidentiality, names of participants, students, and schools were changed during transcription.

Brinkmann and Kvale’s (2015) seven stages of an interview inquiry serves as a guide for the interview process of the current study. The authors detail the interview process in the following stages:

1. **Thematizing.** Thematizing refers to the development of the research questions and theoretical orientation of the study. The process involves clarifying the study’s purpose, reviewing existing literature on the subject matter being studied, and becoming familiar with the interview process. Familiarization with the interview process includes deciding which techniques for data collection and analysis should be employed in order to answer the research questions. For the current dissertation study, this process took place prior to the proposal of this study after an exhaustive review
of the literature on high school GSAs. The purpose of the study, research questions, and methodology were all driven by previous research examining GSAs.

2. **Designing.** The design phase requires the researcher to plan the design of the study before the interview process. This stage is completed in order to identify how knowledge will be obtained and any implications of the study. After reviewing existing literature and developing research questions, qualitative methods emerged as the most appropriate form of inquiry for the dissertation study. Specifically, case study methods were selected based on Yin’s (2003) criteria.

3. **Interviewing.** Interviews should be conducted with a guide (i.e., interview guide) with a reflective approach to the knowledge sought. Interview questions may include introductory, follow-up, probing, specifying, direct, indirect, structuring, and interpreting questions as well as moments of silence to allow the interviewee a chance to reflect on information. In addition, interpersonal relations during the interview must be taken into consideration.

   For the current dissertation study, the interview guide was developed to align directly with the research questions. For the first research question, descriptive questions were developed in order to get general information on the GSA, its purpose, and the role of its advisor. For the second research question (examining barriers), descriptive questions were developed as well follow-up probes to be asked as needed. Following descriptive questions, open-ended questions asked how advisors navigate barriers and what helps them do so. For the third research question, descriptive questions were developed with follow-up probes in order to identify the factors that help support their roles. Questions and follow-up probes were not asked in checklist
form as interviews were conversational. Many topics were naturally addressed over
the course of the interview. Any questions that were not addressed already, were
asked toward the end of the interview. Thus, some questions were asked out of order
compared to the Interview Guide. (See Appendix D for Interview Guide.)

4. **Transcribing.** Transcriptions are conversions of oral conversations into a written text.
The process is important to the interview process as it prepares the researcher for the
data analysis phase. Researchers must be mindful of the implications of transcribing
conversations into written form as verbatim recording may be taken out of context,
misinterpreted, or compromise the anonymity of a participant. Transcriptions of
interviews took place within one week following the interview. Interviews were
transcribed verbatim into Word files.

5. **Analyzing.** Appropriate modes of analysis for the interviews and research topic are
selected during this phase. Analyses may be focused on meaning, language, or may
be eclectic. Data for this study were analyzed through two cycles of coding. First,
data in vivo code and versus codes were identified. The second cycle of coding
identified holistic and focused codes. Codes were then reviewed by a second
reviewer, followed by categorization, then theme development. The specific methods
for data analysis were primarily guided by Saldaña’s (2013) recommendations and
are described in more detail later in this chapter.

6. **Verifying.** Validity (whether the interview investigates what is intended to be
investigated), reliability (consistency and trustworthiness of the results), and
generalizability of interview findings must be identified. “Issues of reliability and
validity go beyond technical or conceptual concerns and raise epistemological
questions about the objectivity of knowledge and the nature of interview research” (p. 278). In order to address concerns with reliability and trustworthiness, codes were examined by a second reviewer.

7. Reporting. Reporting involves selecting and condensing the interpreted texts for readers. There is no standard method of reporting results of interviews, but general guidelines include using quotes, dialogues, and metaphors. Quotes provide readers an impression of the interview content and exemplify the material used for analysis. Dialogues offer readers a glimpse into the personal interactions of the interview conversation. Metaphors “amplify and depict, rather than simply describe social phenomena” (p. 322-323). In addition to presenting the views of interviewees, an “interview report is itself a social construction in which the author’s choice of writing style and literary devices provide a specific view on the subjects’ lived world” (p. 301). The results of this study have synthesized all of the participants’ view in order to offer a more cohesive view of GSA advisors. However, each GSA is unique and each advisor has had individual experiences. In order to preserve the voices of participants, direct quotes are also reported.

Documents. The documents collected for the dissertation study included information listed on the school’s website related the GSA. Each of the four schools had a webpage for its individual GSA. Hard copies were printed for additional data analysis with any identifying information redacted in order to maintain confidentiality.

Field notes and analytic memos. In order to properly convey the meanings of participants’ experiences, field notes served as a supplement to the audio recording of interviews. During the interview process, descriptive field notes were written by the researcher to help
capture the essence of experiences. Field notes emphasize significant features, as determined by
the note-taker, within the setting of the research (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). With each
interview in the dissertation study, additional notes were needed in order to capture more than
the literal language of participants via audio, such as the physical space, body language, and
facial expressions. These notes helped inform later interpretations and findings.

Brief analytic, or thematic, memos were written throughout the data collection and
analysis process (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Saldaña, 2013). However, these memos were not
use a data collection method. Analytic memos allow researchers to develop analytic leads and
insights early in the fieldwork process (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). This process is not
intended to produce a final, systematic analysis (which occurs later during the data analysis
stage); rather, it provides insights, directions, and guidance for ongoing fieldwork by identifying
and exploring initial theoretical directions and possibilities. After composing field notes during
and immediately after interviews, further analytic leads with memos were developed by the
researcher. Analytic memos were a way to allow the researcher to self-reflect on the ongoing
data collection process and keep notes on what works, and does not work, with the methods.
During the data analysis phase, memo writing also serves as a code- and category-generating
method (Saldaña, 2013).

Data Analysis for the Dissertation Study: General Overview

Creswell (2013) describes data analysis as an ongoing process throughout the research
project. The exploratory nature of this qualitative multiple case study is content-driven and calls
for codes and themes to emerge from the data rather than confirmatory hypothesis testing. As
data were collected for the dissertation study, interviews were recorded and the information was
stored electronically, transcribed verbatim into Word files, and organized by the primary
researcher. Following the organization of data, codes were generated, organized into categories, and themes were identified in response to each research question.

Interpreting data involves thinking beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Following the development of codes, organization of categories, and the formation of themes, final interpretations take place as the themes are organized into “larger units of abstraction to make sense of the data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 187). For a case study, forming themes requires the researcher to interpret the data more broadly, identify patterns within and across cases, make generalizations about the cases about what was learned, and present data with in-depth portrayals of cases through the use of narratives, dialogues, figures, and tables in the final report.

Framework for Coding

In qualitative inquiry, a code is typically a word or short phrase that assigns a “summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2013, p.3). Data from the dissertation study included interview transcripts and documents. Emergent, or inductive, codes were developed during the analysis stage. Inductive codes are ones that are developed by the researcher from directly examining the data. The use of inductive coding allows the researcher to glean new insights unique to a set of data. Inductive coding took place in two phases. Data were initially coded during the First Cycle where coding methods included identifying in vivo codes and versus codes. The Second Cycle of coding identified holistic codes and used focused coding methods in order to categorize the coded data.

**First cycle: In vivo and versus coding.** In vivo coding is appropriate for qualitative studies that prioritize and honor the participants’ voices (Saldaña, 2013). In vivo codes may be
generated line-by-line or for every few sentences. Several codes may be generated; however, researcher reflection through the use of analytic memos as well as second cycle coding will condense in vivo codes and provide a reanalysis of the initial coding phase.

Versus coding identifies dichotomous terms of individuals, groups, social systems, and organizations (Saldaña, 2013). This form of coding is appropriate when qualitative data sets suggest conflicts or competing goals within, among, and between participants. As this study examines barriers and conflicts related to GSA advisors, versus coding can organize these conflicts. For example, conflicts between school policies and the strategies employed by GSA advisors may be a versus code identified.

**Second cycle: Holistic and focused coding.** Second cycle coding methods are used to reorganize and reorganize the data coded through first cycle methods (Saldaña, 2013). The goal during the second cycle is to develop a sense of categorical and thematic organization from the potentially large array of first cycle codes. Holistic coding attempts to grasp broad topics or issues in the data by examining the whole rather than analyzing data line-by-line. Holistic coding is useful when it is applied to “self-standing units of data” such as documents as well as larger units of data, such as excerpts from an interview (Saldaña, 2013, p. 142). Focused coding complements holistic coding as it categorizes data based on thematic or conceptual similarities. Focused coding searches for the most frequent or significant codes in order to develop the most salient categories. This process is more analytic as it requires decision-making about which initial codes make the most analytic sense when organized into categories (Saldaña, 2013).

**Trustworthiness and Second Reviewer**

The terms validity, reliability, objectivity, and generalizability are ones more commonly used within the realm of quantitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Standards of
trustworthiness within qualitative research typically include credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility of a study establishes that the study indeed investigates what it purports to investigate. Dependability refers to the consistency of findings. Confirmability suggests the findings could be corroborated by another individual apart from the primary researcher. Transferability refers to the applicability of the findings within other contexts or settings.

In order to increase trustworthiness of the findings in the dissertation study, steps were taken to address these areas. Credibility and transferability were addressed by clearly defining the context of the study, its participants, and methodology, as stated earlier in this chapter. During the coding process, qualitative researchers may employ additional raters to monitor consistency of the emergent codes. Blind review coders are asked to check data for consistency in the developing meanings. In an effort to obtain dependability and confirmability of the emergent findings, data were reviewed across multiple stages, including initial impressions in field notes and memos as well as two cycles of coding. Further, a second reviewer was asked to review results of second cycle coding and categorizing to ensure credibility of the emergent codes and clarify meanings that were developed.

Overall, the triangulation of information gathered through interviews and documents, the inclusion of impressions from field notes and memos, the multistep data coding process, outside review of emergent findings, and the detailed description of the study were in place in order to increase trustworthiness of the results.

**Theming the Data**

Themes are the outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflections (Creswell, 2013; Saldaña, 2013). Broad units of information that consist of several codes are aggregated to
form a common idea: a theme. Manifest level themes are ones which are directly observable in the information while latent level themes are those which are underlying the phenomenon and require more inductive reasoning to be identified. Thus, themes are the product of interpretation by the researcher. Themes synthesize the findings revealed from codes offer a more global view of the data, and are reported to answer the research questions.

**Interpreting the Data**

While data are interpreted by the researcher earlier in the analysis process, a final interpretation involves making sense of the data as a whole and identifies the lessons learned (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, the research relies as much as possible on the participants’ view of the situation and focuses on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the settings of the participants. This form of interpretation also calls for researchers to “position themselves” in the research and acknowledge how their interpretation is a shaped by their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences (Creswell, 2013, p. 25).

**Data Analysis for the Dissertation Study: Specific Procedures**

The following sections describe the general procedures used following the collection of data for the current study. Interviews were recorded with the use of a digital audio recorder. Brief field notes were written immediately following semi-structured interviews followed by analytic memos a few days following interviews. Interviews were coded across two cycles of coding. First, in vivo and versus codes were identified, then holistic and focused codes were identified during the second cycle of coding. A second reviewer was asked to examine developed codes. Following the feedback of a second reviewer, codes were organized into broader categories. Finally, emergent themes were identified to offer a more global view of the data and answer this study’s research questions.
Pre-Analysis Procedures

Field notes were written by hand by the researcher during and immediately following the interview. These field notes were not used as actual data from participants, but served as memory aids and noted initial impressions of interviews. Information from field notes were embedded within analytic memos which were written within two to three days after interviews. The use of analytic memos served as a reference during the coding, categorizing, and theming processes in order to generate the most salient emergent findings while preserving the meanings of participants’ literal words.

Interviews were recorded with the use of a Sony ICD-UX71 digital voice recorder. Files were immediately uploaded to the primary researcher’s computer following interviews. Interviews were transcribed verbatim into Word files within one week after interviews. After all interviews were transcribed, first cycle coding began.

First Cycle: In Vivo and Versus Coding

The first cycle of coding utilized in vivo and versus coding methods as described by Saldaña (2013). Codes may be a single word, short phrases, or extended narratives that capture meaning or characteristics of the data. Saldaña notes that in vivo coding may also be called “literal coding” or “verbatim coding” as codes are generated line-by-line or for every few sentences (p. 93). Versus coding identifies dichotomous terms of individuals, groups, social systems, and organizations (Saldaña, 2013). Interview transcripts and website information were read line-by-line and several codes were initially generated by the researcher, with many codes being literal chunks of participants’ interviews. (See Appendix F for First Cycle In Vivo Codes and Appendix G for First Cycle Versus Codes.)
The goal of the first cycle was to generate codes and there was no specific attempt to answer each research question. Instead, notable words, phrases, and statements from the participants’ interviews were identified. Each interview was coded once during the first cycle; thus, in vivo coding and versus coding took place simultaneously during the first coding cycle. Many of the codes identified during the first cycle were large units of data with several sentences and short paragraphs identified as single codes in addition to simple sentences. Identified units of data were coded as either in vivo or versus codes.

Memo writing also continued as potential categories became conceptualized with the intention of refining codes during the second coding phase and developing categories afterward. The second cycle of coding targeted more specific codes in an effort to both organize the data and most accurately capture participants’ meanings.

Second Cycle: Holistic and Focused Coding

Second Cycle coding methods are used to reorganize the data coded through first cycle methods (Saldaña, 2013). The goal during the second cycle is to develop a sense of categorical and thematic organization from the potentially large array of first cycle codes. Holistic coding attempts to grasp broad topics or issues in the data by examining the whole rather than analyzing data line-by-line. Holistic coding is useful when it is applied to “self-standing units of data” such as documents as well as larger units of data, such as excerpts from an interview (Saldaña, 2013, p. 142). Units of data that were previously coded as either in vivo or versus were reorganized by the researcher under more holistic coding labels. For example, many first cycle codes identified referenced GSA officers; these codes were reorganized under the holistic code of student leadership. All first cycle codes were recoded and listed under a holistic coding label. (See
Focused coding complements holistic coding as it categorizes data based on thematic or conceptual similarities. Focused coding searches for the most frequent or significant codes in order to develop the most salient categories. This process is more analytic as it requires decision-making about which initial codes make the most analytic sense when organized into categories (Saldaña, 2013). Holistic codes were reorganized with focused coding methods and arranged under generalized descriptive phrases. These focused codes were then organized categorically based on common features after the second cycle. (See Appendix J for a list of focused codes and Appendix K for segments of focused coding data.) Again, memo writing took place to keep emerging categorical and thematic impressions organized.

Second Reviewer

In an effort to ensure trustworthiness, or reliability, of the results, a second reviewer was asked to review codes after the second cycle of coding was complete. Assistance from a second reviewer, a doctoral student in educational psychology, was requested prior to the collection of data. At that time, an overview of the study and methodology were shared. After focused codes were identified by the researcher, the list of codes was sent to the second reviewer.

The second reviewer was asked to review focused codes to determine if they made analytic sense and were appropriately listed under a descriptive label. There were no discrepancies in how codes were identified and organized as the second reviewer agreed with the developed list of codes. However, the second reviewer was concerned with the clarity and succinctness of labels used. For example, Adolescents, Motivation of Students, and Student Leadership are all labels that describe student characteristics. Per the second reviewer’s request,
codes were relabeled with more specific tags (i.e., “Adolescents” became “Student Characteristics: Adolescents”). Of the 29 second cycle focused codes identified, eight remained the same while 21 codes were more specifically tagged with targeted labels. This generated six new targeted labels for codes: Mission, Roles of Advisors, Support from Colleagues, Culture of Community, Culture of School, and Student Characteristics. Please refer to Appendix L for a comparative list of focused codes before and after the second coder’s review.

Aside from targeting labels more specifically, the second reviewer did not have concerns with the emergent focused codes identified. The process of tagging focused codes into more generalized groups was helpful in laying the foundation for the identification of categories.

Categorizing Codes

A category is a group of codes that shares common features as identified by the researcher (Saldaña, 2013). Categorizing of codes is fundamentally interpretive and emergent during the data analysis process. Rather than organizing data under preconceived labels, data are coded multiple times. Then, emergent categories and themes are generated after multiple cycles of coding. For the current study, focused codes were reorganized under broader descriptive categories based on features of the particular GSA, community, school, students, and advisor herself. The categories developed were organized by label; thus, data were organized across cases. (See Appendix M for a list of categories.)

Theming the Data

Themes are the outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflections (Creswell, 2013; Saldaña, 2013). Themes synthesize the findings revealed from codes, offer a more global view of the data, and are reported to answer the research questions. After all data were coded and organized into categories, memos that were written throughout the analysis phase were reviewed.
Recurrent patterns within the data were identified which helped inform thematic development in response to the research questions. The intention of the theming the data was to answer each research question.

Themes were generated to be representative of groups of data, capture the meanings of participants’ literal words, and offer answers to the research questions. The themes that developed were emergent throughout the analysis phase as the data were not organized into preconceived categories. Data from all cases were integrated into categories and emergent themes were generated for each research question. Thus, each research question’s themes include views from all participants in an attempt to synthesize finding across all four cases. While many themes were common across cases, some nuances in experiences arose. Remarkable differences between GSA advisors were identified and are reported within the themes in Chapter 4.

**Researcher Positionality**

In a qualitative study, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis; as a human instrument, mistakes may be made and personal biases may interfere with the research (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative researchers must be sensitive to their personal biographies and how it shapes a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). As the principal investigator of this study, it is important that I recognize my own personal background and how it may influence my data collection, analysis, and interpretation of findings. LGBTQ issues in education are incredibly important to me; however, when I think about such issues and the experiences of LGBTQ students, I relate more to the roles of the adults working with and for these students. I believe the role of supportive adults in a child’s life can significantly impact his or her development. To me, GSA advisors and school personnel are in a position to not only do their jobs, but to also leave a lasting impression on students. I also believe that schools are social
institutions; while learning is the goal of education, schooling is a process that is influenced by all individuals within schools. When dealing with sensitive topics, particularly sexual identity and orientation, I believe social norms have a strong influence on how issues are discussed and addressed. While some individuals may exist in more open environments, others are more constrained to the conservative social norms and boundaries placed upon them. I believe GSA advisors are in a particularly critical role as adults who recognize their social constraints while also addressing the needs of LGBTQ students.

Throughout this process, I began my career as a school psychologist in a public school district. As this study progressed, I began to realize the institutional barriers and bureaucratic procedures in place which may hinder the work of those in the field. While I understand these policies are in place to protect students, I also was aware of my personal bias in believing these procedures were primarily in place to protect the district above the individuals within it. As a researcher, I made efforts to recognize that I carry my own biases while also undertaking actions to mediate such biases by recognizing my own personal opinions, recruiting multiple cases, validating responses with a second reviewer, and developing thick, rich descriptions of the data in order to depict an accurate picture of experiences of participants.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to better understand GSAs and how GSA advisors fulfill their roles. Specifically, this study sought to explore a) how GSA advisors view the purpose of their GSA and their roles within it, b) obstacles to their role, and c) factors that help support their role. This study utilized qualitative research methods to conduct a multiple case study in order to gain a more meaningful understanding of the perceptions and roles of GSA advisors. Four GSA advisors were recruited from a large suburban school district in the Southeastern United States.
Specific types of data collection included semi-structured interviews and document analysis in order to answer the research questions. Data were analyzed with two cycles of coding (in vivo and versus coding first followed by holistic and focused coding methods). Trustworthiness of the data was addressed through the use of a second reviewer of codes. After two cycles of coding, categories were developed, followed by the generation of global themes.
CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

The purpose of the current study was to explore the experiences of GSA advisors in order to better understand their roles as well as how they are able to fulfill their roles. Specifically, this study explored a) how advisors view the purpose of their GSA and their role within it, b) obstacles to their role, and c) factors that help facilitate their role. Participants for this study included four GSA advisors at four high schools within a single school district. Each advisor participated in a single interview. Brinkmann and Kvale’s (2015) seven stages of an interview inquiry served as a guide for the interview process of the current study. Group descriptions from school websites were also included in the analysis.

As recommended by Saldaña (2009), two cycles of coding took place. First, in vivo and versus codes were identified followed by holistic and focused codes. After the second cycle of coding, findings were reviewed by a second rater for consistency. Comments from the second rater revealed quotes were coded logically, but some codes could be clarified by noting what the codes were describing. (For example, motivation, leadership, and being an adolescent are all student characteristics. Or, being an ally, monitor, and supporter are all advisor characteristics.) Following feedback from the second reviewer, codes were revised with categorical labels for clarity which resolved any discrepancies between my coding and that of the second rater. Codes were then organized into broader categories, followed by emergent themes. (See Appendix E for a list of codes and Appendix M for a list of categories). In order to answer the research questions,
emergent themes were identified across cases with the most salient themes presented below. Any particularly remarkable differences experienced between advisors were identified and are reported within the themes.

**Research Questions**

**Research Question One: What are GSA advisors’ perceptions of their GSA’s mission?**

What is the mission of the GSA? In order for a GSA to fulfill its mission, students and advisors both function as part of the GSA. What are the roles of the students? What are the roles of the advisor?

**Research Question Two: How do GSA advisors address environmental obstacles to their roles within GSAs?**

What environmental barriers prevent GSA advisors from performing their roles? How do GSA advisors perform their roles within the constraints of their environment? What strategies, resources, or combination thereof, if any, are used to overcome barriers? Strategies may include actions undertaken (such as collaborating with colleagues) to support their role. Resources may include tangible items (such as audiovisual equipment) to support their role.

**Research Question Three: How do GSA advisors address environmental facilitators to their roles within GSAs?**

What environmental factors help facilitate the roles of GSA advisors? How do GSA advisors perform their roles with the support of these factors within their environment? What strategies, resources, or combination thereof, if any, are used to facilitate the roles of GSA advisors? Strategies may include actions (such as collaborating with colleagues) used to support their role. Resources may include tangible items (such as audiovisual equipment) to support their role.
Data Analysis Results Prior to the Development of Themes

Prior to the generation of themes, all data were transcribed and coded over two cycles of coding. Following the second cycle of coding, a second coder reviewed codes in an attempt to ensure trustworthiness and increase the quality of the data analyses. Then, data were organized into broader units of categories across cases. Analytic memos were written throughout the data collection process to keep ideas organized and document impressions from the data. Coding and categorizing of the data was an emergent process that took place without the use of preconceived categorical labels. Further, all analytic steps prior to the generation of themes were applied to all of the research questions. Categories ultimately helped inform the development of themes. Results of thematic analysis are included later in this chapter.

Results of First Cycle: In Vivo and Versus Coding

The first cycle of coding utilized in vivo and versus coding methods as described by Saldaña (2013). Interview transcripts and website information were read line-by-line and several codes were initially generated with many codes being literal chunks of participants’ interviews. The goal of the first cycle was to generate codes for each interview and did not specifically attempt to answer each research question with preconceived categories. Instead, notable words, phrases, and statements were identified.

Each interview was coded once during the first cycle; thus, in vivo coding and versus coding took place simultaneously during the first coding cycle. Many of the codes identified during the first cycle were large units of data with several sentences and short paragraphs identified as single codes in addition to simple sentences. Larger units of data were coded as a singular code in order to preserve the integrity of participants’ meanings. In an effort to avoid
taking literal words out of context, both short and large units of data were identified during the first cycle of coding. Identified units of data were coded as either in vivo or versus codes.

For Advisor #1, 70 in vivo codes and 11 versus codes were identified. For Advisor #2, 56 in vivo and 12 versus codes emerged. For Advisor #3, 76 in vivo and 24 versus codes developed. Finally, for Advisor #4, 73 in vivo and 18 versus codes were identified. Overall, a greater number of in vivo codes emerged. However, the simple quantity of codes generated does not truly reflect the data. Segments of codes ranged from short sentences of two to three words to longer narratives when advisors were sharing various experiences. For segments of data, please refer to Appendix F for First Cycle In Vivo Codes and Appendix G for First Cycle Versus Codes.

Memo writing also continued as potential categories became conceptualized with the intention of refining codes during the second coding phase and developing categories afterward. The second cycle of coding targeted more specific codes in an effort to both organize the data and most accurately capture participants’ intended meanings.

Results of Second Cycle: Holistic and Focused Coding

Second Cycle coding methods are used to reorganize and reorganize the data coded through First Cycle methods (Saldaña, 2013). The goal during the Second Cycle was to develop a sense of categorical and thematic organization from the large array of First Cycle codes. Units of data that were previously coded as either in vivo or versus were reorganized under more holistic coding labels. Thus, codes were generated across cases for the second cycle. For example, many first cycle codes identified referenced GSA officers; these codes were reorganized under the holistic code of student leadership. All first cycle codes were recoded and listed under a holistic coding label. The goal of holistic coding was to shift away from analyzing
each advisor’s interview and to move toward integrating the findings across all four interviews. A total of 31 holistic codes emerged from this process. (See Appendix H for a list of holistic codes and Appendix I for segments of holistic coding data.)

Focused coding complements holistic coding as it categorizes data based on thematic or conceptual similarities. Focused coding searches for the most frequent or significant codes in order to develop the most salient categories. This process is more analytic as it requires decision-making about which initial codes make the most analytic sense when organized into categories (Saldaña, 2013). Holistic codes were reorganized with focused coding methods and arranged under generalized descriptive phrases. Thus, during the second cycle of coding, holistic codes were identified first followed by focused codes. The goal of the second cycle of coding was to begin to get a sense of thematic organization with the intention of ultimately answering the research questions. Twenty-nine focused emerged following second cycle of coding. Please refer to Appendix J for a comparative list of the 31 holistic and 29 focused second cycle codes. See Appendix K for segments of focused coding data.

In addition, analytic memos were continuously written throughout the analysis phase in order to keep emerging categorical and thematic impressions organized.

Second Reviewer

In an effort to ensure trustworthiness of the results, a second reviewer was asked to review codes after the second cycle of coding was complete. After focused codes were identified, that list of codes was sent to the second reviewer. Segments of codes were organized under focused code labels with additional notations denoting which advisor reported statements. The second coder was asked to review focused codes to determine if they made analytic sense and were appropriately listed under a descriptive label. With regard to intercoder agreement, the
second reviewer had no concerns with how codes were identified and organized under focused code labels.

The second reviewer did have concerns with the clarity and succinctness of labels used. For example, Adolescents, Motivation of Students, and Student Leadership are all labels that describe student characteristics. Per the second reviewer’s request, codes were relabeled with more specific tags (i.e., “Adolescents” became “Student Characteristics: Adolescents”). Of the 29 second cycle focused codes identified, eight remained the same while 21 codes were more specifically tagged with targeted labels. This generated six new targeted labels for codes: Mission, Roles of Advisors, Support from Colleagues, Culture of Community, Culture of School, and Student Characteristics. Please refer to Appendix L for the comparative list of initially identified focused codes and focused codes following the second coder’s review.

Aside from targeting labels more specifically, the second reviewer agreed with all other elements of the emergent focused codes. The feedback from the second reviewer was applied to the focused codes. The number of focused codes (29) did not change nor did the coded segments of data; however, clearer coding labels were identified. This process was helpful in laying the foundation for the identification of categories.

**Categorizing Codes**

A category is a group of codes that shares common features as identified by the researcher (Saldaña, 2013). Categorizing of codes is fundamentally interpretive and emergent during the data analysis process. For the current study, focused codes were reorganized under broader descriptive categories based on features of the particular GSA, community, school, students, and advisor herself. Focused codes identified after the second cycle were organized categorically based on common features after the second cycle. Thus, data were categorically
organized across cases. The 29 focused codes generated were organized under five categories: GSA Characteristics, Role of Advisor, Community Factors, School Factors, and Student Factors. (See Appendix M for a list of categories and codes organized under categories.)

Again, analytic memos were also written throughout the analysis phase in order to document and organize emerging thematic impressions from the data.

**Theming the Data**

A product of interpretation by the researcher, themes are the outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflections (Creswell, 2013; Saldaña, 2013). Themes synthesize the findings revealed from codes, offer a more global view of the data, and are reported to answer the research questions. After reviewing focused codes, categories, and analytic memos, themes were generated from these sources. (See to Appendix N for a list of themes with associated categories and codes.) Major thematic findings were generated in response to each research question for this study and are reported below.

**Theme Results for Research Question One**

**Interview Questions and Other Data for Research Question One**

In order to answer the first research question, the following descriptive questions were included in the interview guide: 1) How would you describe the purpose or mission of your GSA? 2) How do you describe your role as a GSA advisor? 3) How would you describe a typical GSA meeting?

In addition to descriptive questions, available documents were used to address this research question. Documents included information about individual GSAs listed on their school websites. For two schools, websites included a written mission. One school’s GSA page
included a brief overview describing GSAs in general while one schools GSA page only listed
the upcoming meeting time and links to outside resources (e.g., GLSEN).

Results of Theming the Data

With regard to their mission, three major themes encompass the perceptions of a GSA’s
mission across all four advisors in this study. Four categories (GSA Characteristics, Role of
Advisor, Community Factors, School Factors, and Student Factors) were associated with the
emergent themes. (See Appendix O for a list of codes and categories associated with themes for
research question one.) These three themes are as follows: the GSA’s framework, the roles of
students, and the roles of advisors. Consistent with the GSA Network’s (2011) types of GSAs,
advisors in this study reported that GSA frameworks may be social, support, activist, or a
combination. Salient roles of students across all four GSAs include establishing the GSA,
running the GSA, and communicating with school personnel. Roles of advisors in all four GSAs
include monitoring students, supporting students, and communicating with students and
administrators. Based on the results of the current study, when these activities take place, a GSA
is able to run most effectively and work toward its mission.

Theme one: Framework of GSA. The first theme for research question one was
associated with four categories: GSA Characteristics, Role of Advisor, School Factors, and
Student Factors. Associated codes included: Mission: Support Type, Mission: Activist Type,
Mission: Social Type, Mission: Ambiguity of Mission, School-Sanctioned Group, Student-Run
Group, Meetings, Navigating Rules and Regulations,, Culture of School: Facilitators, Student
Characteristics: Motivation, Student Characteristics: Leadership, and Student Characteristics:
Communication. (See Appendix O for a list of codes and categories associated with research
question one.)
As described in Chapter 2, GSAs may be broadly defined into three major types: social, support, and activist (Fetner & Kush, 2008; National Association of GSA Networks, 2011). These types are not mutually exclusive and may overlap within a GSA. This overlap was evident for the four GSAs in this study. Advisor #1, Advisor #2, Advisor #3, and Advisor #4 all described their GSAs as support, social, and activist types of groups.

Findings of the current study suggest that the orientation of a GSA appears fluid and adapts depending on the needs and desires of the students. When students were motivated to advocate within the community, a more activist-type orientation emerged. When students are craving time to simply relax and socialize, a more social-type orientation emerged. Overall, however, the support-type emerged as the most dominant and consistently visible purpose of all four GSAs. Each GSA was devoted to offering a safe place for students as its top priority.

**Support type.** When advisors described their GSA in support-type roles, it became clear that students were able to freely discuss topics and issues they are currently dealing with when a support-type framework is adopted. In addition, all advisors made it clear that students’ confidentiality and emotional safety are always protected. The GSA advisors created spaces where students know they can speak freely without the fear of judgment, they do not have to share anything beyond the limits of their comfort, and they are protected by confidentiality. Students may openly share their opinions and express their views, but are not forced to do so nor are they judged for doing so. Across GSAs, conversations on topics of interest appear to naturally develop during meetings. Often, students are prepared to share opinions and engage in conversation. Other times, ideas for conversation starters are developed prior to meetings. As one advisor stated,
Sometimes they’ll show a five-minute video and just say, “what do you think?” And that's all you have to say for the rest of the meeting because there's enough. But you also have to be prepared for what if nobody says anything.

**Activist-type.** For Advisor #4’s GSA, the support framework takes a less dominant role due primarily to the culture of her school in general. As a specialized academic-focused school, the students who attend Advisor #4's high school are extremely motivated and are voluntarily enrolled in the school. The curriculum standards are remarkably high and students strive to do well. These factors make for an atypical academic environment with an exceptionally positive climate. Common challenges faced by students at typical high schools are not as pronounced at Advisor #4's high school. This enables Advisor #4's high school’s GSA to adopt a more activist-type orientation, with education among the group’s students and advocacy within the community taking the dominant role. Advisor #4 explained,

[They can] talk about those deeper meanings because they're not having to do triage on kids who have been verbally hurt or whatever. It’s not perfect. I’m sure they face things that they don't bring to club… But, you think about like a fight in the lunchroom. That does not happen here. Bullying: that would never happen here.

The desire to advocate for causes and educate others, however, was not unique for Advisor #4’s GSA. All four advisors reported their students were invested in learning more about the LGBTQ community and were involved in community events, particularly Pride. One caveat that emerged, however, was the difficulty engaging in such a large-scale community event as a school-sanctioned group. For each GSA, students attended Pride as community members rather than as their school’s GSA. School policy and liability issues prevent students from participating in Pride as a school group. Attending any event as a school group would require
parental permission, prearranged transportation, safety contingency plans, chaperones, and other factors to support a trip. Moreover, if the students were to attend Pride as a school group, their school would ultimately be responsible for any issues that may arise. All of the advisors stated they were supportive of their students attending Pride, but were not in a position to facilitate that type of activity. School policy preventing advisors from facilitating an off-campus field trip may be viewed as restrictive for advisors in this study. However, by limiting the actions of advisors, schools enable the students to initiate their own advocacy efforts. Although the advisors in this study were unable to assist students with organized advocacy, the restrictions placed on the advisors gives the students an opportunity to organize as a group to engage in local advocacy, albeit as a community-based group rather than a school-based group.

**Social-type.** Overall, advisors wanted their GSAs to be productive with clear agendas for meetings. However, as the group is student-led, advisors noticed a more social-type of framework is adopted at times. Nonetheless, even at times when the group appeared to be more of a social group, the students were still in attendance as they share a common bond. In the words of one advisor,

> And every now and then, they'll just be like, ‘can we just have a meeting just to have pizza and talk?’ And I'm like, “This is you. Yes, if you think that's what people want and what they need, absolutely. We just can't do that every meeting because there needs to be some purpose, but we also don't need it to be incredibly structured.”

**Documentation of mission.** With regard to formal mission statements, advisors in this study were generally unenthusiastic about their GSA’s formal descriptions. Any available documents were analyzed, but documents were limited to the GSA’s webpage. This revealed only basic information regarding the group (i.e., advisor name, meeting date/time, and external
website links). Two GSAs had a small blurb; however, this was essentially pieced together from GLSEN’s description of a GSA as well as templates from different schools. Although accurate, the written descriptions of GSAs appeared generic, for a lack of a better term. While the advisors were able to describe the activities of their GSA with great detail, developing a clear, written document is ultimately up to the students.

Presence of a formal mission statement notwithstanding, participants in the present study provided statements to support that GSAs offer a safe place and open forum for LGBTQ students and their allies. Participants reported that students are able to share their thoughts and feelings in an inclusive environment under the protection of confidentiality. Students are also able to engage with like-minded students as well as students whose opinions may be different. The GSAs in the current study appear to offer students an open forum to cope with issues others may be similarly facing as well as expand their knowledge by giving every student, with any perspective, a voice.

**Theme two: Roles of students.** The second theme for research question one was associated with three categories: GSA Characteristics, Role of Advisor, and Student Factors. Associated codes included: Ambiguity of Mission, Student-Run Group, Inclusive Group, Meetings, Role of Advisor: Communication, Student Characteristics: Motivation, Student Characteristics: Leadership, and Student Characteristics: Communication. (See Appendix O for a list of codes and categories associated with research question one.)

**Establish the purpose.** As stated above, the purpose or framework of a GSA is fluid depending on the wants and needs of students. Therefore, a primary role of the students is to establish the purpose of the GSA. GSAs are not only student-led; they are student-initiated with the very inception of a GSA being the product of students. Advisors are approached to sponsor the group, but the establishment, goals, and activities of the group are designed by the students.
The purpose of the GSA may be explicitly outlined by way of a written mission statement, or may evolve more implicitly with the advisors adapting to the needs of the students. This may present as a challenge for advisors as the purpose is not always clearly defined. As one advisor stated,

“Really our biggest obstacle is at the beginning. And it's like, what do we want our rules to be? And we decide kind of as a group. Respect is always huge.”

**Run the group.** As a student-led group, activities are driven by the students. While the students are the decision-makers, all four of the study’s participants noted that each GSA found it necessary and helpful to establish some sort of organized body of leadership within the group. Two advisors noted that their GSAs that opted for traditional officer roles (e.g., president, vice president, secretary), while one advisor report that her school’s GSA employed co-presidents. One advisor described their leadership body as an “advisory board” with no defined labels, but rather a collaborative effort to drive the group toward its goals.

The findings of the current study suggest there is no clear-cut approach to defining leaders within a GSA; however, it appears common and helpful for GSAs to adopt some sort of student leadership structure in order to fulfill the group’s goals. Regardless of labels, all four GSAs in this study hold students responsible for setting meeting agendas, developing activities, securing guest speakers, and communicating with members. Essentially, the students perform all the necessary tasks to have a GSA with the advisor in a supportive role as needed.

**Communicate with school personnel.** Although the group is run by students, communication with the advisor and appropriate school personnel is necessary for activities to run smoothly. All four advisors reported that students are responsible for informing the advisor of any logistical needs (e.g., meeting space, audiovisual equipment) as well as obtaining
permission from school officials for any events (e.g., setting up a table in the cafeteria, hanging posters). All of the advisors stated that it is the responsibility of the students to communicate appropriately with the advisor. More specifically, as reported by two advisors, it is most beneficial and simplest for one line of communication to exist between the advisor and the group. Typically, the president or lead student in the group is responsible for communicating with the advisor under the assumption that the whole group’s opinions are being relayed.

**Theme three: Roles of advisors.** The third theme for research question one was associated with the following codes from the Role of Advisors category: Role of Advisor: Monitor, Role of Advisor: Support, Role of Advisor: Communication, Role of Advisor: Ally, Role of Advisor: Mandatory Reporter, Navigating Rules and Regulations, and Tangible Resources. (See Appendix O for a list of codes and categories associated with research question one.)

With regard to defining the mission of the GSA, the role of advisors in the current study is less pronounced. Nonetheless, advisors appear to play an important role in helping students achieve their goals. For the four participants in the present study, the role of a GSA advisor is that of a monitor and supporter rather than a leader or director. Advisors allow students to take ownership of their group and regular meetings, only participating when necessary.

**Monitor students.** The four advisors in this study described their primary role as that of a bystander. Their students are responsible for developing agendas as well as the topics of meetings. Conversations generally evolve organically within the group as the students discuss topical issues. Advisors stated the students have the freedom to discuss what they please. However, one role of the advisor made clear was that of a monitor: advisors do not facilitate conversations, but are willing to interject if deemed necessary by personal judgment. For all of
the advisors in the present study, this meant redirecting overly negative conversations (e.g.,
religion bashing), ensuring all students feel safe to share varying opinions (e.g., conservative
opinions among liberal students), and securing the physical safety of all students (e.g., mandated
reporting of abuse or self-harm). As one advisor said,

“We're not supposed to participate and lead discussions. The students are supposed to.
Now if something inappropriate was said or being done, then of course we'd step in.”

Although willing to interject as necessary, advisors generally try to refrain from speaking
in the group in order to allow students more freedom and comfort to speak honestly. Adopting a
position on the sidelines of the group gives students the opportunity for self-guided conversation.
One advisor noted,

“I make myself scarce because I do think there are some people that feel more willing to
speak up if there's not an adult like right there.”

**Support students.** Although the advisors in this study officially serve as non-participants
within the group, they naturally adopted a supportive role within their GSAs. This support takes
place in the form of both logistical support and emotional support. When students approach an
advisor with an idea, it is the advisor’s responsibility to help students acquire the necessary
materials to carry out their ideas. For example, all advisors would help students secure a meeting
space, obtain equipment, suggest additional resources (such as the GLSEN website), and ensure
the proper school protocol has been followed for any activities. Further, if an idea appears
unrealistic, advisors may assist students in developing more attainable goals.

The four advisors in this study offered emotional support by helping establish their GSA
as a safe place and being an adult ally to students. Although generally bystanders, advisors will
insert themselves in meetings in order to protect the emotional and physical safety of students.
Moreover, each advisor establishes herself as ally and makes that known to the students. The idea of being an ally may be assumed; however, adults are still in a position of power within schools. Permission is required for most activities and, even if the advisor is supportive of an idea, she may be the one who informs students if administrators reject an idea. In general, advisors establish their role as an ally in addition to their roles as school personnel. Advisors play a major role in the development of a safe, inclusive place for students. Even if students are not directly seeking comfort from an advisor, the students know the advisor is ultimately by their side. As one of the advisors said,

I have told them, even though I can't actively participate [in the group], if you need an adult to talk to, that they can come to me anytime. I'm not acting as your GSA advisor. I'm acting as an adult in the building who's here to make sure that you are safe.

*Communicate with students and administration.* Just as students communicate with advisors, advisors conversely communicate with students as well as additional school personnel. All advisors reported regularly keeping in touch with one or two group leaders (such as the president, co-presidents, or advisory board spokesperson). Students are responsible for overseeing and planning all activities, but are also obligated to inform the advisor of the group’s activities. As warranted, advisors will communicate with administration if approval is needed for any activities.

Another finding that emerged from the present study was that advisors take on a dual role as an ally to students, but also an employee in the school. As educators in public schools, advisors must adhere to the guidelines set by their administrators as well as county policy. Within a student-led group, advisors find it necessary to maintain an open line of communication with students in order to prevent any misunderstandings or errors that may upset administrators.
In order to see students’ ideas come to fruition, following proper protocol is necessary and advisors are the intermediary between students’ proposals and administration’s approvals. One advisor described a particular event,

So [the students] tried to say, ‘Well we tried to have Day of Silence and the school wouldn't let us.’ I was like, ‘No. You couldn't have Day of Silence because that morning, without telling anybody, you just set up a table and started handing stuff out and [administrators] came to talk to me and the other sponsor about it. And we're like, we have no idea what they're talking about.’ That's why it was shut down. So, the very next year, we went and talked to [administration] and the administrators were very supportive.

Themes Results of Research Question Two

Interview Questions for Research Question Two

In order to answer the second research question, the following questions and subsequent probes were included in the interview guide: 1) Have you experienced any challenges as the GSA advisor in your school? 1a) From individuals within your school? 1b) With school policy? 1c) From members or values of the community? and 2) How do you deal with these difficulties as an advisor? 2a) What do you need, or what helps you, to deal with the challenges you’re facing? 2b) Strategies? and 2c) Resources?

Results of Theming the Data

With regard to environmental barriers, three major themes emerged as inhibitors to the work of GSA advisors who participated in the current study. All five categories (GSA Characteristics, Role of Advisor, School Factors, and Student Factors) were associated with the emergent themes. (See Appendix P for a list of codes and categories associated with themes for research question two.)
All five categories (GSA Characteristics, Role of Advisor, Community Factors, School Factors, and Student Factors) helped inform the emergent themes. (See Appendix P for a list of codes and categories associated with themes for research question two.) All four advisors’ experiences revealed they had encountered parental disapproval which established a barrier to their support of students. School policies also posed as barriers for all four advisors as they had to learn how to effectively navigate school policies to support their students. The third emergent theme for the second research question synthesized general barriers to helping students succeed at running a GSA. All four advisors noted they were not able to actively participate in or organize the activities of the GSA. Although all four advisors still wanted their students to successfully run their GSAs, they were unable to do so. These barriers were specifically identified as the difficulty of working collaboratively with teenagers and the ambiguity of a GSA’s mission.

**Theme one: Supporting students regardless of parental approval.** The first theme for research question two was associated with three categories: GSA Characteristics, Role of Advisor, and Community Factors. Associated codes included: School-Sanctioned Group, Role of Advisor: Support, Role of Advisor: Ally, Navigating Rules and Regulations, Culture of Community: Barriers, and Culture of Community: Barriers—Students Hiding From Parents. (See Appendix P for a list of codes and categories associated with research question two.)

Although GSAs are school-sanctioned clubs, the school district recruited for this study does not require written parental permission for a student to participate in the group. This policy is true for all student-led groups in the county and there is a mutual understanding in the schools that students are to inform their parents of their whereabouts with any extracurricular activity. However, the participants revealed that with GSAs particularly, students may not feel
comfortable informing their parents of their involvement with the group or its associated activities (such as Pride). All of the advisors reported that some students have not yet come out to their parents. Two advisors speculated that some students may fear their parents’ disapproval and also confirmed their GSAs include students whose parents are unaware of their participation in the group. Rather than risk not being able to attend meetings, students may elect to hide from their parents.

When students hide their activities from their parents, the advisors reported minimal actions could be done to rectify this issue. Apart from calling every student’s parent, advisors have no way of monitoring this behavior. Additionally, because advisors do not actively participate in the group, they also do not actively monitor the attendance of each student. As one advisor noted,

The school would never support a kid defying parents, but we don't always know that. It's not like we can interview each of the kids. They would have to tell their parents that they're at the club.

It emerged that some students would confide in their GSA advisor and let them know of the situation. One advisor shared one particular experience involving a student whose parent was also a teacher at his high school, “We had a teacher’s child that said, ‘yeah, my dad thinks I've been at math tutoring for two years.’” Two advisors had experienced such issues in their time as a GSA advisor. However, these two advisors opted to maintain confidentiality and preserve trust rather than report GSA involvement to unknowing parents.

For the advisors in this study, parental disapproval is an obstacle they must indirectly address by supporting students from the sidelines. Whether or not students choose to let their parents know about their participation is a decision ultimately left to each individual student. In
order to work around this barrier, advisors reported that they continue to offer a safe space and
serve as a confidential ally for students. The rules and regulations of the school are made clear to
the students. So long as the students are not actively violating school policy, advisors in this
study stated that they technically have no reason to contact administrators or parents. The GSAs
of these advisors appear to offer a safe outlet for students who fear parental backlash, and the
advisors are understanding in their acknowledgment of such fears. Although some parents may
not agree with a student’s participation in the GSA, the advisors continue to fulfill their role as a
supportive ally.

**Theme two: Navigating school policy.** The second theme for research question two was
associated with two categories: Role of Advisor and School Factors. Associated codes included:
(See Appendix P for a list of codes and categories associated with research question two.)

School policies emerged as challenges advisors must work around in order to support
their students. The county establishes guidelines for all student-initiated clubs and some schools
may choose to abide by these recommendations more or less diligently. At times, two GSA
advisors in this study felt that their school policies were being more strictly enforced for their
GSAs when compared to other student-initiated clubs. The rules and policies are outlined by the
district, but the actions of GSAs are monitored by individuals within the school (i.e.,
administrators). At times, one of the advisors reported GSAs may be profiled and immediately
targeted when mistakes are made whereas other groups are not as closely watched. As she
described,

“We're not supposed to participate with the groups and clubs. However, a chess club
sponsor will play chess with the kids. I mean, so, you know...”
Advisors were able to overcome the barriers of school regulations by understanding the rules and learning how to navigate policies. This study’s advisors were aware of their limited opportunities to make mistakes. Thus, they stated that anticipating potential consequences of actions is necessary prior to performing any activity. The advisors employed this strategy for themselves and encouraged their students to do this as well. Based on the experiences of all the advisors, it appears that in order for students to achieve the GSA’s goals, students must abide by school and district rules, effectively navigate these policies, and prevent any negative outcomes by planning ahead. In the words of one advisor, “You need to make it as hard as possible for that person [in power] to have a problem.”

**Theme three: Setting students up for success.** The third theme for research question two was associated with three categories: GSA Characteristics, Role of Advisor, and Student Factors. Associated codes included: Mission: Ambiguity of Mission, Student-Run Group, Role of Advisor: Support, Navigating Rules and Regulations, Student Characteristics: Adolescents, and Student Characteristics: Motivation (See Appendix P for a list of codes and categories associated with research question two.)

**Working with teenagers.** As stated earlier, the current study’s advisors serve their GSAs in an indirect manner by supporting and monitoring the actions of their students. A common obstacle reported by all four advisors was the difficulty of working collaboratively with teenagers. These students are still developing organizational, communication, and problem-solving skills whereas these skills are more developed for advisors. In order to support students, advisors stated they offer ideas of best practice from the perspectives of others. For example, if students want to plan an event (such as Day of Silence or a bake sale), the advisors have students consider what that would logistically entail, who would be involved, how that would impact
students’ classroom functioning, and what permissions need to be granted prior to holding the event. Asking these questions is not necessarily an opposing view, but it is a different view from the students’ perspective. In order for students to successfully achieve their goals, particularly when more people may be affected, advisors stated that they offer guidance on how to thoroughly address possible conflicts. Just as this study’s advisors navigate school policy themselves, they teach their students to do this as well.

**Ambiguity of mission.** With regard to the GSA’s framework, a barrier reported by three advisors was the ambiguity of their GSA’s mission. While each GSA had an information page on their school’s website, one only had a brief definition of a GSA, one simply listed upcoming meeting times with links to outside resources, and two listed a generic missions. Three advisors reported this lack of clarity as a weakness of their group. Advisor #4 did not report concerns with her GSA’s mission; however, as she serves a non-traditional school, the context of her GSA and its students are vastly different from that of the other three advisors. Advisor #4’s GSA often engages in advocacy as they primarily devoted time to raising money for marginalized groups of individuals; however, these groups were not always associated with LGBTQ youth.

As more students participate and the year progresses, the specific goals or framework of the group can become less clear. While the lack of a specific mission appears to be a barrier for three of the advisors, it also seems that the mission of each GSA is fluid and dynamic. These advisors seemed to overcome this lack of clarity by continuously adapting to the changing needs and goals of students. Moving forward, the three advisors reported they would like students to develop a mission at the beginning of each new school year.
Theme Results of Research Question Three

Interview Questions and Other Data for Research Question Three

In order to answer the third research question, the following questions and subsequent probes were included in the interview guide: 1) Although you may experience challenges and obstacles to performing their job, what are some things that you find helpful as the GSA advisor in your school? 1a) Strategies? 1b) Resources? and 2) What factors positively influence your role as the GSA advisor?

Results of Theming the Data

With regard to environmental facilitators, four major themes emerged as factors that help support the work of the four GSA advisors who participated in this study. All five categories (GSA Characteristics, Role of Advisor, Community Factors, School Factors, and Student Factors) were associated with the emergent themes. (See Appendix Q for a list of codes and categories associated with themes for research question three.) Examination of all four advisors’ experiences revealed that they found it beneficial to align with supportive administrators, rely on colleagues for additional support, and to establish student leadership while facilitating transitions in leadership across years. With regard to utilizing outside resources, two advisors in this study reported sharing national advocacy groups’ (e.g., GLSEN) recommendations when supporting students.

Theme one: Aligning with supportive administration. The first theme for research question three was associated with four categories: GSA Characteristics, Role of Advisor, Community Factors, and School Factors. Associated codes included: School-Sanctioned Group, Role of Advisor: Communication, Navigating Rules and Regulations, Culture of Community:
Barriers, Culture of School: Facilitators, and Supportive Administration. (See Appendix Q for a list of codes and categories associated with research question three.)

Each advisor in this study reported administration as their primary source of support. None of the advisors reported any firsthand experience with combative or disapproving administrators; however, each advisor was able to share secondhand accounts of such instances. As many advisors in years past may have experienced adversity to sponsoring the group, the current advisors in the present study were fully aware of their supportive administrators. These advisors not only recognize administrators as supportive, they also aligned with their administrative team to form bonds. Each advisor found it most effective and beneficial for their group to communicate with administration regularly and secure approval of any activities or events that may garner negative attention. One advisor stated, “I am the kind of person that would always rather ask for permission than forgiveness.”

Overall, advisors found that when proper protocols were followed, administrators were consistently supportive of their cause and involvement with GSAs. Following the standard protocols, in addition to regularly communicating with administrators, appeared to establish a foundation of trust. By establishing these bonds, the advisors felt more at ease knowing their GSAs are able freely organize and plan events without the fear of administrative backlash. Moreover, in the event the school community is unhappy with the activities of the GSA, administrators would address those situations directly. Rather than the advisor defending and advocating for the GSA, administration would step in and serve as an advocate for the group. Two advisors reported direct complaints from the community regarding the GSA’s activities. For both of them, their administrators supported and defended the GSAs. In the words of one advisor, “If any parents have had any complaints or anything, [administration has] handled it.
None of it is trickled down to me.” Another advisor recalled a particular memory, “[After Day of Silence], we had some parents call and complain about why is my child forced to participate in a gay day. But it was nice that we didn't have to deal with it. [Administration] took that on.”

**Theme two: Relying on colleagues.** The second theme for research question three was associated with the following codes under the School Factors category: Support from Colleagues: Co-Advisor and Support from Colleagues: Continuity of GSA Advisor. (See Appendix Q for a list of codes and categories associated with research question three.)

The ability to rely on supportive colleagues was identified as a facilitator for advisors. Each advisor in this study is the primary sponsor of their GSA, but all of the advisors reported co-sponsors may also help support the group. One advisor reported that her GSA had utilized multiple advisors in years past, but has served as the sole advisor for the past four years. For the other three advisors, co-sponsors help support their role. Having adults in the building emerged as an incredible source of support for the advisors with regard to both logistics and emotional well-being. Logistically, having another adult to rely is beneficial if a conflict arises and the sponsor is unable to be at the GSA’s meeting. As another advisor said, “It's kind of nice just to have extra if something comes up. And it's nice to have three adults to give some different perspectives.”

Interviews with participants revealed that co-sponsors are available to step in as the adult in the room and, more importantly, are also familiar with the students who actively participate in the GSA. Emotionally, having additional sponsors helps advisors manage the demands of emotionally supporting students in a GSA. One of the advisors noted, “The co-sponsor is one of the counselors.”
Theme three: Utilizing outside resources. The third theme for research question three was associated with the Tangible Resources coded the category of Role of Advisor. (See Appendix Q for a list of codes and categories associated with research question three.)

Another helpful strategy identified was the use of resources offered by advocacy groups, particularly GLSEN. GLSEN offers a variety of materials to students and adults who want to start or support a GSA. Their materials include topics for meetings, suggested activities, the impacts of GSAs, and how to establish an individual GSA. Two advisors regularly share these materials with students and often direct their students to GLSEN’s website. While GLSEN is extremely helpful, the advisors were sometimes left wanting more beyond what is offered by GLSEN. One of the advisors also recommended directing students to PFLAG’s website for additional emotional support resources or news websites for current events to facilitate conversations. A couple of advisors encourage students to identify resources independently, but may also offer suggestions for students to consider as well. Regardless of whether it is the advisor or the student who identifies these sources of information, outside resources appear to offer another avenue of support to advisors’ roles.

Theme four: Establishing student leadership and facilitating transitions in leadership. The fourth theme for research question three was associated with three categories: GSA Characteristics, School Factors, and Student Factors. Associated codes included: Student-Run Group, Inclusive Group, Recruitment, Culture of School: Facilitators, Student Characteristics: Leadership, Student Characteristics: Continuity of Student Leadership, and Student Characteristics: Communication. (See Appendix Q for a list of codes and categories associated with research question three.)
Throughout this study, the most meaningful factor that emerged as a facilitator to the roles of GSA advisors is student leadership. While it may appear obvious that student leadership is critical to a student-led club, leadership within the group itself appears beneficial to the GSA’s overall functioning. All of the GSAs in this study include organized bodies of student leadership within their groups which are responsible for developing meeting agendas, organizing events, and communicating with members as well as the GSA advisor. These leadership bodies may have varied structurally (e.g., advisory board, co-presidents, president and vice president), but emerged as consistently helpful for both individual GSA advisors as well as GSAs as a whole.

For one advisor GSA, her leadership body was dubbed an “advisory board” which consisted of a small group of students. The student leadership of one advisor’s GSA is shared between two co-presidents. Meanwhile, two advisors reported the adoption of more standard officer positions of president, vice-president, and secretary. Each GSA is unique in how it outlines its leadership, but a common trait is the use of an internal student leadership structure within the group. Results of the present study suggest that student leadership is a major facilitator to support the role of advisors.

Further, internal student leadership structures appear to pave the way for a clear line of communication between the advisor and the GSA. Rather than trying to coordinate with every GSA member (which can peak to 50 students at times), all of the advisors in this study found it most effective to regularly communicate with just one or two students. As one of the advisors explained,

We want to keep everything equal. We want to not have labels, but I don't want to have to talk to five people and get the same story from five different people and then try and figure it out. I'm going to talk to one person and it's worked out fine.
Another common feature of the student leadership within this study’s GSAs is that it often appears to be heavily composed of seniors. This poses a potentially significant problem with regard to continuity across years. In order to effectively address this, all four advisors found it helpful to have students explore leadership options for the upcoming year before the seniors graduate. The execution of this act, however, can vary across GSAs. By the end of an academic year, attendance has typically dwindled to much fewer students due to final exams, projects, and other end-of-year obligations. Advisors reported that the students who regularly attend at the end of the year are generally the core members so-to-speak and typically seniors. One advisor described her experience a few years ago,

And that's where we ran into a lot of problems between one year to the next. We went from having probably about 18 kids show up at every meeting to like five kids showing up at every meeting because a lot of them were seniors [who had graduated]. The leadership was all seniors and we just didn't do a good job of reaching out to underclassmen.

All of the advisors reported the need to recruit underclassmen throughout the school year in order to prevent difficulties with transitioning student leadership at the end of the year. As One advisor forewarned, “We have three seniors [as leaders]. And that's a problem.” In order to prevent this potential conflict, the advisors in this study focus on welcoming new members to the group during the first few meetings of the school year while also continuously trying to recruit underclassmen throughout the year.

For another advisor, her GSA is successfully able to do this as mentoring younger students is embedded in her school’s culture. At her high school, students attend summer programs before even enrolling in the program. In addition, seniors throughout the school are
required to mentor incoming freshman. Her high school, as a whole, trains students to become leaders; this feature appears to have generalized to the school’s GSA. As she stated, “I didn't realize until just now how much we indoctrinate our kids to become leaders and mentor the younger kids at our school. But it works. We do prime them.”

For the other advisors, some uncertainty regarding the futures of their GSAs was evident. One advisor expressed her concerns during the interview, “There's a couple of kids that we're trying to work with because when [student leaders] graduate, hopefully [the GSA will] still have a future.” Overall, all four of the study’s advisors recognized the importance of creating an inclusive, welcoming environment for students of all grade levels in order to maintain the existence of their GSAs over time.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter reported the process by which emergent themes were developed as well as the major thematic findings that were identified in response to each research question. Regarding the first research question, themes that help better understand advisors’ perceptions of their GSA’s mission include understanding the framework of the GSA, the roles of students, and the roles of advisors. The second research question examined how advisors overcome barriers to their roles. Major themes that emerged include advisors supporting students regardless of parental approval, advisors effectively navigating school policy, and advisors setting students up for success by supporting the development of their students’ skills and helping clarify their GSA’s mission. Finally, the third research question revealed four major themes regarding how advisors address the facilitators to their roles. These themes include aligning with supportive administrators, relying on colleagues as co-sponsors, utilizing outside resources from advocacy
groups, and supporting transitions of student leadership to maintain the existence of the group over time.
CHAPTER V:
DISCUSSION

Summary of the Dissertation Study

The purpose of the dissertation study was to better understand how GSA advisors fulfill their roles. Specifically, this study attempted to identify the perceived missions of GSAs, how GSA advisors navigate barriers to their work, and the facilitators that help encourage their roles as GSA advisors. As there is no standardized approach to GSA development and implementation, GSAs across the country may adopt different policies and practices for their groups. There is a notable gap in the literature investigating how GSA advisors work within their environments in order to support students toward achieving their GSA’s mission. It was unclear how GSA advisors work within, and possibly across, the constraints of their schools in order to fulfill their roles as GSA advisors. The present study examined how GSA advisors perceive their GSA’s mission, the roles of their students, and their own roles, as well as the strategies employed, resources needed, and obstacles GSA advisors overcome within their schools.

The present study utilized qualitative research methods to conduct a multiple case study in order to gain a more meaningful understanding of the perceptions and roles of GSA advisors. Four GSA advisors were recruited from a large suburban school district in the Southeastern United States. Specific types of data collected included semi-structured interviews and documents in order to answer the research questions. Data were analyzed with two cycles of coding (in vivo and versus coding first followed by holistic and focused coding methods).
Trustworthiness of the data was addressed through the use of a second reviewer of codes. After two cycles of coding, categories were developed, followed by the generation of global themes.

**Research Questions**

In order to identify how GSA advisors work within their environments to serve LGBTQ+ students, the dissertation study was guided by the following research questions:

**Research Question 1: What are GSA advisors’ perceptions of their GSA’s mission?**

What is the mission of the GSA? In order for a GSA to fulfill its mission, students and advisors both function as part of the GSA. What are the roles of the students? What are the roles of the advisor?

**Research Question 2: How do GSA advisors address environmental obstacles to their roles within GSAs?**

What environmental barriers prevent GSA advisors from performing their roles? How do GSA advisors perform their roles within the constraints of their environment? What strategies, resources, or combination thereof, if any, are used to overcome barriers? Strategies may include actions undertaken (such as collaborating with colleagues) to support their role. Resources may include tangible items (such as audiovisual equipment) to support their role.

**Research Question 3: How do GSA advisors address environmental facilitators to their roles within GSAs?**

What environmental factors help facilitate the roles of GSA advisors? How do GSA advisors perform their roles with the support of these factors within their environment? What strategies, resources, or combination thereof, if any, are used to facilitate the roles of GSA advisors? Strategies may include actions (such as collaborating with colleagues) used to support
their role. Resources may include tangible items (such as audiovisual equipment) to support their role.

**Summary of Major Findings**

**Research Question One**

With regard to advisors’ perceptions of their GSA’s mission, three themes emerged in response to research question one: the GSA’s framework, the roles of students, and the roles of advisors. Advisors in the present study reported that GSA frameworks may be social, support, activist, or a combination. Across all four GSAs, roles of students include establishing the GSA, running the GSA, and communicating with school personnel. Roles of advisors in all four GSAs include monitoring students, supporting students, and communicating with students and administrators. Based on the results of the current study, when these activities take place, a GSA is able to run most effectively and work toward its mission.

**Research Question Two**

With regard to environmental barriers, three major themes emerged as inhibitors to the work of GSA advisors who participated in this study. All four advisors’ experiences revealed they had encountered parental disapproval which inhibited their support of students. School policies also posed as barriers for all four advisors as they had to learn how to effectively navigate school policies to support their students. The third emergent theme for the second research question synthesized general barriers to helping students succeed at running a GSA. All four advisors noted they were not able to actively participate in or organize the activities of the GSA. Although all four advisors wanted their students to successfully run their GSAs, they were unable so. These barriers were specifically identified as the difficulty of working collaboratively with teenagers and the ambiguity of a GSA’s mission.
Research Question Three

With regard to environmental facilitators, four major themes emerged as factors that help support the work of the four GSA advisors who participated in this study. Examination of all four advisors’ experiences revealed that they found it beneficial to align with supportive administrators, rely on colleagues for additional support, utilize outside resources, and to establish student leadership while facilitating transitions in leadership across years. With regard to utilizing outside resources, two advisors in this study reported sharing national advocacy groups’ (e.g., GLSEN) recommendations when supporting students.

Discussion of Major Findings

The following section discusses the emergent findings of the current study in relation to previous research. Many findings of the present study are supported by prior research while some variations of previous studies also emerged. The current study also expands the existing body of literature examining high school GSA frameworks, roles of advisors, and roles of students. Emergent themes addressing barriers and facilitators to advisors’ roles are also discussed.

Research Question One

Theme one: Framework of GSA. As GSAs are unique to their needs, there is no standardized approach to GSA development and maintenance; however, three general frameworks commonly are employed: social, support, and activist (Fetner & Kush, 2008; National Association of GSA Networks, 2011). GSAs may adopt one or more of these frameworks when establishing their organization. The results of this study are consistent with this fluid model of running GSAs, as each of the four advisors in this study reported their GSA as employing social, support, and activist types of orientations at some point during their runs as
advisor. The advisors in the current study did not specify a particular orientation for their GSA as this tended to vary depending on the needs and motivations of students.

With regard to activist frameworks, GSAs can act as a vehicle to raise awareness and educate others in the schools and communities (Griffin et al., 2004). Specifically, students and their GSA advisor educate other students and adults on relevant issues in order to promote equality and fairness. Advocacy in the community, such as pride events, may take place. The results of the current study support previous these previous findings as advocacy-type actions of GSAs. The four GSAs in this study made efforts to educate themselves and raise awareness. An expansion from previous literature, however, was that the four advisors in this study reported regularly attending community Pride events as a liability. Students from the four GSAs in this study were encouraged to attend Pride as members of the community rather than a school-sanctioned group. The four advisors in the present study cited safety and liability issues as the primary reason why students were unable to participate in Pride as a school GSA.

Previous research suggests the missions of GSAs typically include improving school climate for LGBTQ students, educating students and staff, offering students social and emotional support, and giving LGBTQ students a safe space to be (Fetner & Kush, 2008; Griffin et al., 2005; National Association of GSA Networks, 2011; Williams et al., 2005). Results of previous research are consistent with the findings of the present study with regard to educating students and staff, providing students social and emotional support, and offering LGBTQ students a safe space. Educating students and staff takes place via advocacy efforts within the school while advocacy efforts outside of the school are held outside of the GSA. The four advisors in the current study reported their GSAs to be safe spaces for their students to meet, hold discussions, educate themselves, and socialize with each another. The four advisors in this study also reported
that their students are able to regularly share personal stories in a supportive, inclusive, and safe environment.

With regard to improving school climate as a deliberate mission of GSAs, a variation from the previous research emerged as a result of the current study. Previous research suggests positive school climates are a protective factor to the psychosocial risks of LGBTQ students (Espelage et al., 2008; Toomey et al., 2012; Walls et al., 2008). The advisors in the current study did not emphasize efforts to improve general school climate; however, this may be attributable to the positive school climates in which their GSAs exist as anti-bullying campaigns and school-wide positive behavioral supports are offered in every school throughout the current study’s school district.

Another interesting facet of the current findings was with regard to the purposes of establishing a GSA. From the advisors’ perspectives, students are responsible for all of the GSA’s activities including its inception. While the support-type framework emerged as the most salient orientation of GSAs, the advisors did not suggest the support-type framework was the primary reason why students wanted to establish a GSA. Results from the current study also suggest the climate of schools, while heteronormative, is generally positive and accepting of all sexual identities and orientations. Bullying did not surface as a major concern for advisors while negative judgements of intolerance appeared few and far between. It appears, judging from the results of the current study, schools may be undergoing a cultural shift of sorts. While schools may be embedded within communities where sexual diversity is not overtly celebrated, their schools may foster a culture of acceptance within the microsystem. Consequently, GSAs may be developing as a result of this positive context. Rather than establishing GSAs in response to oppression, students may establish GSAs for the purposes of wanting to establish a forum of
positivity around accepting peers. While GSAs may be established by a group of marginalized minority students, the acceptance of sexual diversity impacts the context of the group. Many organizations may develop as a result of negativity and oppression from the larger culture. However, as we continue to see a cultural shift toward tolerance and celebration of sexual diversity, the contexts of GSAs may shift toward more positive outlooks.

**Theme two: Roles of students.** The roles of students that emerged from the current study include establishing the GSA, running the GSA, and communicating with school personnel. The results of the current study expanded previous research examining roles of students within GSAs. Previous research has primarily focused on the psychosocial outcomes and positive academic impacts of participating in GSAs (Goodenow et al., 2006; Grossman et al, 2009; Heck et al., 2011; Lee, 2002; McCormick et al., 2016; Russell, et al, 2009; Szalacha, 2003; Toomey et al., 2011). However, the present study revealed more detailed information on the responsibilities of students from advisors’ points of view. Particularly, the emphasis on regular communication between students and advisors was an important factor related to the missions of GSAs. In order for GSAs to fulfill their goals, students not only lead meetings, they are also responsible for communicating effectively with advisors and administrators (often via the advisor) in order to properly adhere to policies and carry out their desired activities.

**Theme three: Roles of advisors.** Roles of advisors in all four GSAs include monitoring students, supporting students, and communicating with students and administrators. Based on the results of the current study, when these activities take place, a GSA is able to run most effectively and work toward its mission. Consistent with previous literature, the results of this study suggest many positive roles of having a GSA advisor. These include maintaining the group’s presence on campus as students leave the organization, understanding the dynamics of
student affairs with faculty and staff, legitimizing the group’s existence to administration, empowering students, and supporting students facing adversity (Graybill et al., 2009; Mayo, 2013; Murphy, 2012; Poynter & Tubbs, 2007). While some duties of advisors may be more challenging to carry out (such as transferring student leadership), the four advisors in this study helped their GSAs by maintaining their group’s existence over time, serving as a connection between students and administrators, and always being an adult ally.

Research Question Two

Theme one: Supporting students regardless of parental approval. Although the present study did not directly measure outcomes for students, the results suggest supportive GSA advisors are able to have a positive impact by continuing to offer their support to students despite a lack of parental support. Previous research suggests a link between parental support and positive psychosocial adjustment for LGBTQ students (Espelage et al., 2008, Munoz-Plaza et al., 2008; Walls et al., 2008). However, when parents disapprove of their child’s participation in a GSA, a barrier to GSA advisors’ roles is established (Watson et al., 2010). For students who lack parental support of their sexual identity, non-parental adult support can still serve as a protective factor against psychosocial risks for these students (Munoz-Plaza et al., 2008). The results of the current study are consistent with previous research in recognizing parents may present as obstacles for GSA advisors. The present study also expands on previous research by understanding how advisors overcome this barrier. The advisors in the current study reported that they continue to fulfill their roles as GSA advisor regardless of parental approval of student participation.

Theme two: Navigating school policy. Previous research has illustrated the unique positions of GSA advisors as adults within a student-led club. Advisors’ experience and
participation may offer more visibility from administrators as well as in the community. Further, as adults, GSA advisors have a more meaningful understanding of institutional barriers in school and their community as well as the greater social and cultural contexts in which they live (Graybill et al., 2009; Mayo, 2013). The results of the current study have further contributed to this research as the advisors in this study were not only familiar with their environments, but also highlighted the importance of how they navigate their environments. In order for their GSAs to succeed, the advisors in this study understood that they must be knowledgeable about the standards and rules in place. Further, by knowing the rules, advisors were able to guide their students’ ideas accordingly. This familiarity helped advisors maintain the support of administrators who would address any potential backlashes from the community.

The findings of the second research question also illuminate the difficulty of balancing the dual roles as a school employee and a child advocate. GSA advisors are often teachers who may feel tension associated with navigating the constraints of school policies. The National Education Association (2013) offers a code of ethics for teachers; however, it is limited to only two principles: commitment to the student and commitment to the profession. Further, the NEA’s code of ethics outlines restrictions that educations must avoid, yet it does not address actions educators should undertake to protect students. How to effectively navigate school policy while staying with ethical guidelines is something advisors must learn independently as the official guidance is limited. As both school employees and child advocates, advisors may encounter situations where school policies are inconsistent with the best interests of a student. In such cases, minimal guidance is offered and advisors must learn how to negotiate their within these constraints. Results from the current study suggest effectively navigating school policy is an action best undertaken proactively, prior to any fallout with administrators.
Theme three: Setting students up for success. One noteworthy challenge advisors encountered in this study was how the ambiguity of their GSA’s mission may hinder their facilitation of the group. Individual GSA frameworks may vary across GSAs frameworks (Fetner & Kush, 2008, National Association of GSA Networks, 2011). With regard to goals of a GSA, previous research has examined general purposes of GSAs (Griffin et al., 2004; Williams et al., 2005). The results of the current study expand previous literature regarding purposes of GSAs as the lack of clarity of a GSA’s mission may hinder its ability to thrive. Lacking a clear agenda from the beginning of the year makes running a GSA more challenging as the year progresses due to the constant shifts in ideas and desires of students. The advisors in this study reported wanting a more clearly written mission statement developed at the beginning of the year as that may help frame the actions of the group. As their missions were unclear at times, the GSAs shifted from advocacy-oriented, to support-based, and to primarily a social forum for students. The advisors in the current study found that they must continue to carry out their role as the missions of the group changes, even though it may become more difficult when the group lacks a clear focus. Nonetheless, the fluidity of the mission appears to have allowed students to be more self-directive in their actions. At various times, students elected to work toward common goals in the school and community, adequately developed meeting agendas, appropriately facilitated meeting discussions, and consistently supported each other throughout the process.

The results of the current study illustrated the challenge of working with teenagers in order to fulfill a GSA’s purpose. Communication, organization, and problem-solving skills are typically not as fully developed for high school students compared to adults. Although the GSA advisors in the current study may face challenges when working with young students, the advisors navigate this barrier by informing their students of potential obstacles, fostering growth
of developing skills, and helping students effectively navigate school policy. Previous research suggests advisors are in a knowledgeable about the barriers and obstacles facing students in school and their community; thus, they are able to equip students with necessary skills to circumvent or tackle such barriers (Mayo, 2013). The results of the present study are consistent with previous research insofar as advisors foster the development of skills in students and equip students with the knowledge necessary for success.

Research Question Three

Theme one: Aligning with supportive administration. With regard to choosing to become an advisor, previous literature has indicated advisors may be met with resistance from colleagues and ostracism at work (Watson et al., 2010; Valenti & Campbell, 2009). The results of this study varied from previous research as the four advisors reported having supportive colleagues and administrators. It seemed as though the advisors had heard of difficulties in years past, but were not currently encountering resistance from anyone at work. Moreover, the advisors in this study reported relying on colleagues and their supportive administrators as a facilitator to their roles. The results of the present study expand previous research by illustrating the influence of administrators on the existence of GSAs, activities carried out by GSAs, and the roles of advisors. While GSAs are protected by the Equal Access Act (1984), discrimination and unfair targeting of activities may still occur. The results of the current study suggest administrators can set a tone of fairness with regard to student organizations. Moreover, administrators can facilitate the work of advisors by addressing any issues from parents in the community about a GSA’s activities. This indirectly takes a burden off advisors as they are not the ones who directly deal with contentious issues. Further, both GSA advisors and students are in a more comfortable position when organizing events with administrative support.
Theme two: Relying on colleagues. With regard to colleagues, previous research suggests GSA advisors risk ostracism and negative repercussions from colleagues as a result of choosing to be a GSA advisor (Valenti & Campbell, 2013). However, some evidence suggests supportive school personnel may indirectly facilitate the roles of GSA advisors by fostering an accepting school climate (Watson et al., 2010). The results of the present study expand previous literature by also revealing the value of direct support via co-advisors. In addition to promoting an inclusive environment, co-advisors offer direct support to advisors as they can help share some of the responsibilities associated with being an advisor. Attending meetings, helping in times of crisis, and being a source of emotional support to advisors are ways co-advisors facilitate the work of advisors.

Theme three: Utilizing outside resources. Previous research suggests an availability of community and school-based resources can support GSAs and LGBTQ students (Lee, 2002; Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002; Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009; Toomey et al., 2012; Watson et al., 2010; Williams et al., 2005). Access to resources, such as information, local agencies, websites, and safe spaces, help students feel less hopeless and more empowered to be comfortable with their identities and improve their psychosocial well-being. For GSA advisors, access to community resources may help support their advocacy work (Watson et al., 2010). Results of the current study are consistent with previous research as community resources appear to be beneficial for GSA students and advisors. One caveat that emerged from the present study was how advisors approached these resources as non-participants of their GSA. Advisors may directly offer students resources or interesting articles, but also regularly encourage their students to identify these resources independently. In doing so, it appears advisors are able to help students identify additional support, discover relevant issues, and understand important causes
while also fostering the development of students’ independent skills, encouraging students’ ability to take initiative, and empowering students to take ownership of their group.

**Theme four: Establishing student leadership and facilitating transitions in leadership.** Previous research examining the relationship between student leadership factors within GSAs has been limited. A study conducted by Poteat and colleagues (2016) recently examined factors related to positive youth development among GSA members. The researchers’ stray observations noted youth leadership structures within GSAs can vary. This observation is consistent with results of the current study as some GSAs opted for traditional hierarchical leadership (e.g., president, vice president), one GSA had student leaders in shared roles (e.g., co-presidents), and another utilized an advisory board consisting of a group of student leaders working collaboratively.

The current study expands existing literature by connecting the relevance of student leadership and roles of advisors. As student-led clubs, GSA advisors are in a position to empower student and foster their independence. In order for GSAs to effectively carry out their missions, advisors must facilitate goals of a GSA indirectly by way of supporting students. The advisors in the current study reported that their students take ownership of the goals of their GSA. From developing meeting agendas, securing guest speakers, and organizing events in the school, students within GSAs must take leadership roles in order to mobilize their group. GSA advisors serve as monitors and facilitators with student leadership skills continuing to develop over time.

The present study also adds to the literature as it illuminates the importance of facilitating transitions of student leadership. Results from the current study suggest GSAs tend to be heavily loaded with seniors as leaders. While this may initially present as a barrier, advisors can navigate
this by anticipating the changes across school years. Furthermore, by fostering the development of student leadership as well as transitions of leadership to underclassmen, advisors are able to effectively perform their roles over time. While weaknesses in student leadership may create difficulties for advisors, strong leadership among students and efficient transitions of leadership emerged as a facilitator for GSA advisors’ roles in the current study.

**Applications of GSA Network’s Advisor Guidelines**

This following section compares the study’s emergent findings to the guide for GSA advisors set forth by the National Association of GSA Networks (2011). There are no formal training standards for advising GSAs. However, the National Association of GSA Networks (2011, p. 10) offers a guide for GSA advisors to adopt when trying to identify their roles within the group. Many of the recommendations offered were adopted by the advisors in the current study.

1. **Provide and identify regular opportunities for skill building, leadership, and learning.**

   The advisors in the current study regularly offered opportunities for leadership as the GSAs are designed to be led by the students. Only under occasional circumstances would an advisor insert herself in the group’s activities. This was for the purpose of allowing students to build leadership skills, interpersonal skills, and learn more about topics through a student discussion-based model rather than by the advisor instructing the group.

2. **Teach students how to navigate the ins and outs of the school systems in terms of laws and policies, and serve as a liaison between faculty and the GSA.**

   The advisors in the current study were consistent with this recommendation as their role was partly defined as a liaison between faculty and the GSA. The advisors in this study were a clearly established link between the group and the school’s administration. Advisors regularly
encouraged their students to plan activities appropriately in accordance with school policies. When students failed to adequately navigate the system and activities were ceased, advisors cautioned students on the importance of understanding school policy in order to be able to carry out activities.

3. Train students to resolve conflict among officers and within the club when it arises.

The advisors in the current study reported occasional conflicts among members and officers due to differences in opinions and ideas. When these situations arose, advisors made conscious efforts to allow students to resolve these conflicts. Advisors did not formally train students on conflict resolution, but they did openly remind students to allow an all-inclusive forum for discussion. The advisors encouraged their students to resolve their problems appropriately through the use of a welcoming dialogue.

4. Support students in fostering a safe environment for all students to participate, including challenging language and behavior from within the GSA that perpetuates discrimination.

The advisors in the current study all established their GSA as a warm, safe, and inclusive space for all students. All four advisors in this study reported their role as a monitor. While they tried to remain outside of the group, if conversations grew inappropriate or students felt targeted for sharing an unpopular opinion, advisors would step in on such occasion. In general, the advisors regularly followed this guideline as the GSAs are designed to offer a safe space.

5. Assist students in managing club funds.

The advisors in the current study did not address specifically discuss experiences with club funds. However, for GSAs with traditional officer roles, a treasurer may be appointed to help manage club funds. In this study, the advisors did not specifically deal with any money-handling
or fundraising activities. GSAs may benefit from having a defined plan for the group’s money management whether it is through an officer’s role or a group of students.

6. Educate and support students in keeping records of meetings and decisions and only if need be, keeping records for the GSA.

   The advisors in this current study did not report any procedures for record-keeping. There are no permission forms required to participate as students may come and go as they wish. No off-campus events are attended as a GSA which prevents advisors from having to handle excessive paperwork. The advisors in this study did not report any specific methods to record-keeping nor did they report this as an area of need. Future GSAs may consider employing their secretary to take notes of remarkable decisions made (such as those requiring a vote). However, this study did not identify a need for advisors to manage paperwork.

7. Set students up to succeed, but allow for little failures as teachable moments that are followed with conversations that help them reflect and learn.

   The advisors in this study consistently followed this recommendation as they tried to regularly set students up for success. Typically, the advisors required students run major projects (such as a Day of Silence) by them for approval. This way, advisors could filter out ideas that would not be approved by administration or modify those ideas in order to abide by school policies. In the event that students were unsuccessful with activities, advisors framed these failures as learning opportunities to illustrate where things went wrong and what to do better for the future. While the goal is to help students always succeed, errors will naturally happen. The advisors in this study understood the importance of correcting mistakes and helping students improve with each activity.
8. Support changes within the GSA – which may include shifting goals or the mission of the group or being more than one type of GSA.

Although the advisors in this study stated this could be difficult at times, the advisors were consistently supportive of shifting goals and missions of their GSAs. Each GSA in this study was unique and changed frameworks regularly. This fluidity may have made the advisors’ roles more challenging and may have also led to more social-type orientations; however, the advisors were still supportive of these changes as they recognized the group belongs to the students. As the students lead the group, changes naturally arise as the needs and desires shift. The advisors in this study were aware of this trend and made efforts to remain supportive of students across these changes.

With regard to training new advisors, the results of the current study suggest becoming an effective advisor is a self-taught process with no specific guidance from any organized body. However, the results of the current study also substantiate many of the recommendations offered by the National Association of GSA Networks (2011). While the advisors in the present study did not reference the GSA Network’s guide, future training of advisors may consider employing the guide when describing the roles of advisors.

The current results suggest some of the recommendations in the guide may be more or less useful when informing roles of advisors. Managing club funds and record keeping did not emerge as significant findings of the current study; however, this may remain an important, if not as salient, role of an advisor. Particular emphases may be placed on supporting changes to the group as the framework of a GSA appears dynamic over time as well as offering students opportunities to lead and learn as the group is student-run. The fluidity of the framework in addition to the vital role of students emerged as incredibly meaningful findings of the present
study. Thus, the first and final points laid out in the guide appear to be most useful and ones that should be most heavily emphasized.

**Limitations of the Dissertation Study**

One major limitation of the current study was its lack of multiple points within a variety of contexts to triangulate data. Specifically, observations of actual GSA meetings were not conducted as part of this study. Thus, data were limited to the semi-structured interviews and documents posted on the GSAs’ websites. Further, the understanding of how GSA meetings are run is exclusively understood from the perspectives of advisors. Therefore, another limitation of this study was the lack of direct investigation of students’ perspectives. Previous literature examining LGBTQ youth, mental health, and psychosocial adjustment suggests LGBTQ students experience greater levels of hostile school climates, victimization, discrimination, and harassment than their heterosexual peers (Almeida et al., 2009; Gutkin, 2009; Poteat, 2007; Williams et al., 2005). These negative school factors are associated with psychosocial maladjustment of LGBTQ students, but participating in a GSA may lead to improved psychosocial well-being, better peer relationships, and a greater sense of community at school (Fetner & Kush, 2008; Toomey et al., 2011; Griffin et al., 2004; Grossman et al., 2009; Russell et al., 2009; Walls, et al., 2008). While GSAs are run by students, those students were not interviewed for this study. Therefore, the findings of this study reflect only the perceptions of GSA advisors and do not directly measure outcomes for students. Data collected directly from students may help support findings and provide a more detailed view of GSAs. However, as previously stated, this dissertation study is focused on perceptions of GSA advisors.

Another major limitation related to participants was the lack of control over mental health training that GSA advisors may have received. GSA advisors are typically teachers in schools
and their training may vary greatly depending on their individual backgrounds. The National Association of GSA Networks’ (2011) guide to advising was selected as a framework for advisors’ roles within this study because is specifically designed for GSAs and also takes into consideration the contexts of schools. Although offering support is addressed in the GSA Network’s guide, mental health services are framed more narrowly within the guides offered by professional organizations in fields of psychology and counseling (e.g., NASP, 2011; NASP, 2014; APA & NASP, 2014; APA, 2009, ASCA, 2016). However, due to the uncontrollable nature of potential participants’ training in mental health, the guide provided by the National Association of GSA Networks appears more appropriate and suitable for all GSA advisors.

Implications for Future Research

Future research using quantitative methods may be able to recruit larger sample sizes in order to explore experiences of advisors. Further, additional research may consider recruiting GSA advisors from different geographic areas of the country. All the schools in this study are regulated by the same set of district-level policies as each participant was drawn from the same school district in the Southeast. How advisors from other school districts navigate school policies may vary across other counties. Culturally, this study included only Caucasian females from the same suburban region of the country. Future studies may explore perspectives of GSA advisors from different cultural backgrounds as well as more diverse geographic areas such as in more urban and/or rural settings.

This study expanded the literature on roles of GSA advisors. However, the impact of GSA advisors on students was not directly measured. Future research may also examine additional links between advisors and LGBTQ students’ mental health and psychosocial adjustment. In addition, future research examining roles of GSA advisors may explore how
advisors are navigating barriers in order to promote psychosocial well-being among students. Further examination of GSA advisors’ training on mental health and adolescent development is also warranted. As previous research has examined the relationship between mental health and GSA participation, additional inquiry is needed in order to identify how GSA advisors are trained on mental health issues. This may also have practical implications for the professional development of GSA advisors.

Future research may also examine the applications of the National Association of GSA Networks (2011) guide to advising. Quantitatively surveying GSA advisors’ alignment with the National Association of GSA Networks (2011) guide could offer more information regarding the actual use of the guide. For GSA advisors who have adopted the guide as a framework, future research may examine the effectiveness of the guide as well as more specifically exploring how advisors adhere to the recommendations. Further, associated student outcomes may also be measured in relation to advisors’ frameworks for advising.

The results of the current study suggest student leadership accounts for some of the success of a GSA. Future research that directly examines students may focus on leadership qualities, communication skills, and other characteristics that may establish strong student leaders. In addition, administrators as leaders also emerged as a prominent finding of data analysis. Future research may more closely examine the relationship between administration and students in relation to GSA participation. Administrative support (or lack of support) of a GSA may establish more positive or negative school climates. Further exploration of the roles of administrators, school climate, and student GSA participation may be considered.

While the current study drew from a small sample, the results appeared to differ vastly from previous research with regard to the social and cultural barriers facing GSA advisors and
students. Previous research has heavily emphasized the risks associated with developing GSAs, participating in GSAs, and advising GSAs (Grossman, Haney, Edwards, Alessi, Ardon, & Howell, 2009; Valenti & Campbell, 2009; Walls, Freedenthal, & Wineski, 2008). However, much of the previous research, while within the last ten years, appears somewhat outdated in relation to current cultural norms. While the current climate of schools may still hold heteronormative standards, a culture of acceptance has also appeared to emerge. The results of the current study illustrate the time-sensitivity on future research. Future studies may consider highlighting the shifting cultural climate, specifically as one of tolerance and acceptance, as the results of the current study suggest students and advisors encounter more facilitators than barriers to their roles.

**Implications for High School GSAs**

The results of the current study may help inform students and advisors who seek to establish a new GSA as the findings describe roles of students and advisors in greater detail. Specifically, students and advisors may have a clearer understanding of how GSAs function on a more day-to-day basis. The barriers and facilitators identified can help inform decision-making among students and advisors. It appeared that when students and advisors were proactive and preventative of mistakes, more success ensued. In comparison, when mistakes are made, GSAs may be unfairly targeted or profiled. Thus, the results of the current study can help support the development of new GSAs with its description of some dos and don’ts (facilitators and barriers) to establish and sustain a successful GSA.

The results of the current study may be applied within GSAs in order to help advisors perform their roles. Previous literature examining the specific roles of GSA advisors has held the assumption that advisors are able to be active participants in their GSAs (Graybill et al., 2009
Valenti & Campbell, 2009; Watson et al., 2010). While these previous studies are helpful for advisors in a position to have a more active role, advisors in non-participant roles may benefit from the results of the current study. The current study recruited GSA advisors from a single district where student-led (or student-initiated) clubs are exclusively managed by students. Although club advisors/sponsors may engage with their group’s students (e.g., playing chess during chess club), GSA advisors may be monitored more closely by their administrators. The results of the present study offer current and future GSA advisors strategies on how to perform their roles, support students, navigate barriers, and identify facilitators when they are limited to remaining as non-participants. Further, the results of the present study have many consistencies with the recommendations set forth by the National Association of GSA Networks (2011). Thus, the results of the current study also help illustrate practical applications of that organization’s recommendations.

As bystanders, monitors, and facilitators, the advisors in the current study were limited in terms of how much they are able to actually do within their GSAs. In order to best support students, it appears advisors must help foster the personal growth, empowerment, and leadership skills of students. This can establish the foundation for future advocacy efforts among students. Student leadership emerged as a major theme in the present study; however, there were many variations of leadership structures within GSAs. Consistent with Poteat and colleagues’ (2016) observations, different GSAs may employ different leadership structures in order to effectively run their group. The results of the current study suggest that fostering student leadership and supporting transitions of leadership can be very beneficial to maintaining the existence of a GSA over time.
Implications for the Practice of School Psychology

The current study offers GSA advisors a practical guide to their roles, facilitators to their roles, and how to navigate possible barriers to their roles. While GSA advisors are often teachers, other adults in the schools, such as school psychologists, may choose to serve as advisors. School psychologists are in a position to effectively support GSAs given their expertise with direct and indirect models of service delivery, child mental health and development, and family-school collaboration (NASP, 2010a).

The results of the current study revealed parental disapproval may arise and administrators typically address parental concerns regarding GSA participation and activities. With a background in family-school collaboration, school psychologists are in a position to assist GSA advisors and administration when resistance from the community emerges. School psychologists may engage in active family-school collaborative efforts in order facilitate the psychosocial well-being of students in GSAs. When parental concerns from the community arise, school psychologists may help create stronger linkages between families and school. Facilitating communication between school personnel and communities as well as mediating conflicts that arise are ways school psychologists can assist students, advisors, and administrators supporting GSAs.

In districts where advisors are permitted to actively participate within a GSA, students may benefit from additional mental health supports targeting positive psychosocial well-being. School psychologists may directly serve students by offering mental health services, group counseling services, or individual services. Further, conflict resolution and mediation between GSA students and students within the general student body may be facilitated by school psychologists. When resistance from within the school arises, school psychologists can help by
directly addressing issues on a case-by-case basis as well as by implementing schoolwide interventions to improve the overall climate.

When serving in an indirect role, school psychologists may consult with GSA advisors who lack extensive training in mental health and LGBTQ issues. School psychologists can direct current GSA advisors to helpful resources, offer strategies for healthy psychosocial development, and assist advisors with problem-solving when issues arise from the school and/or community. Conversely, GSA advisors may also help inform the roles of school psychologists who serve GSA students. The recommended ratio of school psychologists to students is about 1:500-700; however, the ratios may be even higher in actual practice (NASP, 2010a; Weir, 2012). Thus, GSA advisors are in a position to understand their students and the dynamics of their GSA in a more detailed and meaningful way. Bidirectional collaborations between GSA advisors and school psychologists may yield the most helpful and beneficial results to students. Just as school psychologists assist advisors, advisors can also help inform the practice of school psychology by illustrating the dynamics of the group so school psychologists may serve students in a more targeted and individualized manner.

Finally, the results of the current study illustrate the implications on training and professional development of school psychologists. Multicultural competence is embedded within school psychology graduate training models and may be emphasized through professional development (NASP, 2010b). However, training specifically addressing LGBTQ issues may or may not be offered to budding school psychologists. Thus, practitioners may lack a meaningful understanding of the historical context and current issues for LGBTQ students. School counselors also face a similar dilemma as their training may not heavily focus, or briefly review, LGBTQ issues (ASCA, 2014). Nonetheless, continued professional development on emergent
issues may remediate the lack of comprehensive knowledge school psychologists and counselors hold. As more GSAs emerge, so too will the need for mental health services for LGBTQ students. The results of the current study illustrated the valuable role of GSA advisors who serve LGBTQ youth. Again, bidirectional collaboration between GSA advisors and school psychologists may yield positive outcomes for students. Current school psychologists can best serve LGBTQ students by seeking additional professional development opportunities as well as consulting with GSA advisors as advisors. As GSA advisors are familiar with students and the current issues they face, the practice of school psychology can be better informed by consulting and collaborating with advisors when serving students.

Conclusion

Previous literature has illustrated the social and emotional challenges faced by LGBTQ students. GSAs may alleviate some of the psychosocial stressors and promote well-being among students. GSA advisors are in a unique position to help support students, but may face challenges from colleagues and the community. Previous literature has been limited with regard to defining the specific roles of GSA advisors, how they navigate barriers to their roles, and what facilitators help support their role. This purpose of this study was to explore the roles, barriers, and facilitators of GSA advisors. The findings of the current study were consistent with previous studies suggesting GSAs may adopt a variety of frameworks. The roles of students and advisors revealed in the current study expanded findings from previous research by offering a more detailed picture of how those roles are performed. With regard barriers, current results were generally consistent with previous findings in the identification of barriers, and expanded the literature by identifying how advisors more specifically navigate barriers. With regard to facilitators, the current study expanded previous research by illustrating how GSA advisors
benefit from supportive administration, colleagues, outside resources, and student leaders. While the present study was limited due to its qualitative design, a thicker description of GSA advisors’ roles emerged. Current results support practical guides on advising GSAs, open up avenues for future researchers to explore, and highlight the areas in which school psychologists may further support GSAs when serving schools.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form for Participation in Research Study

Title of Research Study: A Qualitative Investigation of the Experiences of High School Gay-Straight Alliance Advisors

Researcher: Melissa Cavins, Graduate Student in School Psychology, The University of Alabama

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Melissa Cavins under the supervision of Dr. Patti Harrison, from the University of Alabama. This project is designed to gather information about GSA advisors’ experiences at school. You will be one of approximately six people being interviewed for this research.

What is this study about? What is the investigator trying to learn?
This study is exploring the experiences of GSA advisors in order to better understand how GSA advisors fulfill their roles to best serve students. The investigator is seeking to understand the duties of serving as a GSA advisor and how those duties are fulfilled by understanding GSA advisors’ perspectives.

Why is this study important or useful?
This study offers an opportunity to learn more about GSA’s advisors roles. How they are able to fulfill their roles will provide valuable information and knowledge to future researchers and professionals who choose to serve as a GSA advisor. The results of this study may help others fulfill their roles as GSA advisors.

Why have I been asked to be in this study?
You have been asked to be in this study because you are currently a GSA advisor.

What will I be asked to do in this study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an interview with the researcher. The interview will be recorded with a digital audio recorder and is expected to last approximately one hour.

Will I be compensated for being in this study?
You will not receive financial compensation for participating in this study. However, in appreciation of your time, this investigator will report the findings of this study to you.
What are the risks to me if I agree to be in this study?
Little or no risk is foreseen. Though the researcher, Melissa Cavins, will make every effort to conceal your identity, there is some risk that you may be identified as a participant of this study.

What are the benefits that may happen if I am in this study?
Although you will not benefit personally from being in the study, you may feel good about knowing that you have helped provide information that may be used to better meet the needs of GSA advisors and their students. This study may help teachers, school counselors, and school psychologists become more helpful in meeting the needs of GSA advisors and their students.

How will my privacy be protected?
In order to protect your privacy, pseudonyms will be used and no identifying information will be reported. You may choose not to answer any question for whatever reason.

How will my confidentiality be protected?
Your confidentiality will be protected at all times. Confidentiality will be protected by separating signed consents, using ID numbers and pseudonyms instead of names for records, placing hard-copy consent forms in locked drawers and doors, encrypting the computer database where all responses will be electronically stored, and destroying raw data or identifiers after data have been entered. The number of people who can access data will be limited to the primary researcher and her committee of 5 faculty members at the University of Alabama.

What are my rights as a participant in this study?
Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your relations with the University of Alabama or with school, school system, or any school or district personnel.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (“the IRB”) is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

If new information becomes available that might affect your willingness to continue participating in this study, we will tell you.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?
If you have questions about the study right now, please ask them. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study later on, please call the researcher, Melissa Cavins, at (256-541-3561). If you have questions about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

By signing this form, I am agreeing to voluntarily enter this study. I understand that, by signing this document, I do not waive any of my legal rights. I have had a chance to read this consent form and it was explained to me in a language which I use and understand. I have had the
opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me.

___ I agree to the use of audio recording.
___ I do not agree to the use of audio recording.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Research Participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Signature of Investigator</th>
<th>Date</th>
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August 5, 2015

Melissa Cavins
ESPRMC
College of Education
Box 870231

Re: IRB #: 15-OR-236 “A Qualitative Investigation of the Experiences of High School Gay-Straight Alliance Advisors”

Dear Ms. Cavins:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Your application will expire on August 3, 2016. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

[Redacted]

Director & Research Compliance Officer
APPENDIX C: SCHOOL DISTRICT INSTITUTIONAL APPROVAL LETTER

June 6, 2016

Melissa Cavins
Duluth, GA 30096

Re: File ID 2016-52

Dear Ms. Cavins:

This is to advise you that your research application, "Qualitative Investigation of the Experiences of High School Gay-Straight Alliance Advisors," ID Number 2016-52, has satisfactorily met [REDACTED] Research Standards and was approved by the Institutional Review Board. This approval is valid beginning June 7, 2016, through June 7, 2017. Please note the following comments regarding your study:

- This study has potential for informing school advisors of student-led gay-straight alliance organizations about best practices for providing oversight of these student groups.
- This is an unobtrusive and well-designed study that will add to the knowledge base in the field of school psychology.

Please note the following requirements of you as a researcher in [REDACTED]:

- A copy of this approval letter must be attached to any initial communication with a [REDACTED] school or office.
- The above File ID number must be included in the subject line of any communication with a [REDACTED] school or district office concerning this research study.
- If circumstances prevent you and every member of your research team from following these requirements, please let me know so that we can make alternative arrangements.

Note that schools and teachers may elect not to participate in your research study, even though the district has granted permission.

Please forward a copy of your results to me when they are completed.

Best wishes for a successful research project. Please call me at [REDACTED] if I may be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Date: 2016.06.06 11:51:49

cc: Dr. Patti Harrison, University of Alabama, pharrison@ua.edu
    Melissa Cavins, mtchumacher@crimson.ua.edu
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

Date: _____________________    Case ID______________________
Time: ____________________   Location: ____________________
Pseudonyms____________________________

Introduction
- Briefly describe the project and purpose of study
- Describe nature of the interview (audio recording, taking notes, and use of pseudonyms)
- Ask if he or she has any questions
- Obtain inform consent

Descriptive Questions
1. How would you describe the purpose or mission of your GSA?
2. How do you describe your role as a GSA advisor?
3. How would you describe a typical GSA meeting?

Questions About Environmental Barriers
4. GSA advisors may experience challenges and obstacles to performing their job. Have you experienced any challenges as the GSA advisor in your school?
   a. From individuals within your school?
   b. With school policy?
   c. From members or values of the community?
5. How do you deal with these difficulties as an advisor?
   a. What do you need, or what helps you, to deal with the challenges you’re facing?
   b. Strategies?
   c. Resources?

Questions About Environmental Facilitators

6. Although you may experience challenges and obstacles to performing their job, what are some things that you find helpful as the GSA advisor in your school?
   a. Strategies?
   b. Resources?

7. What factors positively influence your role as the GSA advisor?

Concluding Statement

- Ask if there are any questions or comments
- Thank them for participating
- Ask if they would like a copy of the results
APPENDIX E: LIST OF FINAL CODES

Table 1

List of Final Codes

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission: Support Type</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mission: Activist Type</td>
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<td>Mission: Social Type</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mission: Ambiguity of Mission</td>
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<td>School-Sanctioned Group</td>
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<td>Student-Run Group</td>
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<td>Inclusive Group</td>
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<td>Role of Advisor: Support</td>
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<td>Role of Advisor: Mandatory Reporter</td>
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<td>Support from Colleagues: Continuity of GSA Advisor</td>
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<td>Culture of Community: Barriers</td>
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<td>Culture of Community: Barriers-- Students Hiding from Parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture of Community: Facilitators</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture of School: Barriers</td>
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### Table 2

**First Cycle Codes: In Vivo Codes By Advisor**

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<th>Advisor</th>
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<td>Advisor #1</td>
<td>Pride was a big one.</td>
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Right now is an awesome time for you. [progress]

I think there's a lot more tolerance in school.

I like that at our school the kids aren't afraid to go to an administrator.

[On participating in an extracurricular] And I think that’s a little [school] culture thing. I think that all the kids want to be a part of something.

I keep in contact with the two [student leaders]. If anything comes up, I'm their direct person.

From the leadership position, it’s the kids that run it.

They [two presidents] do run the meetings.

They're still teenagers.

You're still minors.

Especially teenagers.

[on sexual and gender identity] I mean the kids know students that are just kind of confused, lost.

They may not be ready [to come out].

[on spreading the word] There's a social media trend. They’re like other teenagers. We have Twitter, Facebook, and all that.

[on advertisement] Kids still have to make the effort to check social media.
I would say for the most part [my role] is the liaison between the kids and the administration. Making sure that we can do this and this [activity].

And then finally with [the principal] and the administrative staff we have now, now we can say ‘Gay Straight Alliance.’

[administration is] Very supportive.

Knowing that the administrators, the good or bad, anything I've ever had to talk to them or talk with them about, has always been taken positively.

If there's ever been issues, how to fix it, how to work it, [administration] is supportive. Again, it all comes down to being there for the kids.

They're behind me, and, and there's that trust between us.

[The students] also know that they can go to some of the more involved administrators.

The kids aren't afraid to go to an administrator.

We're trying to get the freshmen.

So I think we're still kind of struggling with how to pull in [new students].

The administrators are supportive of the club. They haven't tried to fight it or block it.

We're trying to prune upcoming sophomores and juniors.

There's a couple of kids that we're trying to work with, because when [the student leaders] graduate, hopefully [the GSA will] still have a future.

If there's ever something that I have to report to the principal, [I'll] give him the heads up that something happened.

One of our administrators had said "Well, we never told you all you couldn't [say gay-straight alliance].”

I’d give [administration] a heads up that something happened.

I keep in contact with the two [student leaders]. If anything comes up, I'm their direct person.

Very gingerly.
I know one topic I ran through it in administration was suicide prevention.

I did sit down with two of the administrators on where's our thermostat with the community.

At some point [in years past], they were told that they can't say “Gay-Straight Alliance.” Everything just has to be “GSA.”

[Part of what the students do is] Drive acceptance of just the term [gay-straight alliance].

Finally, I clarified it about two years ago. I was like, "Can the kids put [the term “gay-straight alliance”] on flyers and T-shirts?" And [my assistant principal] was like "Yes, that is the name of your club."

Just being another adult that they know is on their team.

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Just being another adult that they know is on their team.

Then we had a student leader a couple of years ago that had a totally different personality. So there was a lot of falling out.

[The two student leaders] both complement each other. They're not total best friends but they still love GSA.

Their hearts are in it.

I know nothing [about you going to Pride]. I don't when you’re leaving. [Our school] doesn't know when you're leaving. You know.

We're still trying to figure out the positive advocacy for [our city].

I know a lot of kids really feel strongly about doing something that advocates for the community.
I know that there's certain events [Pride] that they're just left to plan on their own.

I mean just things [like other clubs] that are school-wide [have an easier time being seen].

[on being proud of student-led accomplishments] I was like, that is spectacular. I was very proud of them.

And they put it [wall of LGBTQ terms] outside my room and again I got approval to.

They're one of the clubs where if they step one step out of line, the attention's going to be on them.

Twice a month, every other Thursday.

There's about five or six kids that [attend regularly] We've gotten up to 20 kids a few times.

We've had everyone [from different backgrounds] come.

[on being asked by other teachers] "Well, what kind of backgrounds do they have?" And I was like, "Same as my cheerleaders. Some are new queer parents that will support them, and will run the mile with them, some divorced parents, some are wealthy.

They're coming from still all different backgrounds and academic levels.

One of the kids was at Pride last year, but apparently, as he described, "Well, I'm not going to make the same mistake again because I want to see places other than this school for the next three months."

There was a transition about three or four years ago to two of us, but now I'm the only one [sponsor].

There's some times I do have to corral the conversation so it doesn't go to somewhere I have to report.

Even if you're riding the wave of the Supreme Court, use it for positivity.

We're trying to prune upcoming sophomores and juniors.

It’s student-run.

It is a safe place for the kids.
Advisor #2

[On establishing a GSA] And [one sponsor] was very supportive of it, but at the same time was almost paranoid about parents in the community. *Is she still currently a sponsor?* Uh, no. This is just when I had started [serving as sponsor].

[The parents] are just so respectful.

Most of the parents are here that I have encountered are fine. They’re not really rude. They aren’t making comments.

[A former sponsor] was confronted [by colleagues] and evidently was quite uncomfortable. And then she became very secretive almost about it. About advertising, about the club, when they were meeting.

I think the general climate of the school and the kids that impresses me is that the student body as a whole seems to get better and much more open to ideas.

I don't see the taunting like I used to in years passed.

I'm sure I know [bullying] does still happen, but it's not as out in the open

The anti-bullying program is an emphasis in all of the schools.

[On acceptance] The kids truly don't understand why people have a problem.

They’ve got to come up with their own agendas

It seems to be a little bit more organized this year which is good.

The officers this year I think are willing to do more.

They’re teenagers.

Because our administration is so supportive of the group, I really honestly don't think that I would get you know, reprimanded. [for assisting participating in the group with students]

If any parents have had any complaints or anything, [admin has] handled it. None of it is trickled down to me.

Word of mouth a lot helps.

I would like to see them get away from it just being, "Let's come hang out."
If there was anything discussed that, say if a child was talking about suicide, obviously we have to report those things.

They need to know that there are adults that are supportive and that they're okay.

I am here truly to support them.

So they know that I'm out there and you know, standing up for them, um, I think that helps. I'm not just here to be, to provide just a room but I actually believe in what they are doing.

You can always come to me. You know, except not as your GSA sponsor

I will make a few little comments here and there, but I try to let them run the meeting.

They need as many allies as possible.

When it first started, the officers were getting guest speakers to come in. They would have an agenda for the presentation, and they would try to present different topics.

They're getting more involved politically and they're becoming more vocal.

Be involved, and be educated.

Legally, if I was overstepping these bounds [by supporting students within a student-led club], then legally I guess the schools couldn't be supportive if I was expressing opinions that the parents did not like [since I was breaking a rule by being active]. So I do have to be careful.

I try to do what's right.
Advertisements for their club meetings on the corkboards have to be approved

I'm going to keep within the boundaries and my responsibilities and duties but I'm also I'm going to advocate for the kids.

It was standing room only and this is a large class I'm in. But at the end of last year, there were only maybe six to 10 kids showing up because it had devolved.

It really is such an important club for these kids. They need this. They need the support of each other.
And the fear of litigation.

Every other Wednesday.

It turns into just being social, just come hang out one of these days [when students take less initiative to plan meetings].

[on initially supporting a colleague] I became one of the co-sponsors to help him with the GSA.

There's a couple of other teachers that have kind of been the co-sponsors and fill in when the main sponsor can't be there.

It really seemed to fall apart for a few years. [sponsor turnover and students not attending]

It's been through several, several different sponsors.

It really is such an important club for these kids. They need this. They need the support of each other.

They need to know that there is nothing wrong with them and there's things that are wrong with society. There may be things wrong with their parents' beliefs, but nothing wrong with the child.

This provides that safe place for them to meet,

And this is where they feel it [safe], that I’m okay and that are other people like me.

So it's student-run.

I have to pretty much sit.

I do provide them the room and my role, as with all student-led clubs goes, is that the teacher is supposed to be just providing the space, making sure nothing gets out of hand, and that they're following school rules. That kind of stuff.

We're not supposed to participate with the groups and clubs. However, a chess club sponsor will play chess with the kids. I mean, so, you know...

There is a County policy about student-initiated clubs and sponsors. And it does lay out the rules and guidelines as to what can and can't be done by the sponsor. It's pretty clear in there. Now as far as here if we went a little bit beyond these boundaries, if I was participating a little bit more,
because our administration is so supportive of the group, I really honestly
don't think that I would get reprimanded.

[pushing the boundary] If these students ask me questions, I could
certainly answer them, but it's a little touchy.

We've had conversations in passing about [various issues] but I don’t set
the meeting agenda

[on frustration with inability to offer more] They’re looking for it. I’ll
just leave information out and, "Oh, maybe she happens to see it on my
desk."

It is very frustrating because I am such an advocate for the community
and ally.

I can provide them with the resources, but they decide what to do with it.

I can ask them questions. It's not telling them what to do. It's just asking
them, "Have you thought about this?"

The kids have social media [to communicate and advertise].

I try to let the kids know that GLSEN and PFLAG and other groups that
are out there for you. And let the leaders know, "Here's some resources
and they've written them up on the board, so kids can go to these."

Advisor #3

[On Day of Silence] We had some parents call and complain about why
is my child forced to participate in a gay day. But it was nice that we
didn't have to deal with it. [Administration] took that on.

We also have a lot of kids that have really, really awesome and
supportive parents.

The religion part is a lot of what kids talk about in in our club.
We had a couple moms and dads that chauffeured like six, eight kids [to
Pride] which was nice.

[One student’s mom is] very involved. She got us a guest speaker to
come last year and she brought all kinds of food. She's been really
supportive of [her son] because of GSA.

We've heard a lot of kids talk about supportive parents.

[Sexual and gender identity is] something that everybody's talking about
just in in politics and in leisure and entertainment, all of that stuff. I think
it's out there more, and so I think there are a lot of people in support of differences.

We really haven't had anybody complain about us having a GSA

I think a lot of it changed by knowing somebody. It's like, once you know somebody, that changes everything. It's really easy to hate an idea, it's really hard to hate somebody you know.

In a school this size, there are 3000 different clubs and activities that you can be involved in.

They're featured in the yearbook. I worried about that the first time that they like just had this little club picture, but they actually got like a [full] page. And the kids were so excited about having a page and nobody said a word [to disagree].

So far nobody has ever been physically bullied. Nobody's ever been just face-to-face against confrontation.

We have three [upperclassmen] and one [underclassman] that are kind of the advisory board and it's their job to figure out what we want to do for that meeting.

And then we had a girl who's [an underclassman]. She's very outspoken and really, really great. And she approached me and said, "how do I run to be on the board for next year?" I was like, "well how about I just make the executive decision and put you on the board this year." And I asked everybody else afterwards and just kind of said, "this is a decision that I think is important and does anybody have a problem with it?" And everybody was okay.

I only need one person to talk to. And I made the executive decision that it was going to be [a certain student]. If for no other reason, I have her in first period. I don't need to see somebody during their lunch for a meeting we're going to have two hours later.

So, they've learned: here’s our plan, but if that doesn't work, here's our other plan.

I think as teenagers especially, at that age, they have a hard time with [obedience to authority].

I think that [students engaging in the community] is where you get a little bit of advantage in high school and the fact that a lot of these kids can drive.
Just the age.

[on low parental involvement] I think that happens a lot in high school anyways. "Oh, you’re in high school now, you can take care of yourself."

I [as the media specialist] will put it on the announcements that go across the school.

They'll make the posters to put up around the schools.

So last year, [because so many seniors left] there was a huge push and a lot of advertisement about the first meeting.

We do [have a club description] on our school website. With the county, you have to have a description of it. So our group at that time, we looked at several different mission statements from a bunch of different schools. And we just picked and decided that we like this about this one and this about this one. And just made one for ourselves. And we always put it on the board at the first meeting. We should probably edit it at the end of the year rather than the beginning of the year because at the beginning of the year they're all so, "Yeah, everything's great, everything's wonderful."

It's very generic. We didn't want to make it too specific, but we also didn't just want to use the one from like a national site or something. We wanted to make it a little bit more geared towards our high school and our GSA. Respect is always the number one thing. I think [the students] sort of feel like, I just want people to respect who I am, what I believe, and just let me be.

You’re the ones that are going to change things.

You all are the ones that are going to make things better for the next generation, making these legal decisions, going into politics. Don't be defeated because you're going be the ones that are make change. It's on you.

We say that you need to let us know if something [really serious] is going on.

If you want to organize an event, you need to give me a time, you need to give me a date, you need to give me an actual written plan of what you want to talk about and what you want to do because [admin will] be willing to sit down and talk with us, but not just if we just show up.

I think that having a good balance [age/grade/personality] in like your student leadership really helps.
I should be really careful as to what exactly I do [choose to] say.

And you know I'll always have your back.

Anything that they want to do outside of school, we the adults really stay out of.

We've had some picnics and [the sponsors] will like come and hang out for a little bit and then we leave. It's really clear that this is an out of school activity, so it's not formally associated with the club. It's not something that we have to fill out official forms for.

We didn't have a Day of Silence two years ago, but this school is very supportive of having a Day of Silence, but we need to go ahead of time and talk to them and tell them and make sure everybody has an understanding of what is expected. You're welcome not to speak, but if a teacher calls on you in class or if speaking is part of what you do for school that day, you have to.

The best thing you can do is you need to make it as hard as possible for that person to have a problem.

We meet every other week. It comes a lot faster than what you realize.

Right now we're averaging 30 kids per meeting.

Anywhere from 15 to 35. Last year it was a really small group. We had like six, eight people coming.

And that's when we had like 54 kids show up and we'd had like eight before. Kids started coming and coming and coming. And we were like, "this is awesome, but I don't know what to do with all of you."

It's good when they join early and make friends early because then they see them. I think that's how you keep kids involved a lot.

I don't think there's anybody that that I know of that doesn't feel welcome to come.

Really we have more straight kids that come than gay kids that come.

We didn't realize there was a [time] conflict and so we didn't have a meeting space. So we met in the media center and there were tons of kids that were that were not [involved with] GSA at all. And they did not have any problem speaking out. They felt very comfortable surrounded by the group and they didn't care that other people outside were listening to
what was going on. Nobody got up and left, nobody was making fun, nobody was doing anything, and I found it really interesting that everybody was very respectful and just listening to what people were saying.

It's that social time of wanting to come and see them. I think that's how you keep kids involved a lot.

And every now and then, they'll just be like, "can we just have a meeting just to have pizza and talk?" And I'm like, "This is you. Yes, if you think that's what people want and what they need, absolutely. We just can't do that every meeting because there needs to be some purpose, but we also don't need it to be incredibly structured."

We actually have two other teachers that help out because it's kind of nice just to have extra if something comes up.

And it's nice to have three adults to give some different perspectives.

A lot of times, it's only one or two of us there, but the first two meetings of the year we try to all three be there.

I liked having three. Three is nice. There's no pressure really because between three of us, somebody will be there. There haven't been any issues now [with two co-sponsors].

We have three seniors [as leaders]. And that's a problem.

And that's where we ran into a lot of problems between one year to the next. We went from having probably about 18 kids show up at every meeting to like five kids showing up at every meeting because a lot of them were seniors [who had graduated]. The leadership was all seniors and we just didn't do a good job of reaching out to underclassman.

We have about a 45 minute to an hour long meeting and we try to have 15 to 20 minutes of something that's sort of structured first. And then have the rest of the period just social hour. A lot of times what happens is whatever the topic is will just sort of facilitate discussion and then everybody spends the rest of the time just kind of talking about that or sharing personal stories.

Sometimes they'll show a five-minute video and just say, "what do you think?" And that's all you have to say for the rest of the meeting because there's enough. But you also have to be prepared for what if nobody says anything.
I think that's what happens a lot, is they want something but then I remind them, "hey, remember, if you want to do this.

It is student-initiated and student-run.

It's your club.

So they’ll usually will tell me, "this is what we decided, this is what we want to do." And it’ll be if they need a computer at the meeting or if we need equipment or announcements.

I tell them, "it's my job to facilitate anything that needs to be facilitated at this school."

I can only remind them so many times [to follow through with ideas] because it's not my job to do it.

It's a lot of sitting and listening.

I try not to interfere very much when they talk.

I make myself scarce because I do think there are some people that feel more willing to speak up if there's not an adult like right there,

I also do try to, sometimes when the conversations are getting a little too much in one direction, to bring them back and play devil’s advocate a little bit. Let's look at this from another point of view.

[on approving topics] I try to look at it from a teacher’s point of view and be like, "Okay, but what do you have for a backup if this, if this flops?"

Sometimes I just need to sort of do the teacher thing and walk around and stand behind somebody or tap them on the shoulder, just sort of, "hey, hey someone's talking over here." Or I try to be like, "hey, y'all are talking about something really good that everybody needs to hear, so hang on."

I try to keep an eye on things that pop up in the news and I’ll email just the officers and say, "hey, did you see this article in the newspaper today?" And like send it to them and maybe it's something that they use. But just because I find it interesting, they might not find it interesting.

I’m always trying to find that balance of letting them do their own thing, but not getting too disorganized to where it kind of falls apart. But then I don’t want to step in too much where it’s like, "oh well the grown-up’s making the rules."
I try to tell them all the time-- This is your club, I'm facilitating.

[On making executive decisions for the group] Every now and then I just have to be like, "you know what, I'm the grownup- and that's why."

I try to stop it if I see it going in a [negative] direction, but in general, they've been good.

I don't do anything. I really don't. The kids do like 95% of it. It's really on them.

They had sent out messages [on social media]. I don't really know what they're on now, which form of social media they're advertising on, but they send messages to each other.

They go to the GLSEN site a lot to get ideas. There's all kinds of great resources.

And GLSEN’s website is awesome because it has enough stuff that you can find everything and anything that you need to talk about, which is really, really great.

Advisor #4

There hasn't been any conflict. We're always available if a parent were to call the school and ask questions.

A couple of the GSA parents are on the PTSA, so they're up here a bit.

It takes a special sort of parent to send his or her child to [our school]. So, there is a certain amount of continuity among our parents. These are parents who want their kids to be high achieving. These are parents who want their kids to work hard. These are parents who are investing in their children... So we're going to work harder so that your kid gets the best possible education.

[On participating in an extracurricular] They teach them, here are all the clubs at our school. Here's all the cool stuff you can join. Here's the culture of the school.

They decorated [a Christmas tree] with rainbow flags. It's not every school that would let the GSA decorate a Christmas tree with rainbow flags.

Our kids are loved and supported here. And that's what's important.

[On going to Pride] And I will always tell them, look, I'm giving you my warning tips. Do not trust strangers. Do not. They are sheltered. And they are isolated at this school. People are nice to them here. And it's cool
here. So, I'll be like, "People will act like they're excited to mentor you, and some of them really are. And some of them are predators. And I want you to remember that the world is not like [our school]."

[This school] isn't like the rest of the world. I think one of the good things that we have here is there's like 20% of every racial group. Like sometimes I'm the only white person in the room. And sometimes I'm one of about 20% you know in the room. And I just think that's good for building unity. Because you can't really like hang out with the kids who look like you because there probably aren't enough of them in any given classroom. So, you can hang out with the GSA kids and then you're bonding ideologically. You can hang out with the chess club kids and you're bonding ideologically. And it's a very different thing from other schools.

It's not like we've got a bunch of privileged and entitled kids. We've got this huge range.

Something that we really focus on [at the school] is making them work collaboratively. Because of the demographic makeup of [our school], they are forced to work with people who are different from them. I think that probably filters over into GSA as another strength.

It's not like it's Utopia. It's not like it's perfect or anything. But it is really good.

They know they're here by choice. Somebody's choice. Sometimes it's mom's choice. Sometimes it's dad's choice. But they're here by choice. They don't have to be here.

They know [this school] is a place we're they're not going to be bullied. They can be comfortably out of the closet. Nobody's going to be a jerk about it.

Our kids are very, very fortunate. So they have the opportunity to then go, "Okay well let's talk about, what's demi-sexual? What's gray sexual? What's aromantic?" And they can get into that kind of cool stuff. And like talk about those deeper meanings because they're not having to do triage on kids who have been verbally or physically hurt.

We used to have a kid who would come in a full face of makeup. Nobody said anything to him. He was one of those kids that everybody on the faculty respected-- great kid, got really good recommendations and stuff. Whereas I know that there are places that that wouldn't be true.

We've got a president, vice president, and secretary.
They are still teenagers.

The secretary of the club just sent out an email today to all the members. The secretary sends out an email to make sure that everybody knows what’s going on. And to get feedback or input ahead of time.

A kid said, "Oh well I'm worried about this," And I said, "Do you think [the assistant principal] would protect you?" Absolutely.

They know that [the assistant principal is] tough and fair. She's always on their side. I think it's so important and it's true of all of our administration.

And the first meeting is to just welcome the freshman.

I am a mandatory reporter.

I am a mandatory reporter so you can talk to me, but if it's like a super big deal you might want to go straight to the counselor because I'm going to have to go there.

[on Day of Silence but still meeting classroom expectations] Make sure everybody understands, make sure the kids all sign a contract and all that stuff.

And the roles [of administrators] are very clearly defined. If something's going wrong, I know which administrator to go to get help.
I'm here not only as an ally, but also so they can feel safer knowing there's an adult in the room. And that I'm going to make sure you know everything's okay.

I'm definitely here for you.

We understand they're a vulnerable population and that's one of the reasons we want to be here to protect and support those kids.

It’s useful for them to have an ally to sort of get that idea that they can have support from outside the community as well.

We know we are part of the solution, not part of the problem. And, that's one of the reasons that I like being the GSA sponsor. Those kids have somebody in the building. They know that we're all on their side.

It's Trans Awareness Week and we're going to wear purple on Friday. They're putting together a lesson and they're going to talk about transgender awareness.
Last year we raised over $1,500 for charity. The kids aren't raising it to give themselves a pizza party.

Last year we did a big thing for mental health awareness week. So we wore green and put up signs and posters. And we had a special lesson in the club and invited everybody you know who wanted to come.

They had prepared a whole lesson on all the different types of identities within our group. And here's how to start thinking about your identity and how to start thinking about dealing with other people's identities in a respectful way.

Last year a lot of it went to Syrian refugees and we did a clothing drive. And they mobilized the school for that clothing drive. It was pretty incredible.

They haven't done anything with any of that money that actually benefited them.

These kids are doing stuff that's bigger than they are [by donating to charity]

We're cautious. We always want to make sure we're doing the right thing.

It's a public school. I said, "We have these books in the media center you may find useful. They have been approved by the media committee in the county." I went to one of the administrators before and I was like, "Hey could I have a little bookshelf for, some books that I've read that I think might be like interesting to these kids?" And she said, "That needs to go through the media center. It needs to be official through the school." And I think that's helpful that everybody's looking out to make sure that the right thing is done at all levels.

I am the kind of person that would always rather ask for permission than forgiveness.

So a lot of times they'll say, "Hey, we, GSA wants to do this. Is this cool?"

So there are approved [school district] County charities. And so the kids, they would say, "All right we want to donate to this kind of thing." So I'll go to the bookkeeper and ask what’s in the list of approved charities that's this kind of thing? [if charity is not approved by county]

They're trying to figure out where to donate the remaining funds. Sometimes they'll be like, "Oh we want to donate to a group that works
specifically with LGBTQ+ students." But not all of those charities are approved through the county. We’re usually able to find like a related charity. Like a shelter for teens. And LGBTQ+ kids are disproportionately homeless and face these kinds of social issues, if they couldn't specifically help LGBTQ+ kids, then at least something where a lot of LGBTQ+ kids were going to show up.

They meet every other Tuesday.

I would say, anywhere from 10-25. And it ebbs and flows. If something big is due and right here this last week, so much stuff is due tomorrow.

We have a couple of students who are transgender.

At the first meeting of the year they go around and say, "Hi my name is Joe. I identify as pansexual. I use they/them pronouns." And so they go ahead and establish that. And anybody can say pass or abstain.

It's a safe and welcoming space. And it's very inclusive. And they all make an effort to really get to know each other's preferences

The first meeting is to just welcome the freshman and say who we are. What kinds of things do you all want to talk about? What are you struggling with? Or what are some interesting issues you know that you want to talk about?

There is a space here for people who disagree So they're very, very good [about including everyone]. I'm in here to monitor and make sure that that happens all the time.

They're always really supportive of each other.

The co-sponsor who is not able to be with us all that often, but the co-sponsor is one of the counselors.

If there's a bigger deal issue that's sort of beyond me you, then the counselor would step in.

And we have had the counselors come in before

It's a little more high-powered than your average school. And so you add to that, a non-traditional identity, and they have extra stress.

The rising seniors are being tapped now to be freshman mentors next year. And so we know who the leaders are. And they are indoctrinated.
It's the seniors teaching the incoming freshman what the culture [of the school] is.

The older kids mentor the younger kids.

So the rising seniors are being tapped now to be freshman mentors next year. So we know who the leaders are. They are indoctrinated to be leaders. And we have a very active student council and county [student leadership group].

I didn't realize until just now how much we indoctrinate our kids to become leaders and mentor the younger kids at our school. But it works. We do prime them.

So, they're very careful in meetings to say, you know what is your preference? And what are you comfortable with? And if they ever talk about something potentially controversial, there's always—okay well how does everybody feel?

[At the beginning of meetings] they'll kind of come in. Hey, how's everybody doing? They do a check. Is everybody all right? Anything anybody wants to share? And they're here for each other.

[During meetings] if a kid is like, "I've been having these feelings, or I've been having these questions." Then they support the kid. "So, is there anybody else in here who shares those feelings?" They're just kind of there for each other which is cool.

The students really take ownership of that.

So it's all student-run, student-led.

I'm here to monitor.

I'm in here to monitor and make sure that that happens (keeping the space safe) all the time.

It’s student run.

It's all student run, student led. They prepare lessons. I'm here to monitor.

I would say most of what they do isn't controversial at all.

I try to be helpful and supportive.
I would be very quick to step in if I felt like anyone might be uncomfortable or that a parent would be uncomfortable with. But I haven't experienced that.

Sometimes they say, "well what's your perspective on this?" Because I sit in the room. And I'll say, "Well what's your perspective on this? Why would this be an issue?" Or I can say, “from an adult perspective” or “from a non-oppressed minority perspective.”
APPENDIX G: FIRST CYCLE CODES: VERSUS CODES BY ADVISOR

Table 3

*First Cycle Codes: Versus Codes By Advisor*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisor</th>
<th>Versus Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisor #1</td>
<td>I did sit down with two of the administrators on like where's our thermostat with the community?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We're still in a politically red, conservative county.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have to keep telling them what it was like. You know we, we've definitely made strides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[On progress and change in the community] And that's why I have to tell them sometimes, I was like, &quot;I know that you mean well&quot;, but I was like &quot;We can't just all of a sudden get the car going 80 miles an hour&quot;. We're still in the 15 to 20 mile and hour neighborhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There's still that misconception [about GSAs], &quot;so, y'all just talk about how to have gay sex?&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It comes down to the student leaders because I can’t [recruit].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s hard when it’s up to the students to do everything and not wanting to step in to help.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[on transgender bathrooms] Opposition we were getting with the bathroom, you know, how there's ignorant comments. A lot of it was behind a computer screen.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trying to put that balance between how you be all heavy and all &quot;Safe place&quot; and all serious than having it be funny.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That’s the one thing that is so frustrating- that I can't run it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I wish there was more of a constitution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have to keep telling them what it was like. We've definitely made strides, but I when I think of [our state] and [our county] (sighing)… But</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I have to tell the kids, we're still not up to San Diego or South Florida. If we were there, oh my god, we could probably like paint rainbows all over.

| Advisor #2 | I think there had been a year before I got here, there was one parent that was a bit confrontational.] And quite vocal about their disapproval of this type of club being available. And they may not hear that [supportiveness] at home. There are things that are getting better but then, there's a lot of things that are going, "Wow." Yeah, especially here in the south. In the Bible Belt. And they may not approve of it, but they understand that the students have rights. There's always going to be those negative comments and stuff, but I think in general, the kids are just a lot more open. That's really what's lacking. How you can tell them that [to establish a framework] without telling them that? I have told them, you know, even though I can't actively participate but if you need an adult to talk to, that they can come to me anytime, you know, that's not, I'm not acting as your GSA adviser, I'm acting as an adult in the building who's here to make sure that you are safe. I want to do what's right by the kids but I also want to keep my job. There are a lot of kids who haven't been able to come out to their parents yet. And there have been some that have and had been disowned. They don't want their parents to know that they're coming to the, to GSA. We're not supposed to participate and lead discussions. The students are supposed to. Now if something inappropriate was said or being done, then of course we'd step in. |

| Advisor #3 | A lot of them go to church and worry a lot about telling their parents. Are they going to stick with the love part or are they going to stick with the abomination part? Things have changed since before. But the kids remind me all the time, "Yeah, but we're still in the bible belt." My GSA kids are real quick to say that. |
They feel comfortable coming to a GSA meeting. We have not had anybody say that they've ever been truly bullied. They say, some people make crude remarks under their breath, and stuff like that, but knock on wood, so far nobody has ever been physically bullied. Nobody's ever been just face to face against confrontation.

It's usually just if you're walking down the hall, it's the quick under-your-breath something that, if you look around, you wouldn't be able to tell who said it.

There are still issues, but I don't think anybody here right now feels safe to like openly antagonize anybody which is good.

They don't want to have labels of president, vice president, or whatever, but there is a sort of head person of the advisory group who communicates with me directly, mainly because he’s my first period student.

They went a little overboard about not wanting to have a president, a vice president. They didn't want to labels.

We want to keep everything equal, we want to not have labels, but I don't want to have to talk to five people and get the same story from five different people and then try and figure it out. I'm going to talk to one person and it's worked out fine.

Really our biggest obstacle is at the beginning. And it's like, what do we want our rules to be? And we decide kind of as a group. Respect is always huge.

They can't go to Pride as [our school’s] group, but they can certainly meet up there. On their own kind of thing.

We just want to stay away from the liability of things. We want to make sure everybody's safe, but I didn't want to have to stay there and make sure every parent has picked up every child and everybody had a permission slip to be there, and stuff like that.

So they tried to say, "Well we tried to have day of silence and the school wouldn't let us." I was like, "no, you couldn't have day of silence because that morning, without telling anybody, you just set up a table and started handing stuff out and [admin] came to talk to me and the other sponsor about it. And we're like, "we have no idea what they're talking about." That's why it was shut down. So, the very next year, we went and talked to them and the administrators were very supportive.
It just kind of depends. You get closer to exam time and when grades are due and stuff like that, you'll have a few fewer.

We have had more than one student that lies about where they are to be there.

We had a teacher's child that said, "yeah, my dad thinks I've been at math tutoring for two years."

We do have a lot of kids that still are afraid to come out at home.

Fear is not the right word for it. I think it's more that they love their parents so much they don't want to risk losing that.

I know some kids really well, but a lot of them we don't know outside of the club, which in some ways I think is good. They know that anything they say, it's not like they're going to have to face you in class tomorrow.

They run club. I do not run the club.

My job is to help facilitate what you want to do, but you have to do the steps to do it.

And sometimes you need somebody to be the bad guy too. It's sort of like, "hey, we all voted to do this, and now we're thinking this is a little too much." And we're not going to be able to do it or we're not going to be able to pull it together. And I'm just like, "you know what- we're not doing it. And it's because I said so. Let's scale it back and do this thing instead." And then I just send out the message.

I said, "so I'm making the executive decision." And I said, "I hope nobody has a problem with it." And nobody did. I try not to do it that often, but sometimes.

[One meeting] got into a little bit of religion bashing. And I could see some of our leadership people kinda like, "This is getting a little out of hand." And I was just about to step in, but one of our officers said, "now hang on just a minute." And then told a really great story of somebody in her family who’s extremely religious and was very accepting. And that then turned into all these other people sharing their really positive stories. She stepped right up, I was so proud of her.

I think sometimes you can get really bogged down into the negative and sometimes they need an outlet for the negative, but I try to keep it from going too far.
Advisor #4

Parts of this area are quite conservative.

The school would never go against the wishes of a parent, but [parental resistance] has never happened. And the kids come voluntarily.

I've heard other people say, "Oh, we have a GSA at my school but we're not allowed to be in the yearbook." And we're in the yearbook. The yearbook sponsor is one of my favorite colleagues.

The kids said, "Hey can we do an announcement [on National Coming Out Day]?" And I said, "I'll ask.". But, and I can see the position [of admin]. The school doesn't want to be like, we're making some big announcement and they're pushing an agenda. Do you know what I mean? I can kind of see how it might sort of look that way. So they let us make an announcement that we were meeting. It happened that National Coming Out Day fell on a GSA meeting day which was a lovely coincidence.

A couple of kids came out to me before they came out at home because I was an adult they trusted. And it was like a dry run before mom and dad.

They're not just concerned about, "Oh let's sit here in a room and talk about our identity." No, let's raise money for people who are hungry.

So if the kids want to go to Pride, it's very clear-- that's on them. I am not sponsoring. The school is not. We are not going together. We are not facilitating. You all discuss that. If you go together as friends, Merry Christmas, but that has nothing to do with GSA. That is not a school sponsored event because we cannot guarantee your safety.

That's between them and the parents. That discussion does not happen with me.

We have these books in the media center. They have been approved by the media committee at the county.

I think sometimes [the students] make assumptions. Like recently they seemed to be assuming that everyone in the room was liberal. And I said, now wait a second, that's not the case. You know we have this alternative perspective, and there is a space here for that.

We have had students who were part of the GSA in the past who identified as Log Cabin Republicans. And they were like, I'm fiscally very, very conservative. Is there a space for me here? Yeah, of course there is. It's not about politics. It's more about identity. So, it's a good safe place for them.
There have been some students who are not out at home. So they will sometimes opt not to be in the pictures.

The school would never support a kid defying parents, but we don't always know that. It's not like we can interview each of the kids. They would have to tell their parents that they're at the club.

A lot of times if a kid is out and is comfortable with being out, but most of the kid's friends are straight, then that kid can't really say to them, here's this particular issue that's been weighing on my mind that I want to talk about.

I'm definitely not in a leadership role. The kids are the leaders.

So it's not our place to push any kind of agenda. We're here to support. That's why I don't create the lessons. It's not my place to push anything.

I obviously can't catch every single word they say, but I can eavesdrop.

They always suggest positive, motivational, uplifting, the right things to do. They have done a really good job and they've never given me any cause to think that they're veering off in any kind of negative direction.
## APPENDIX H: SECOND CYCLE CODES: LIST OF HOLISTIC CODES

### Table 4

*Second Cycle Codes: List of Holistic Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Holistic Codes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture of Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture of School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment/Advertisement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ambiguity of Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandated Reporters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscommunication/Misunderstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Link Between Students and Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Ally</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactions Between Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activist Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-Sanctioned Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know and Abide by the Rules and Regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Hiding from Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Sponsor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity of Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role as Sponsor Within Student-Led Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Among Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX I: SECOND CYCLE CODES: HOLISTIC CODES DATA

Table 5

Second Cycle Codes: Holistic Codes Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Holistic Code</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture of Community</td>
<td>Pride was a big one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I did sit down with two of the administrators on like where's our thermostat with the community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We're still in a politically red, conservative county.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have to keep telling them what it was like. You know we, we've definitely made strides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[On progress and change in the community] And that's why I have to tell them sometimes, I was like, &quot;I know that you mean well&quot;, but I was like &quot;We can't just all of a sudden get the car going 80 miles an hour&quot;. We're still in the 15 to 20 mile and hour neighborhood.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I have to keep telling them what it was like. We've definitely made strides, but I when I think of [our state] and [our county] (sighing)... But I have to tell the kids, we're still not up to San Diego or South Florida. If we were there, oh my god, we could probably like paint rainbows all over.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[On establishing a GSA] And [one sponsor] was very supportive of it, but at the same time was almost paranoid about parents in the community.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is she still currently a sponsor? Uh, no. This is just when I had started [serving as sponsor].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There are things that are getting better but then, there's a lot of things that are going, &quot;Wow.&quot; Yeah, especially here in the south. In the Bible Belt. And they may not approve of it, but they understand that the students have rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Right now is an awesome time for you&quot; [progress]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And they may not hear that [supportiveness] at home.</td>
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</table>
I think there had been a year before I got here, there was one parent that was a bit confrontational.] And quite vocal about their disapproval of this type of club being available.

[The parents] are just so respectful.

Most of the parents are here that I have encountered are fine. They’re not really rude. They aren’t making comments.

[On Day of Silence] We had some parents call and complain about why is my child forced to participate in a gay day. But it was nice that we didn't have to deal with it. [Administration] took that on.

We also have a lot of kids that have really, really awesome and supportive parents.

The religion part is a lot of what kids talk about in our club.

A lot of them go to church and worry a lot about telling their parents. Are they going to stick with the love part or are they going to stick with the abomination part?

We had a couple moms and dads that chauffeured like six, eight kids [to Pride] which was nice.

[One student’s mom is] very involved. She got us a guest speaker to come last year and she brought all kinds of food. She's been really supportive of [her son] because of GSA.

We've heard a lot of kids talk about supportive parents.

We really haven't had anybody complain about us having a GSA

[Sexual and gender identity is] something that everybody's talking about just in in politics and in leisure and entertainment, all of that stuff. I think it's out there more, and so I think there are a lot of people in support of differences.

Things have changed since before. But the kids remind me all the time, "Yeah, but we're still in the bible belt." My GSA kids are real quick to say that.

There hasn't been any conflict. We're always available if a parent were to call the school and ask questions.

Parts of this area are quite conservative.
I think a lot of it changed by knowing somebody. It's like, once you know somebody, that changes everything. It's really easy to hate an idea, it's really hard to hate somebody you know.

A couple of the GSA parents are on the PTSA, so they're up here a bit.

The school would never go against the wishes of a parent, but [parental resistance] has never happened. And the kids come voluntarily.

It takes a special sort of parent to send his or her child to [our school]. So, there is a certain amount of continuity among our parents. These are parents who want their kids to be high achieving. These are parents who want their kids to work hard. These are parents who are investing in their children... So we're going to work harder so that your kid gets the best possible education.

Culture of School

I think there's a lot more tolerance in school.

There's still that misconception [about GSAs], "so, y'all just talk about how to have gay sex?"

I like that at our school the kids aren't afraid to go to an administrator.

[On participating in an extracurricular] And I think that’s a little [school] culture thing. I think that all the kids want to be a part of something.

[A former sponsor] was confronted [by colleagues] and evidently was quite uncomfortable. And then she became very secretive almost about it. About advertising, about the club, when they were meeting.

There's always going to be those negative comments and stuff, but I think in general, the kids are just a lot more open.

I don't see the taunting like I used to in years passed.

I'm sure I know [bullying] does still happen, but it's not as out in the open.

The anti-bullying program is an emphasis in all of the schools.

[On acceptance] The kids truly don't understand why people have a problem.

They're featured in the yearbook. I worried about that the first time that they like just had this little club picture, but they actually got like a [full] page. And the kids were so excited about having a page and nobody said a word [to disagree].
In a school this size, there are 3000 different clubs and activities that you can be involved in.

I think the general climate of the school and the kids that impresses me is that the student body as a whole seems to get better and much more open to ideas.

They feel comfortable coming to a GSA meeting. We have not had anybody say that they've ever been truly bullied. They say, some people make crude remarks under their breath, and stuff like that, but knock on wood, so far nobody has ever been physically bullied. Nobody's ever been just face to face against confrontation.

It's usually just if you're walking down the hall, it's the quick under-your-breath something that, if you look around, you wouldn't be able to tell who said it.

There are still issues, but I don't think anybody here right now feels safe to like openly antagonize anybody which is good.

[On participating in an extracurricular] They teach them, here are all the clubs at our school. Here's all the cool stuff you can join. Here's the culture of the school.

They decorated [a Christmas tree] with rainbow flags. It's not every school that would let the GSA decorate a Christmas tree with rainbow flags.

Our kids are loved and supported here. And that's what's important.

[On going to Pride] And I will always tell them, look, I'm giving you my warning tips. Do not trust strangers. Do not. They are sheltered. And they are isolated at this school. People are nice to them here. And it's cool here. So, I'll be like, "People will act like they're excited to mentor you, and some of them really are. And some of them are predators. And I want you to remember that the world is not like [our school]."

[This school] isn't like the rest of the world. I think one of the good things that we have here is there's like 20% of every racial group. Like sometimes I'm the only white person in the room. And sometimes I'm one of about 20% you know in the room. And I just think that's good for building unity. Because you can't really like hang out with the kids who look like you because there probably aren't enough of them in any given classroom. So, you can hang out with the GSA kids and then you're bonding ideologically. You can hang out with the chess club kids and
you're bonding ideologically. And it's a very different thing from other schools.

It's not like we've got a bunch of privileged and entitled kids. We've got this huge range.

Something that we really focus on [at the school] is making them work collaboratively. Because of the demographic makeup of [our school], they are forced to work with people who are different from them. I think that probably filters over into GSA as another strength.

It's not like its Utopia. It's not like it's perfect or anything. But it is really good.

They know they're here by choice. Somebody's choice. Sometimes it's mom's choice. Sometimes it's dad's choice. But they're here by choice. They don't have to be here.

They know [this school] is a place we're they're not going to be bullied. They can be comfortably out of the closet. Nobody's going to be a jerk about it.

Our kids are very, very fortunate. So they have the opportunity to then go, "Okay well let's talk about, what's demi-sexual? What's gray sexual? What's aromantic?" And they can get into that kind of cool stuff. And like talk about those deeper meanings because they're not having to do triage on kids who have been verbally or physically hurt.

We used to have a kid who would come in a full face of makeup. Nobody said anything to him. He was one of those kids that everybody on the faculty respected-- great kid, got really good recommendations and stuff. Whereas I know that there are places that that wouldn't be true.

I've heard other people say, "Oh, we have a GSA at my school but we're not allowed to be in the yearbook." And we're in the yearbook. The yearbook sponsor is one of my favorite colleagues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Leadership</th>
<th>I keep in contact with the two [student leaders]. If anything comes up, I'm their direct person.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From the leadership position, it’s the kids that run it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They (the student leaders) do run the meetings.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They went a little overboard about not wanting to have a president, a vice president. They didn't want to labels.</td>
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</table>
They’ve got to come up with their own agendas.

It seems to be a little bit more organized this year which is good. The officers this year I think are willing to do more.

We have three [upperclassmen] and one [underclassman] that are kind of the advisory board and it's their job to figure out what we want to do for that meeting.

They don't want to have labels of president, vice president, or whatever, but there is a sort of head person of the advisory group who communicates with me directly, mainly because he’s my first period student.

So, they've learned: here's our plan, but if that doesn't work, here's our other plan.

And then we had a girl who’s [an underclassman]. She's very outspoken and really, really great. And she approached me and said, "how do I run to be on the board for next year?" I was like, "well how about I just make the executive decision and put you on the board this year." And I asked everybody else afterwards and just kind of said, "this is a decision that I think is important and does anybody have a problem with it?" And everybody was okay.

We want to keep everything equal, we want to not have labels, but I don't want to have to talk to five people and get the same story from five different people and then try and figure it out. I'm going to talk to one person and it's worked out fine.

I only need one person to talk to. And I made the executive decision that it was going to be [a certain student]. If for no other reason, I have her in first period. I don't need to see somebody during their lunch for a meeting we're going to have two hours later.

The secretary of the club just sent out an email today to all the members.

The secretary sends out an email to make sure that everybody knows what’s going on. And to get feedback or input ahead of time.

We've got a president, vice president, and secretary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Concerns</th>
<th>They're still teenagers.</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[on sexual and gender identity] I mean the kids know students that are just kind of confused, lost.</td>
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</table>
You're still minors.

Especially teenagers.

They may not be ready [to come out].

They’re teenagers.

I think as teenagers especially, at that age, they have a hard time with [obedience to authority].

Just the age.

I think that [students engaging in the community] is where you get a little bit of advantage in high school and the fact that a lot of these kids can drive.

[on low parental involvement] I think that happens a lot in high school anyways. "Oh, you’re in high school now, you can take care of yourself."

They are still teenagers.

Social Media

[on transgender bathrooms] Opposition we were getting with the bathroom, you know, how there's ignorant comments. A lot of it was behind a computer screen.

[on spreading the word] There's a social media trend. They're like other teenagers. We have Twitter, Facebook, and all that.

[on advertisement] Kids still have to make the effort to check social media.

Administration

I would say for the most part [my role] is the liaison between the The kids and the administration. Making sure that we can do this and this [activity].

And then finally with [the principal] and the administrative staff we have now, now we can say ‘Gay Straight Alliance.’

[administration is] Very supportive.

Knowing that the administrators, the good or bad, anything I've ever had to talk to them or talk with them about has always been taken positively.

If there's ever been issues, trying to how, how, how to fix it, how to work it, which ... I just, knowing that they're supportive, and again, it all comes down to being there for the kids.
They're behind me, and, and there's that trust between us.

[The students] also know that they can go to some of the more involved administrators.

The kids aren't afraid to go to an administrator.

Because our administration is so supportive of the group, I really honestly don't think that I would get you know, reprimanded. [for assisting participating in the group with students]

If any parents have had any complaints or anything, [admin has] handled it. None of it is trickled down to me.

A kid said, "Oh well I'm worried about this." And I said, "Do you think [the assistant principal] would protect you?" Absolutely.

They know that [the assistant principal is] tough and fair. She's always on their side. I think it's so important and it's true of all of our administration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment/Advertisement</th>
<th>We're trying to get the freshmen.</th>
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<td>So I think we're still kind of struggling with how to pull in [new students].</td>
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<td>Word of mouth a lot helps.</td>
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<td>It comes down to the student leaders because I can’t [recruit].</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The administrators are supportive of the club. They haven't tried to fight it or block it.</td>
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<td>I [as the media specialist] will put it on the announcements that go across the school.</td>
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<td>They'll make the posters to put up around the schools.</td>
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<td>So last year, [because so many seniors left] there was a huge push and a lot of advertisement about the first meeting.</td>
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<td>And the first meeting is to just welcome the freshman.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Ambiguity of Purpose</th>
<th>I wish there was more of a constitution.</th>
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<td>That's really what's lacking.</td>
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How you can tell them that [to establish a framework] without telling them that?

I would like to see them get away from it just being, "Let's come hang out."

Really our biggest obstacle is at the beginning. And it's like, what do we want our rules to be? And we decide kind of as a group. Respect is always huge.

We do [have a club description] on our school website. With the county, you have to have a description of it. So our group at that time, we looked at several different mission statements from a bunch of different schools. And we just picked and decided that we like this about this one and this about this one. And just made one for ourselves. And we always put it on the board at the first meeting. We should probably edit it at the end of the year rather than the beginning of the year because at the beginning of the year they're all so, "Yeah, everything's great, everything's wonderful."

It's very generic. We didn't want to make it too specific, but we also didn't just want to use the one from like a national site or something. We wanted to make it a little bit more geared towards our high school and our GSA. Respect is always the number one thing. I think [the students] sort of feel like, I just want people to respect who I am, what I believe, and just let me be.

Future Planning

We're trying to prune upcoming sophomores and juniors.

There's a couple of kids that we're trying to work with, because when [the student leaders] graduate, hopefully [the GSA will] still have a future.

You're the ones that are going to change things.

You all are the ones that are going to make things better for the next generation, making these legal decisions, going into politics.

Don't be defeated because you're going be the ones that are make change. It's on you.

Mandated Reporters

If there's ever something that I have to report to the principal, [I'll] give him the heads up that something happened.

If there was anything discussed that, say if a child was talking about suicide, obviously we have to report those things.

I am a mandatory reporter.
I am a mandatory reporter so you can talk to me, but if it's like a super big deal you might want to go straight to the counselor because I'm going to have to go there.

We say that you need to let us know if something [really serious] is going on.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Miscommunication/ Misunderstanding</th>
<th>One of our administrators had said &quot;Well, we never told you all you couldn't [say gay-straight alliance].”</th>
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<td>[on Day of Silence but still meeting classroom expectations] Make sure everybody understands, make sure the kids all sign a contract and and all that stuff.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Communication Link Between Students and Admin</th>
<th>I would say for the most part [my role] is the liaison between the The kids and the administration. Making sure that we can do this and this [activity].</th>
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<td></td>
<td>I keep in contact with the two [student leaders]. If anything comes up, I'm their direct person.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I’d give [administration] a heads up that something happened.</td>
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<td>I know one topic I ran through it in administration was suicide prevention.</td>
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<td>I did sit down with two of the administrators on where's our thermostat with the community,</td>
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<td>if you want to organize an event, you need to give me a time, you need to give me a date, you need to give me an actual written plan of what you want to talk about and what you want to do because [admin will] be willing to sit down and talk with us, but not just if we just show up.</td>
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<td>And the roles [of administrators] are very clearly defined. If something's going wrong, I know which administrator to go to to get help.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Very gingerly.</th>
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<td>At some point [in years past], they were told that they can't say “Gay Straight Alliance.” Everything just has to be “GSA.”</td>
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<td>[Part of what the students do is] Drive acceptance of just the term [gay-straight alliance].</td>
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<td>Finally, I clarified it about two years ago. I was like, &quot;Can the kids put [the term “gay-straight alliance”] on flyers and T-shirts?” And [my assistant principal] was like &quot;Yes, that is the name of your club.”</td>
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I should be really careful as to what exactly I do [choose to] say.

The kids said, "Hey can we do an announcement [on National Coming Out Day]?" And I said, "I'll ask.". But, and I can see the position [of admin]. The school doesn't want to be like, we're making some big announcement and they're pushing an agenda. Do you know what I mean? I can kind of see how it might sort of look that way. So they let us make an announcement that we were meeting. It happened that National Coming Out Day fell on a GSA meeting day which was a lovely coincidence.

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<tr>
<th>Adult Ally</th>
<th>Just being another adult that they know is on their team.</th>
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<td>They need to know that there are adults that are supportive and that they're okay.</td>
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<td>I am here truly to support them.</td>
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<td>So they know that I'm out there and you know, standing up for them, um, I think that helps. I'm not just here to be, to provide just a room but I actually believe in what they are doing.</td>
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<td>I have told them, you know, even though I can't actively participate but if you need an adult to talk to, that they can come to me anytime, you know, that's not, I'm not acting as your GSA adviser, I'm acting as an adult in the building who's here to make sure that you are safe.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>You can always come to me. You know, except not as your GSA sponsor</td>
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<td>I will make a few little comments here and there, but I try to let them run the meeting.</td>
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<td>They need as many allies as possible.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>And you know I'll always have your back.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I'm here not only as an ally, but also so they can feel safer knowing there's an adult in the room. And that I'm going to make sure you know everything's okay.</td>
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<td>We understand they're a vulnerable population and that's one of the reasons we want to be here to protect and support those kids</td>
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<td>A couple of kids came out to me before they came out at home because I was an adult they trusted. And it was like a dry run before mom and dad.</td>
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It’s useful for them to have an ally to sort of get that idea that they can have support from outside the community as well.

I'm definitely here for you.

We know we are part of the solution, not part of the problem. And, that's one of the reasons that I like being the GSA sponsor. Those kids have somebody in the building. They know that we're all on their side.

Interactions Between Students

Then we had a [student leader] a couple of years ago that had a totally different personality. So there was a lot of falling out.

[The two student leaders] both complement each other. They're not total best friends but they still love GSA.

I think that having a good balance [age/grade/personality] in like your student leadership really helps.

Activist Type

Their hearts are in it.

We're still trying to figure out the positive advocacy for [our city].

I know a lot of kids really feel strongly about doing something that advocates for the community.

When it first started, the officers were getting guest speakers to come in. They would have an agenda for the presentation, and they would try to present different topics.

They're getting more involved politically and they're becoming more vocal.

Be involved, and be educated.

It's Trans Awareness Week and we're going to wear purple on Friday. They’re putting together a lesson and they're going to talk about transgender awareness.

Last year we raised over $1,500 for charity. The kids aren't raising it to give themselves a pizza party.

They're not just concerned about, "Oh let's sit here in a room and talk about our identity." No, let's raise money for people who are hungry.

Last year a lot of it went to Syrian refugees and we did a clothing drive. And they mobilized the school for that clothing drive. It was pretty incredible.
Last year we did a big thing for mental health awareness week. So we wore green and put up signs and posters. And we had a special lesson in the club and invited everybody you know who wanted to come.

They had prepared a whole lesson on all the different types of identities within our group. And here's how to start thinking about your identity and how to start thinking about dealing with other people's identities in a respectful way.

They haven't done anything with any of that money that actually benefited them.

These kids are doing stuff that's bigger than they are [by donating to charity]

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<tr>
<th>School-Sanctioned Group</th>
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<td>I know that there's certain events [Pride] that they're just left to plan on their own.</td>
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<td>I know nothing [about you going to Pride]. I don't when you’re leaving. [Our school] doesn't know when you're leaving. You know.</td>
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<td>I mean just things [like other clubs] that are school-wide [have an easier time being seen].</td>
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<td>It’s hard when it’s up to the students to do everything and not wanting to step in to help.</td>
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<td>[on being proud of student-led accomplishments] I was like, that is spectacular. I was very proud of them.</td>
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<td>They can't go to Pride as [our school’s] group, but they can certainly meet up there. On their own kind of thing.</td>
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<td>Anything that they want to do outside of school, we the adults really stay out of.</td>
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<td>We've had some picnics and [the sponsors] will like come and hang out for a little bit and then we leave. It's really clear that this is an out of school activity, so it's not formally associated with the club. It's not something that we have to fill out official forms for.</td>
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<td>We just want to stay away from the liability of things. We want to make sure everybody's safe, but I didn't want to have to stay there and make sure every parent has picked up every child and everybody had a permission slip to be there, and stuff like that.</td>
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So if the kids want to go to Pride, it's very clear-- that's on them. I am not sponsoring. The school is not. We are not going together. We are not facilitating. You all discuss that. If you go together as friends, Merry Christmas, but that has nothing to do with GSA. That is not a school sponsored event because we cannot guarantee your safety.

That's between them and the parents. That discussion does not happen with me.

Know and Abide by the Rules and Regulations.

And they put it [wall of LGBTQ terms] outside my room and again I got approval to.

They're one of the clubs where if they step one step out of line, the attention's going to be on them.

Legally, if I was overstepping these bounds [by supporting students within a student-led club], then legally I guess the schools couldn't be supportive if I was expressing opinions that the parents did not like [since I was breaking a rule by being active]. So I do have to be careful.

I try to do what's right.

I want to do what's right by the kids but I also want to keep my job.

Advertisements for their club meetings on the corkboards have to be approved

And the fear of litigation,

I'm going to keep within the boundaries and my responsibilities and duties but I'm also I'm going to advocate for the kids.

We didn't have a day of silence two years ago, but this school is very supportive of having a day of silence, but we need to go ahead of time and talk to them and tell them and make sure everybody has an understanding of what is expected. You're welcome not to speak, but if a teacher calls on you in class or if speaking is part of what you do for school that day, you have to.

So they tried to say, "Well we tried to have day of silence and the school wouldn't let us." I was like, "no, you couldn't have day of silence because that morning, without telling anybody, you just set up a table and started handing stuff out and [admin] came to talk to me and the other sponsor about it. And we're like, "we have no idea what they're talking about." That's why it was shut down. So, the very next year, we went and talked to them and the administrators were very supportive.
The best thing you can do is you need to make it as hard as possible for that person to have a problem.

We have these books in the media center. They have been approved by the media committee at the county.

We're cautious. We always want to make sure we're doing the right thing.

It's a public school. I said, "We have these books in the media center you may find useful. They have been approved by the media committee in the county." I went to one of the administrators before and I was like, "Hey could I have a little bookshelf for, some books that I've read that I think might be like interesting to these kids?" And she said, "That needs to go through the media center. It needs to be official through the school." And I think that's helpful that everybody's looking out to make sure that the right thing is done at all levels.

I am the kind of person that would always rather ask for permission than forgiveness.

So a lot of times they'll say, "Hey, we, GSA wants to do this. Is this cool?"

So there are approved [school district] County charities. And so the kids, they would say, "All right we want to donate to this kind of thing." So I'll go to the bookkeeper and ask what's in the list of approved charities that's this kind of thing? [if charity is not approved by county]

They're trying to figure out where to donate the remaining funds. Sometimes they'll be like, "Oh we want to donate to a group that works specifically with LGBTQ+ students." But not all of those charities are approved through the county. We're usually able to find like a related charity. Like a shelter for teens. And LGBTQ+ kids are disproportionately homeless and face these kinds of social issues, if they couldn't specifically help LGBTQ+ kids, then at least something where a lot of LGBTQ+ kids were going to show up.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Meetings</th>
<th>Twice a month, every other Thursday.</th>
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<td>Every other Wednesday.</td>
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<td>We meet every other week. It comes a lot faster than what you realize.</td>
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<td>They meet every other Tuesday.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regular Attendance</td>
<td>There's about five or six kids that [attend regularly] We've gotten up to 20 kids a few times.</td>
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Right now we're averaging 30 kids per meeting.

It was standing room only and this is a large class I'm in. But at the end of last year, there were only maybe six to 10 kids showing up because it had devolved.

Anywhere from 15 to 35. Last year it was a really small group. We had like six, eight people coming.

It just kind of depends. You get closer to exam time and when grades are due and stuff like that, you'll have a few fewer.

And that's when we had like 54 kids show up and we'd had like eight before. Kids started coming and coming and coming. And we were like, "this is awesome, but I don't know what to do with all of you."

It's good when they join early and make friends early because then they see them. I think that's how you keep kids involved a lot.

I would say, anywhere from 10-25. And it ebbs and flows. If something big is due and right here this last week, so much stuff is due tomorrow.

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<tr>
<th>Inclusiveness</th>
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<td>We've had everyone [from different backgrounds] come.</td>
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[on being asked by other teachers] "Well, what kind of backgrounds do they have?" And I was like, "Same as my cheerleaders. Some are new queer parents that will support them, and will run the mile with them, some divorced parents, some are wealthy.

They're coming from still all different backgrounds and academic levels.

It really is such an important club for these kids. They need this. They need the support of each other.

I don't think there's anybody that that I know of that doesn't feel welcome to come.

We have a couple of students who are transgender.

Really we have more straight kids that come than gay kids that come. We didn't realize there was a [time] conflict and so we didn't have a meeting space. So we met in the media center and there were tons of kids that were that were not [involved with] GSA at all. And they did not have any problem speaking out. They felt very comfortable surrounded by the group and they didn't care that other people outside were listening to what was going on. Nobody got up and left, nobody was making fun,
nobody was doing anything, and I found it really interesting that everybody was very respectful and just listening to what people were saying.

At the first meeting of the year they go around and say, "Hi my name is Joe. I identify as pansexual. I use they/them pronouns." And so they go ahead and establish that. And anybody can say pass or abstain.

It's a safe and welcoming space. And it's very inclusive. And they all make an effort to really get to know each other's preferences.

There is a space here for people who disagree. So they're very, very good [about including everyone]. I'm in here to monitor and make sure that that happens all the time.

I think sometimes [the students] make assumptions. Like recently they seemed to be assuming that everyone in the room was liberal. And I said, now wait a second, that's not the case. You know we have this alternative perspective, and there is a space here for that.

We have had students who were part of the GSA in the past who identified as Log Cabin Republicans. And they were like, I'm fiscally very, very conservative. Is there a space for me here? Yeah, of course there is. It's not about politics. It's more about identity. So, it's a good safe place for them.

The first meeting is to just welcome the freshman and say who we are. What kinds of things do you all want to talk about? What are you struggling with? Or what are some interesting issues you know that you want to talk about?

They're always really supportive of each other.

Social Type

Trying to put that balance between how you be all heavy and all "Safe place" and all serious than having it be funny.

It turns into just being social, just come hang out one of these days [when students take less initiative to plan meetings]. It's that social time of wanting to come and see them. I think that's how you keep kids involved a lot.

And every now and then, they'll just be like, "can we just have a meeting just to have pizza and talk?" And I'm like, "This is you. Yes, if you think that's what people want and what they need, absolutely. We just can't do that every meeting because there needs to be some purpose, but we also don't need it to be incredibly structured."
Students Hiding from Parents

There are a lot of kids who haven't been able to come out to their parents yet. And there have been some that have and had been disowned.

They don't want their parents to know that they're coming to the, to GSA. One of the kids was at Pride last year, but apparently, as he described, "Well, I'm not going to make the same mistake again because I want to see places other than this school for the next three months."

We have had more than one student that lies about where they are to be there.

We had a teacher's child that said, "yeah, my dad thinks I've been at math tutoring for two years."

We do have a lot of kids that still are afraid to come out at home.

Fear is not the right word for it. I think it's more that they love their parents so much they don't want to risk losing that.

There have been some students who are not out at home. So they will sometimes opt not to be in the pictures.

The school would never support a kid defying parents, but we don't always know that. It's not like we can interview each of the kids. They would have to tell their parents that they're at the club.

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<tr>
<th>Advocacy</th>
<th>Even if you're riding the wave of the Supreme Court, use it for positivity.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Co-Sponsor</td>
<td>[on initially supporting a colleague] I became one of the co-sponsors to help him with the GSA.</td>
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<td>There's a couple of other teachers that have kind of been the co-sponsors and fill in when the main sponsor can't be there.</td>
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<td>A lot of times, it's only one or two of us there, but the first two meetings of the year we try to all three be there.</td>
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<td>The co-sponsor who is not able to be with us all that often, but the co-sponsor is one of the counselors.</td>
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<td>We actually have two other teachers that help out because it's kind of nice just to have extra if something comes up.</td>
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<td>And it's nice to have three adults to give some different perspectives.</td>
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I liked having three. Three is nice. There's no pressure really because between three of us, somebody will be there. There haven't been any issues now [with two co-sponsors].

Mental Health

If there's a bigger deal issue that's sort of beyond me you, then the counselor would step in.

And we have had the counselors come in before.

It's a little more high-powered than your average school. And so you add to that, a non-traditional identity, and they have extra stress.

Continuity of Leadership

There was a transition about three or four years ago to two of us, but now I'm the only one [sponsor].

We're trying to prune upcoming sophomores and juniors.

The rising seniors are being tapped now to be freshman mentors next year. And so we know who the leaders are. And they are indoctrinated.

It's the seniors teaching the incoming freshman what the culture [of the school] is.

It really seemed to fall apart for a few years. [sponsor turnover and students not attending]

It’s been through several, several different sponsors.

We have three seniors [as leaders]. And that's a problem.

And that's where we ran into a lot of problems between one year to the next. We went from having probably about 18 kids show up at every meeting to like five kids showing up at every meeting because a lot of them were seniors [who had graduated]. The leadership was all seniors and we just didn't do a good job of reaching out to underclassman.

The older kids mentor the younger kids.

So the rising seniors are being tapped now to be freshman mentors next year. So we know who the leaders are. They are indoctrinated to be leaders. And we have a very active student council and county [student leadership group].

I didn't realize until just now how much we indoctrinate our kids to become leaders and mentor the younger kids at our school. But it works. We do prime them.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Support Type</th>
<th>It is a safe place for the kids.</th>
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<td>I know some kids really well, but a lot of them we don't know outside of the club, which in some ways I think is good. They know that anything they say, it's not like they're going to have to face you in class tomorrow. It really is such an important club for these kids. They need this. They need the support of each other.</td>
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<td>They need to know that there is nothing wrong with them and there's things that are wrong with society. There may be things wrong with their parents' beliefs, but nothing wrong with the child.</td>
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<td>This provides that safe place for them to meet, And this is where they feel it [safe], that I’m okay and that are other people like me.</td>
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<td>We have about a 45 minute to an hour long meeting and we try to have 15 to 20 minutes of something that's sort of structured first. And then have the rest of the period just social hour. A lot of times what happens is whatever the topic is will just sort of facilitate discussion and then everybody spends the rest of the time just kind of talking about that or sharing personal stories.</td>
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<td>Sometimes they’ll show a five-minute video and just say, &quot;what do you think?&quot; And that's all you have to say for the rest of the meeting because there's enough. But you also have to be prepared for what if nobody says anything.</td>
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<td>So, they're very careful in meetings to say, you know what is your preference? And what are you comfortable with? And if they ever talk about something potentially controversial, there's always-- okay well how does everybody feel?</td>
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<td>[At the beginning of meetings] they'll kind of come in. Hey, how's everybody doing? They do a check. Is everybody all right? Anything anybody wants to share? And they're here for each other.</td>
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<td>A lot of times if a kid is out and is comfortable with being out, but most of the kid's friends are straight, then that kid can't really say to them, here's this particular issue that's been weighing on my mind that I want to talk about.</td>
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</table>
|              | [During meetings] if a kid is like, "I've been having these feelings, or I've been having these questions.” Then they support the kid. “So, is there
anybody else in here who shares those feelings?" They're just kind of there for each other which is cool.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Role as Sponsor Within Student-Led Group</th>
<th>That’s the one thing that is so frustrating- that I can't run it.</th>
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<td>It’s student-run.</td>
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<td>There's some times I do have to corral the conversation so it doesn't go to somewhere I have to report.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>So it's student-run.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I have to pretty much sit.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>It is student-initiated and student-run.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>They run club. I do not run the club.</td>
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<td>The students really take ownership of that.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>So it's all student-run, student-led.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I'm here to monitor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I'm in here to monitor and make sure that that happens (keeping the space safe) all the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I do provide them the room and my role, as with all student-led clubs goes, is that the teacher is supposed to be just providing the space, making sure nothing gets out of hand, and that they're following school rules. That kind of stuff. We're not supposed to participate with the groups and clubs. However, a chess club sponsor will play chess with the kids. I mean, so, you know...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is a County policy about student-initiated clubs and sponsors. And it does lay out the rules and guidelines as to what can and can't be done by the sponsor. It's pretty clear in there. Now as far as here if we went a little bit beyond these boundaries, if I was participating a little bit more, because our administration is so supportive of the group, I really honestly don't think that I would get reprimanded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We're not supposed to participate and lead discussions. The students are supposed to. Now if something inappropriate was said or being done, then of course we'd step in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[pushing the boundary] If these students ask me questions, I could certainly answer them, but it's a little touchy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We've had conversations in passing about [various issues] but I don’t set the meeting agenda

[on frustration with inability to offer more] They’re looking for it. I’ll just leave information out and, "Oh, maybe she happens to see it on my desk."

It is very frustrating because I am such an advocate for the community and ally.

I can ask them questions. It's not telling them what to do. It's just asking them, "Have you thought about this?"

I can provide them with the resources, but they decide what to do with it.

My job is to help facilitate what you want to do, but you have to do the steps to do it.

I think that's what happens a lot, is they want something but then I remind them, "hey, remember, if you want to do this.

It's your club.

So they’ll usually will tell me, "this is what we decided, this is what we want to do." And it’ll be if they need a computer at the meeting or if we need equipment or announcements.

I tell them, "it's my job to facilitate anything that needs to be facilitated at this school."

I can only remind them so many times [to follow through with ideas] because it's not my job to do it.

It's a lot of sitting and listening.

I make myself scarce because I do think there are some people that feel more willing to speak up if there's not an adult like right there,

I also do try to, sometimes when the conversations are getting a little too much in one direction, to bring them back and play devil’s advocate a little bit. Let's look at this from another point of view.

[on approving topics] I try to look at it from a teacher’s point of view and be like, "Okay, but what do you have for a backup if this, if this flops?"

Sometimes I just need to sort of do the teacher thing and walk around and stand behind somebody or tap them on the shoulder, just sort of, "hey,
hey someone's talking over here.” Or I try to be like, "hey, y'all are talking about something really good that everybody needs to hear, so hang on."

I try to keep an eye on things that pop up in the news and I’ll email just the officers and say, "hey, did you see this article in the newspaper today?" And like send it to them and maybe it's something that they use. But just because I find it interesting, they might not find it interesting.

I’m always trying to find that balance of letting them do their own thing, but not getting too disorganized to where it kind of falls apart. But then I don’t want to step in too much where it’s like, "oh well the grown-up’s making the rules."

I try not to interfere very much when they talk.

[On making executive decisions for the group] Every now and then I just have to be like, "you know what, I'm the grownup- and that's why."

And sometimes you need somebody to be the bad guy too. It's sort of like, "hey, we all voted to do this, and now we're thinking this is a little too much." And we're not going to be able to do it or we're not going to be able to pull it together. And I'm just like, "you know what- we're not doing it. And it's because I said so. Let’s scale it back and do this thing instead.” And then I just send out the message.

I said, "so I'm making the executive decision.” And I said, "I hope nobody has a problem with it." And nobody did. I try not to do it that often, but sometimes.

I try to tell them all the time-- This is your club, I'm facilitating.

I try to stop it if I see it going in a [negative] direction, but in general, they've been good.

I don't do anything. I really don't. The kids do like 95% of it. It's really on them.

[One meeting] got into a little bit of religion bashing. And I could see some of our leadership people kinda like, "This is getting a little out of hand." And I was just about to step in, but one of our officers said, "now hang on just a minute." And then told a really great story of somebody in her family who’s extremely religious and was very accepting. And that then turned into all these other people sharing their really positive stories. She stepped right up, I was so proud of her.
I think sometimes you can get really bogged down into the negative and sometimes they need an outlet for the negative, but I try to keep it from going too far.

It’s student run.

It's all student run, student led. They prepare lessons. I'm here to monitor. I would say most of what they do isn't controversial at all.

I would be very quick to step in if I felt like anyone might be uncomfortable or that a parent would be uncomfortable with. But I haven't experienced that.

Sometimes they say, "well what's your perspective on this?" Because I sit in the room. And I'll say, "Well what's your perspective on this? Why would this be an issue?" Or I can say, “from an adult perspective” or “from a non-oppressed minority perspective.”

I try to be helpful and supportive.

I'm definitely not in a leadership role. The kids are the leaders.

So it's not our place to push any kind of agenda. We're here to support. That's why I don't create the lessons. It's not my place to push anything.

I obviously can't catch every single word they say, but I can eavesdrop.

They always suggest positive, motivational, uplifting, the right things to do. They have done a really good job and they've never given me any cause to think that they're veering off in any kind of negative direction.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Among Students</th>
<th>The kids have social media [to communicate and advertise].</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They had sent out messages [on social media]. I don't really know what they're on now, which form of social media they're advertising on, but they send messages to each other.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>I try to let the kids know that GLSEN and PFLAG and other groups that are out there for you. And let the leaders know, &quot;Here's some resources and they've written them up on the board, so kids can go to these,&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They go to the GLSEN site a lot to get ideas. There's all kinds of great resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And GLSEN’s website is awesome because it has enough stuff that you can find everything and anything that you need to talk about, which is really, really great.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX J: SECOND CYCLE CODES: LIST OF HOLISTIC AND FOCUSED CODES

### Table 6

**Second Cycle Codes: List of Holistic and Focused Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Holistic Codes</th>
<th>Focused Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture of Community</td>
<td>Support Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of School</td>
<td>Activist Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Leadership</td>
<td>Social Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Concerns</td>
<td>Ambiguity of Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>School-Sanctioned Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>Student-Run Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment/Advisement</td>
<td>Inclusive Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguity of Purpose</td>
<td>Advisors as Mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Planning</td>
<td>Support Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Link Between Students and</td>
<td>Communicate with Students and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandated Reporters</td>
<td>Mandatory Reporter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscommunication/Misunderstanding</td>
<td>Co-Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Continuity of GSA Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Ally</td>
<td>Community Barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions Between Students</td>
<td>Students Hiding from Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activist Type</td>
<td>Community Facilitators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-Sanctioned Group</td>
<td>School Barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know and Abide by the Rules and Regulations</td>
<td>School Facilitators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td>Supportive Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Attendance</td>
<td>Navigating Rules and Regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness</td>
<td>Adolescents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>Motivation of Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Hiding From Parents</td>
<td>Student Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Continuity of Student Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Sponsor</td>
<td>Student Communication with Advisors and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity of Leadership</td>
<td>Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Type</td>
<td>Recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role as Sponsor Within Student-Led Group</td>
<td>Tangible Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Among Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX K: SECOND CYCLE CODES: FOCUSED CODES DATA

Table 7

*Second Cycle Codes: Focused Codes Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focused Code</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission: Support Type</td>
<td>It is a safe place for the kids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It really is such an important club for these kids. They need this. They need the support of each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They need to know that there is nothing wrong with them and there's things that are wrong with society. There may be things wrong with their parents' beliefs, but nothing wrong with the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This provides that safe place for them to meet.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And this is where they feel it [safe], that I’m okay and that are other people like me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It really is such an important club for these kids. They need this. They need the support of each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[During meetings] a lot of times what happens is whatever the topic is will just sort of facilitate discussion and then everybody spends the rest of the time just kind of talking about that or sharing personal stories.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes they’ll show a five-minute video and just say, &quot;what do you think?&quot; And that's all you have to say for the rest of the meeting because there's enough. But you also have to be prepared for what if nobody says anything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The religion part is a lot of what kids talk about in in our club.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So, they're very careful in meetings to say, you know what is your preference? And what are you comfortable with? And if they ever talk about something potentially controversial, there's always-- okay well how does everybody feel?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
[At the beginning of meetings] they'll kind of come in. Hey, how's everybody doing? They do a check. Is everybody all right? Anything anybody wants to share? And they're here for each other.

A lot of times if a kid is out and is comfortable with being out, but most of the kid's friends are straight, then that kid can't really say to them, here's this particular issue that's been weighing on my mind that I want to talk about.

[During meetings] if a kid is like, "I've been having these feelings, or I've been having these questions." Then they support the kid. “So, is there anybody else in here who shares those feelings?” They're just kind of there for each other which is cool.

It's a little more high-powered than your average school. And so you add to that, a non-traditional identity, and they have extra stress.

It's a safe and welcoming space.

They're always really supportive of each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission: Activist</th>
<th>We're still trying to figure out the positive advocacy for [our city].</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>I know a lot of kids really feel strongly about doing something that advocates for the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Even if you're riding the wave of the Supreme Court, use it for positivity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When it first started, the officers were getting guest speakers to come in. They would have an agenda for the presentation, and they would try to present different topics.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>They're getting more involved politically and they're becoming more vocal.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>It's Trans Awareness Week and we're going to wear purple on Friday. They're putting together a lesson and they're going to talk about transgender awareness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Last year we did a big thing for mental health awareness week. So we wore green and put up signs and posters. And we had a special lesson in the club and invited everybody you know who wanted to come.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They had prepared a whole lesson on all the different types of identities within our group. And here's how to start thinking about your identity and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
how to start thinking about dealing with other people's identities in a respectful way.

Be involved, and be educated.

Last year we raised over $1,500 for charity. The kids aren't raising it to give themselves a pizza party.

Last year a lot of it went to Syrian refugees and we did a clothing drive. And they mobilized the school for that clothing drive. It was pretty incredible.

They haven't done anything with any of that money that actually benefited them.

des these kids are doing stuff that's bigger than they are [by donating to charity]

[Part of what the students do is] Drive acceptance of just the term [gay-straight alliance].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission: Social Type</th>
<th>Trying to put that balance between how you be all heavy and all &quot;Safe place&quot; and all serious than having it be funny.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It turns into just being social, just come hang out one of these days [when students take less initiative to plan meetings].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And then [after planned agenda] have the rest of the period just social hour.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>It's that social time of wanting to come and see them. I think that's how you keep kids involved a lot.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>And every now and then, they'll just be like, &quot;can we just have a meeting just to have pizza and talk?&quot; And I'm like, &quot;This is you. Yes, if you think that's what people want and what they need, absolutely. We just can't do that every meeting because there needs to be some purpose, but we also don't need it to be incredibly structured.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I wish there was more of a constitution.

That's really what's lacking.

How you can tell them that [to establish a framework] without telling them that?
Really our biggest obstacle is at the beginning. And it's like, what do we want our rules to be? And we decide kind of as a group. Respect is always huge.

I would like to see them get away from it just being, "Let's come hang out."

We do [have a club description] on our school website. With the county, you have to have a description of it. So our group at that time, we looked at several different mission statements from a bunch of different schools. And we just picked and decided that we like this about this one and this about this one. And just made one for ourselves. And we always put it on the board at the first meeting. We should probably edit it at the end of the year rather than the beginning of the year because at the beginning of the year they're all so, "Yeah, everything's great, everything's wonderful."

It's very generic. We didn't want to make it too specific, but we also didn't just want to use the one from like a national site or something. We wanted to make it a little bit more geared towards our high school and our GSA. Respect is always the number one thing. I think [the students] sort of feel like, I just want people to respect who I am, what I believe, and just let me be.

They're not just concerned about, "Oh let's sit here in a room and talk about our identity." No, let's raise money for people who are hungry.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School-Sanctioned Group</th>
<th>I know that there's certain events [Pride] that they're just left to plan on their own.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I know nothing [about you going to Pride]. I don't when you’re leaving. [Our school] doesn't know when you're leaving. You know.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>I mean just things [like other clubs] that are school-wide [have an easier time being seen].</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s hard when it’s up to the students to do everything and not wanting to step in to help.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They can't go to Pride as [our school’s] group, but they can certainly meet up there. On their own kind of thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anything that they want to do outside of school, we the adults really stay out of.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We've had some picnics and [the sponsors] will like come and hang out for a little bit and then we leave. It's really clear that this is an out of</td>
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</table>
school activity, so it's not formally associated with the club. It's not something that we have to fill out official forms for.

We just want to stay away from the liability of things. We want to make sure everybody's safe, but I didn't want to have to stay there and make sure every parent has picked up every child and everybody had a permission slip to be there, and stuff like that.

So if the kids want to go to Pride, it's very clear-- that's on them. I am not sponsoring. The school is not. We are not going together. We are not facilitating. You all discuss that. If you go together as friends, Merry Christmas, but that has nothing to do with GSA. That is not a school sponsored event because we cannot guarantee your safety.

[Out-of-school-activities are] between them and the parents. That discussion does not happen with me.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student-Run Group</th>
<th>That’s the one thing that is so frustrating- that I can't run it.</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>It’s student-run.</td>
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<td>So it's student-run.</td>
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<td>The students really take ownership of that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So it's all student-run, student-led.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It's your club.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I don't do anything. I really don't. The kids do like 95% of it. It's really on them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s student run.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It's all student run, student led. They prepare lessons.</td>
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<td>They always suggest positive, motivational, uplifting, the right things to do. They have done a really good job and they've never given me any cause to think that they're veering off in any kind of negative direction.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Inclusive Group                    | They're coming from still all different backgrounds and academic levels. [on being asked by other teachers] "Well, what kind of backgrounds do they have?" And I was like, "Same as my cheerleaders. Some are new |

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queer parents that will support them, and will run the mile with them, some divorced parents, some are wealthy. We've had everyone [from different backgrounds] come.

I don't think there's anybody that that I know of that doesn't feel welcome to come.

Really we have more straight kids that come than gay kids that come.

We didn't realize there was a [time] conflict and so we didn't have a meeting space. So we met in the media center and there were tons of kids that were that were not [involved with] GSA at all. And they did not have any problem speaking out. They felt very comfortable surrounded by the group and they didn't care that other people outside were listening to what was going on. Nobody got up and left, nobody was making fun, nobody was doing anything, and I found it really interesting that everybody was very respectful and just listening to what people were saying.

We have a couple of students who are transgender.

At the first meeting of the year they go around and say, "Hi my name is Joe. I identify as pansexual. I use they/them pronouns." And so they go ahead and establish that. And anybody can say pass or abstain.

And it's very inclusive. And they all make an effort to really get to know each other's preferences.

There is a space here for people who disagree. So they're very, very good [about including everyone]. I'm in here to monitor and make sure that that happens all the time.

I think sometimes [the students] make assumptions. Like recently they seemed to be assuming that everyone in the room was liberal. And I said, now wait a second, that's not the case. You know we have this alternative perspective, and there is a space here for that.

We have had students who were part of the GSA in the past who identified as Log Cabin Republicans. And they were like, I'm fiscally very, very conservative. Is there a space for me here? Yeah, of course there is. It's not about politics. It's more about identity. So, it's a good safe place for them.

The first meeting is to just welcome the freshman and say who we are. What kinds of things do you all want to talk about? What are you struggling with? Or what are some interesting issues you know that you want to talk about?
And the first meeting is to just welcome the freshman.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of Advisor: Monitor</th>
<th>There's some times I do have to corral the conversation so it doesn't go to somewhere I have to report.</th>
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I have to pretty much sit.

We're not supposed to participate and lead discussions. The students are supposed to. Now if something inappropriate was said or being done, then of course we'd step in.

It's a lot of sitting and listening.

I try not to interfere very much when they talk.

I make myself scarce because I do think there are some people that feel more willing to speak up if there's not an adult like right there.

I also do try to, sometimes when the conversations are getting a little too much in one direction, to bring them back and play devil’s advocate a little bit. Let's look at this from another point of view.

[on approving topics] I try to look at it from a teacher’s point of view and be like, "Okay, but what do you have for a backup if this, if this flops?"

Sometimes I just need to sort of do the teacher thing and walk around and stand behind somebody or tap them on the shoulder, just sort of, "hey, hey someone's talking over here.” Or I try to be like, "hey, y'all are talking about something really good that everybody needs to hear, so hang on.”

I’m always trying to find that balance of letting them do their own thing, but not getting too disorganized to where it kind of falls apart. But then I don’t want to step in too much where it’s like, "oh well the grown-up’s making the rules."

[On making executive decisions for the group] Every now and then I just have to be like, "you know what, I'm the grownup- and that's why."

And sometimes you need somebody to be the bad guy too. It's sort of like, "hey, we all voted to do this, and now we're thinking this is a little too much." And we're not going to be able to do it or we're not going to be able to pull it together. And I'm just like, "you know what- we're not doing it. And it's because I said so. Let’s scale it back and do this thing instead.” And then I just send out the message.
I said, "so I'm making the executive decision." And I said, "I hope nobody has a problem with it." And nobody did. I try not to do it that often, but sometimes.

I try to stop it if I see it going in a [negative] direction, but in general, they've been good.

[One meeting] got into a little bit of religion bashing. And I could see some of our leadership people kinda like, "This is getting a little out of hand." And I was just about to step in, but one of our officers said, "now hang on just a minute." And then told a really great story of somebody in her family who’s extremely religious and was very accepting. And that then turned into all these other people sharing their really positive stories. She stepped right up, I was so proud of her.

I think sometimes you can get really bogged down into the negative and sometimes they need an outlet for the negative, but I try to keep it from going too far.

I would be very quick to step in if I felt like anyone might be uncomfortable or that a parent would be uncomfortable with. But I haven't experienced that.

I'm here to monitor.

I'm in here to monitor and make sure that that happens (keeping the space safe) all the time.

I'm here to monitor. I would say most of what they do isn't controversial at all.

I obviously can't catch every single word they say, but I can eavesdrop.

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<tr>
<th>Role of Advisor: Support</th>
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<tr>
<td>I do provide them the room and my role, as with all student-led clubs goes, is that the teacher is supposed to be just providing the space, making sure nothing gets out of hand, and that they're following school rules. That kind of stuff.</td>
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[pushing the boundary] If these students ask me questions, I could certainly answer them, but it's a little touchy.

I can provide them with the resources, but they decide what to do with it.

We've had conversations in passing about [various issues] but I don’t set the meeting agenda.
They’re looking for it. I’ll just leave information out and, "Oh, maybe she happens to see it on my desk." So they’ll usually will tell me, "this is what we decided, this is what we want to do." And it’ll be if they need a computer at the meeting or if we need equipment or announcements.

It is very frustrating because I am such an advocate for the community and ally.

I can ask them questions. It's not telling them what to do. It's just asking them, "Have you thought about this?"

I think that's what happens a lot, is they want something but then I remind them, "hey, remember, if you want to do this.

My job is to help facilitate what you want to do, but you have to do the steps to do it.

I tell them, "it's my job to facilitate anything that needs to be facilitated at this school."

I can only remind them so many times [to follow through with ideas] because it's not my job to do it.

I try to be helpful and supportive.

So it's not our place to push any kind of agenda. We're here to support. That's why I don't create the lessons. It's not my place to push anything.

I'm definitely not in a leadership role.

I try to keep an eye on things that pop up in the news and I’ll email just the officers and say, "hey, did you see this article in the newspaper today?" And like send it to them and maybe it's something that they use. But just because I find it interesting, they might not find it interesting.

I try to tell them all the time-- This is your club, I'm facilitating.

Sometimes they say, "well what's your perspective on this?" Because I sit in the room. And I’ll say, "Well what's your perspective on this? Why would this be an issue?" Or I can say, “from an adult perspective” or “from a non-oppressed minority perspective.”

| Role of Advisor: Communication | I would say for the most part [my role] is the liaison between the kids and the administration. Making sure that we can do this and this [activity]. I’d give [administration] a heads up that something happened. |

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I keep in contact with the two [student leaders]. If anything comes up, I'm their direct person.

I know one topic I ran through it in administration was suicide prevention.

I did sit down with two of the administrators on where's our thermostat with the community,

If you want to organize an event, you need to give me a time, you need to give me a date, you need to give me an actual written plan of what you want to talk about and what you want to do because [admin will] be willing to sit down and talk with us, but not just if we just show up.

And the roles [of administrators] are very clearly defined. If something's going wrong, I know which administrator to go to to get help.

We want to keep everything equal, we want to not have labels, but I don't want to have to talk to five people and get the same story from five different people and then try and figure it out. I'm going to talk to one person and it's worked out fine.

I only need one person to talk to. And I made the executive decision that it was going to be [a certain student]. If for no other reason, I have her in first period. I don't need to see somebody during their lunch for a meeting we're going to have two hours later.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of Advisor: Ally</th>
<th>Just being another adult that they know is on their team.</th>
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<td></td>
<td>They need to know that there are adults that are supportive and that they're okay.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I am here truly to support them.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>So they know that I'm out there and standing up for them. I think that helps. I'm not just here to provide a room, but I actually believe in what they are doing.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>You can always come to me. You know, except not as your GSA sponsor</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I will make a few little comments here and there, but I try to let them run the meeting.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I have told them, even though I can't actively participate, but if you need an adult to talk to, that they can come to me anytime. I'm not acting as</td>
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</table>
your GSA advisor. I'm acting as an adult in the building who's here to make sure that you are safe.

They need as many allies as possible.

And you know I'll always have your back.

I'm here not only as an ally, but also so they can feel safer knowing there's an adult in the room. And that I'm going to make sure you know everything's okay.

We understand they're a vulnerable population and that's one of the reasons we want to be here to protect and support those kids.

It’s useful for them to have an ally to sort of get that idea that they can have support from outside the community as well.

I'm definitely here for you.

A couple of kids came out to me before they came out at home because I was an adult they trusted. And it was like a dry run before mom and dad.

We know we are part of the solution, not part of the problem. And, that's one of the reasons that I like being the GSA sponsor. Those kids have somebody in the building. They know that we're all on their side.

I know some kids really well, but a lot of them we don't know outside of the club, which in some ways I think is good. They know that anything they say, it's not like they're going to have to face you in class tomorrow.

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<tr>
<th>Role of Advisor: Mandatory Reporter</th>
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<td>If there's ever something that I have to report to the principal, [I’ll] give him the heads up that something happened.</td>
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<td>If there was anything discussed that, say if a child was talking about suicide, obviously we have to report those things.</td>
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<td>We say that you need to let us know if something [really serious] is going on.</td>
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<td>And we have had the counselors come in before.</td>
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<td>I am a mandatory reporter so you can talk to me, but if it's like a super big deal you might want to go straight to the counselor because I'm going to have to go there.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am a mandatory reporter.</td>
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If there's a bigger deal issue that's sort of beyond me you, then the counselor would step in.

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<tr>
<th>Support from Colleagues: Co-Advisor</th>
<th>I liked having three. Three is nice. There's no pressure really because between three of us, somebody will be there. There haven't been any issues now [with two co-sponsors].</th>
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<tr>
<td>[on initially supporting a colleague] I became one of the co-sponsors to help him with the GSA.</td>
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<td>There's a couple of other teachers that have kind of been the co-sponsors and fill in when the main sponsor can't be there.</td>
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<td>We actually have two other teachers that help out because it's kind of nice just to have extra if something comes up.</td>
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<tr>
<td>And it's nice to have three adults to give some different perspectives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A lot of times, it's only one or two of us there, but the first two meetings of the year we try to all three be there.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The co-sponsor who is not able to be with us all that often, but the co-sponsor is one of the counselors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support from Colleagues: Continuity of Advisors</td>
<td>There was a transition about three or four years ago to two of us, but now I'm the only one [sponsor].</td>
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<td>It really seemed to fall apart for a few years. [sponsor turnover and students not attending]</td>
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<tr>
<td>It's been through several, several different sponsors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture of Community: Barriers</td>
<td>I did sit down with two of the administrators on like where's our thermostat with the community?</td>
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<tr>
<td>We're still in a politically red, conservative county.</td>
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<td>[on transgender bathrooms] Opposition we were getting with the bathroom, you know, how there's ignorant comments. A lot of it was behind a computer screen.</td>
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<td>[On establishing a GSA] And [one sponsor] was very supportive of it, but at the same time was almost paranoid about parents in the community. Is she still currently a sponsor? Uh, no. This is just when I had started [serving as sponsor].</td>
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I think there had been a year before I got here, there was one parent that was a bit confrontational. And quite vocal about their disapproval of this type of club being available.

[On progress and change in the community] And that's why I have to tell them sometimes, I was like, "I know that you mean well", but I was like "We can't just all of a sudden get the car going 80 miles an hour". We're still in the 15 to 20 mile and hour neighborhood.

And they may not hear that [supportiveness] at home.

There are things that are getting better but then, there's a lot of things that are going, "Wow." Yeah, especially here in the south. In the Bible Belt.

[On Day of Silence] We had some parents call and complain about why is my child forced to participate in a gay day. But it was nice that we didn't have to deal with it. [Administration] took that on.

A lot of them go to church and worry a lot about telling their parents. Are they going to stick with the love part or are they going to stick with the abomination part?

Things have changed since before. But the kids remind me all the time, "Yeah, but we're still in the bible belt." My GSA kids are real quick to say that.

[on low parental involvement] I think that happens a lot in high school anyways. "Oh, you're in high school now, you can take care of yourself."

Parts of this area are quite conservative.

<table>
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<th>Culture of Community: Barriers-- Students Hiding from Parents</th>
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| One of the kids was at Pride last year, but apparently, as he described, "Well, I'm not going to make the same mistake again because I want to see places other than this school for the next three months.”

There are a lot of kids who haven't been able to come out to their parents yet. And there have been some that have and had been disowned.

They don't want their parents to know that they're coming to GSA.

We have had more than one student that lies about where they are to be there.

The school would never support a kid defying parents, but we don't always know that. It's not like we can interview each of the kids. They would have to tell their parents that they're at the club.
We had a teacher’s child that said, “yeah, my dad thinks I've been at math tutoring for two years.”

We do have a lot of kids that still are afraid to come out at home.

Fear is not the right word for it. I think it's more that they love their parents so much they don't want to risk losing that.

There have been some students who are not out at home. So they will sometimes opt not to be in the pictures.

Pride was a big one.

I have to keep telling them what it was like. You know we, we've definitely made strides

I have to keep telling them what it was like. We've definitely made strides, but I when I think of [our state] and [our county] (sighing)… But I have to tell the kids, we're still not up to San Diego or South Florida. If we were there, oh my god, we could probably like paint rainbows all over.

"Right now is an awesome time for you". [progress]

[The parents] are just so respectful.

Most of the parents are here that I have encountered are fine. They’re not really rude. They aren’t making comments.

And they may not approve of it, but they understand that the students have rights.

We also have a lot of kids that have really really awesome and supportive parents.

We had a couple moms and dads that chauffeured like six, eight kids [to Pride] which was nice.

[One student’s mom is] very involved. She got us a guest speaker to come last year and she brought all kinds of food. She's been really supportive of [her son] because of GSA.

We've heard a lot of kids talk about supportive parents.

We really haven't had anybody complain about us having a GSA
I think a lot of it changed by knowing somebody. It's like, once you know somebody, that changes everything. It's really easy to hate an idea, it's really hard to hate somebody you know.

[Sexual and gender identity is] something that everybody's talking about just in politics and in leisure and entertainment, all of that stuff. I think it's out there more, and so I think there are a lot of people in support of differences.

There hasn't been any conflict. We're always available if a parent were to call the school and ask questions.

A couple of the GSA parents are on the PTSA, so they're up here a bit.

The school would never go against the wishes of a parent, but [parental resistance] has never happened. And the kids come voluntarily.

It takes a special sort of parent to send his or her child to [our school]. So, there is a certain amount of continuity among our parents. These are parents who want their kids to be high achieving. These are parents who want their kids to work hard. These are parents who are investing in their children... So we're going to work harder so that your kid gets the best possible education.

| Culture of School: Barriers | There's still that misconception [about GSAs], "so, y'all just talk about how to have gay sex?"

[A former sponsor] was confronted [by colleagues] and evidently was quite uncomfortable. And then she became very secretive almost about it. About advertising, about the club, when they were meeting.

I'm sure I know [bullying] does still happen, but it's not as out in the open.

It’s usually just if you're walking down the hall, it's the quick under-your-breath something that, if you look around, you wouldn't be able to tell who said it.

At some point [in years past], they were told that they can't say “Gay Straight Alliance.” Everything just has to be “GSA.”

| Culture of School: Facilitators | I think there's a lot more tolerance in school.

I like that at our school the kids aren't afraid to go to an administrator.

[On participating in an extracurricular] And I think that’s a little [school] culture thing. I think that all the kids want to be a part of something.
I don't see the taunting like I used to in years passed.

I think the general climate of the school and the kids that impresses me is that the student body as a whole seems to get better and much more open to ideas.

There's always going to be those negative comments and stuff, but I think in general, the kids are just a lot more open.

The anti-bullying program is an emphasis in all of the schools.

[On acceptance] The kids truly don't understand why people have a problem.

In a school this size, there are 3000 different clubs and activities that you can be involved in.

They're featured in the yearbook. I worried about that the first time that they like just had this little club picture, but they actually got like a [full] page. And the kids were so excited about having a page and nobody said a word [to disagree].

They feel comfortable coming to a GSA meeting. We have not had anybody say that they've ever been truly bullied. They say, some people make crude remarks under their breath, and stuff like that, but knock on wood, so far nobody has ever been physically bullied. Nobody's ever been just face to face against confrontation.

There are still issues, but I don't think anybody here right now feels safe to like openly antagonize anybody which is good.

[On participating in an extracurricular] They teach them, here are all the clubs at our school. Here's all the cool stuff you can join. Here's the culture of the school.

They decorated [a Christmas tree] with rainbow flags. It's not every school that would let the GSA decorate a Christmas tree with rainbow flags.

Our kids are loved and supported here. And that's what's important.

[On going to Pride] And I will always tell them, look, I'm giving you my warning tips. Do not trust strangers. Do not. They are sheltered. And they are isolated at this school. People are nice to them here. And it's cool here. So, I'll be like, "People will act like they're excited to mentor you,
and some of them really are. And some of them are predators. And I want you to remember that the world is not like [our school]."

It’s not like we've got a bunch of privileged and entitled kids. We've got this huge range.

Something that we really focus on [at the school] is making them work collaboratively. Because of the demographic makeup of [our school], they are forced to work with people who are different from them. I think that probably filters over into GSA as another strength.

They know they're here by choice. Somebody's choice. Sometimes it's mom's choice. Sometimes it's dad's choice. But they're here by choice. They don't have to be here.

They know [this school] is a place we're not going to be bullied. They can be comfortably out of the closet. Nobody's going to be a jerk about it.

Our kids are very, very fortunate. So they have the opportunity to then go, "Okay well let's talk about, what's demi-sexual? What's gray sexual? What's aromantic?" And they can get into that kind of cool stuff. And like talk about those deeper meanings because they're not having to do triage on kids who have been verbally or physically hurt.

We used to have a kid who would come in a full face of makeup. Nobody said anything to him. He was one of those kids that everybody on the faculty respected-- great kid, got really good recommendations and stuff. Whereas I know that there are places that that wouldn't be true.

It's not like it's Utopia. It's not like it's perfect or anything. But it is really good.

I've heard other people say, "Oh, we have a GSA at my school but we're not allowed to be in the yearbook." And we're in the yearbook. The yearbook sponsor is one of my favorite colleagues.

[This school] isn't like the rest of the world. I think one of the good things that we have here is there's like 20% of every racial group. Like sometimes I'm the only white person in the room. And sometimes I'm one of about 20% you know in the room. And I just think that's good for building unity. Because you can't really like hang out with the kids who look like you because there probably aren't enough of them in any given classroom. So, you can hang out with the GSA kids and then you're bonding ideologically. You can hang out with the chess club kids and
you're bonding ideologically. And it's a very different thing from other schools.

Supportive Administration

Knowing that the administrators, the good or bad, anything I've ever had to talk to them or talk with them about, has always been taken positively. If there's ever been issues, trying to how, how, how to fix it, how to work it, which ... I just, knowing that they're supportive, and again, it all comes down to, like being there for the kids.

[administration is] Very supportive.

They're behind me, and, and there's that trust between us.

Because our administration is so supportive of the group, I really honestly don't think that I would get you know, reprimanded. [for assisting participating in the group with students]

If any parents have had any complaints or anything, [admin has] handled it. None of it is trickled down to me.

A kid said, "Oh well I'm worried about this." And I said, "Do you think [the assistant principal] would protect you?" Absolutely.

They know that [the assistant principal is] tough and fair. She's always on their side. I think it's so important and it's true of all of our administration.

One of our administrators had said "Well, we never told you all you couldn't [say gay-straight alliance]."

[The students] also know that they can go to some of the more involved administrators.

The kids aren't afraid to go to an administrator.

And then finally with [the principal] and the administrative staff we have now, now we can say ‘Gay Straight Alliance.'

Finally, I clarified it about two years ago. I was like, "Can the kids put [the term “gay-straight alliance”] on flyers and T-shirts?" And [my assistant principal] was like "Yes, that is the name of your club."

The administrators are supportive of the club. They haven't tried to fight it or block it.

Navigating Rules and Regulations

I want to do what's right by the kids but I also want to keep my job. Advertisements for their club meetings on the corkboards have to be approved.
And they put it [wall of LGBTQ terms] outside my room and again I got approval to.

They're one of the clubs where if they step one step out of line, the attention's going to be on them.

Legally, if I was overstepping these bounds [by supporting students within a student-led club], then legally I guess the schools couldn't be supportive if I was expressing opinions that the parents did not like [since I was breaking a rule by being active]. So I do have to be careful.

I try to do what's right.

And the fear of litigation.

I'm going to keep within the boundaries and my responsibilities and duties but I'm also I'm going to advocate for the kids.

We didn't have a day of silence two years ago, but this school is very supportive of having a day of silence, but we need to go ahead of time and talk to them and tell them and make sure everybody has an understanding of what is expected. You're welcome not to speak, but if a teacher calls on you in class or if speaking is part of what you do for school that day, you have to.

So they tried to say, "Well we tried to have day of silence and the school wouldn't let us." I was like, "no, you couldn't have day of silence because that morning, without telling anybody, you just set up a table and started handing stuff out and [admin] came to talk to me and the other sponsor about it. And we're like, "we have no idea what they're talking about." That's why it was shut down. So, the very next year, we went and talked to them and the administrators were very supportive.

The best thing you can do is you need to make it as hard as possible for that person to have a problem.

We have these books in the media center. They have been approved by the media committee at the county.

We're cautious. We always want to make sure we're doing the right thing.

It's a public school. I said, "We have these books in the media center you may find useful. They have been approved by the media committee in the county." I went to one of the administrators before and I was like, "Hey could I have a little bookshelf for, some books that I've read that I think might be like interesting to these kids?" And she said, "That needs to go
through the media center. It needs to be official through the school." And I think that's helpful that everybody's looking out to make sure that the right thing is done at all levels.

I am the kind of person that would always rather ask for permission than forgiveness.

So a lot of times they'll say, "Hey, we, GSA wants to do this. Is this cool?"

So there are approved [school district] County charities. And so the kids, they would say, "All right we want to donate to this kind of thing." So I'll go to the bookkeeper and ask what's in the list of approved charities that's this kind of thing? [if charity is not approved by county]

They're trying to figure out where to donate the remaining funds. Sometimes they'll be like, "Oh we want to donate to a group that works specifically with LGBTQ+ students." But not all of those charities are approved through the county. We're usually able to find like a related charity. Like a shelter for teens. And LGBTQ+ kids are disproportionately homeless and face these kinds of social issues, if they couldn't specifically help LGBTQ+ kids, then at least something where a lot of LGBTQ+ kids were going to show up.

[on Day of Silence but still meeting classroom expectations] Make sure everybody understands, make sure the kids all sign a contract and all that stuff.

I should be really careful as to what exactly I do [choose to] say.

The kids said, "Hey can we do an announcement [on National Coming Out Day]?" And I said, "I'll ask.". But, and I can see the position [of admin]. The school doesn't want to be like, we're making some big announcement and they're pushing an agenda. Do you know what I mean? I can kind of see how it might sort of look that way. So they let us make an announcement that we were meeting. It happened that National Coming Out Day fell on a GSA meeting day which was a lovely coincidence.

There is a County policy about student-initiated clubs and sponsors. And it does lay out the rules and guidelines as to what can and can't be done by the sponsor. It's pretty clear in there. Now as far as here if we went a little bit beyond these boundaries, if I was participating a little bit more, because our administration is so supportive of the group, I really honestly don't think that I would get reprimanded.
We're not supposed to participate with the groups and clubs. However, a chess club sponsor will play chess with the kids. I mean, so, you know...

**Student Characteristics: Adolescents**

I think as teenagers especially, at that age, they have a hard time with obedience to authority. They're still teenagers.

You're still minors.

Especially teenagers.

They’re teenagers.

Just the age.

They are still teenagers.

[on sexual and gender identity] I mean the kids know students that are just kind of confused, lost.

They may not be ready [to come out].

Then we had a [student leader] a couple of years ago that had a totally different personality. So there was a lot of falling out.

I think that [students engaging in the community] is where you get a little bit of advantage in high school and the fact that a lot of these kids can drive.

**Student Characteristics: Motivation**

[on being proud of student-led accomplishments] I was like, that is spectacular. I was very proud of them.

Their hearts are in it.

[The two student leaders] both complement each other. They're not total best friends but they still love GSA.

They’ve got to come up with their own agendas

It seems to be a little bit more organized this year which is good.

The officers this year I think are willing to do more.

You’re the ones that are going to change things.

You all are the ones that are going to make things better for the next generation, making these legal decisions, going into politics.
Don't be defeated because you're going be the ones that are make change. It's on you.

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<th>Student Characteristics: Leadership</th>
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<tr>
<td>I think that having a good balance [age/grade/personality] in like your student leadership really helps.</td>
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<td>From the leadership position, it’s the kids that run it.</td>
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<td>They [two student leaders] do run the meetings.</td>
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<td>We have three [upperclassmen] and one [underclassman] that are kind of the advisory board and it's their job to figure out what we want to do for that meeting.</td>
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<td>They don't want to have labels of president, vice president, or whatever, but there is a sort of head person of the advisory group who communicates with me directly, mainly because he’s my first period student.</td>
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<td>So, they've learned: here’s our plan, but if that doesn't work, here's our other plan.</td>
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<td>We've got a president, vice president, and secretary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>They went a little overboard about not wanting to have a president, a vice president. They didn't want to labels.</td>
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<tr>
<td>And then we had a girl who’s [an underclassman]. She's very outspoken and really, really great. And she approached me and said, &quot;how do I run to be on the board for next year?&quot; I was like, &quot;well how about I just make the executive decision and put you on the board this year.&quot; And I asked everybody else afterwards and just kind of said, &quot;this is a decision that I think is important and does anybody have a problem with it?&quot; And everybody was okay.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The kids are the leaders.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Characteristics: Continuity of Student Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We're trying to prune upcoming sophomores and juniors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We're trying to get the freshmen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have three seniors [as leaders]. And that's a problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rising seniors are being tapped now to be freshman mentors next year. And so we know who the leaders are. And they are indoctrinated. It's the seniors teaching the incoming freshman what the culture [of the school] is.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The older kids mentor the younger kids.

They are indoctrinated to be leaders. And we have a very active student council and county [student leadership group].

And that's where we ran into a lot of problems between one year to the next. We went from having probably about 18 kids show up at every meeting to like five kids showing up at every meeting because a lot of them were seniors [who had graduated]. The leadership was all seniors and we just didn't do a good job of reaching out to underclassman.

I didn't realize until just now how much we indoctrinate our kids to become leaders and mentor the younger kids at our school. But it works. We do prime them.

We're trying to prune upcoming sophomores and juniors.

There's a couple of kids that we're trying to work with, because when [the two student leaders] graduate, hopefully [the GSA will] still have a future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Characteristics: Communication</th>
<th>The kids have social media.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They had sent out messages [on social media]. I don't really know what they're on now, which form of social media they're advertising on, but they send messages to each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kids still have to make the effort to check social media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There's a social media trend. They’re like other teenagers. We have Twitter, Facebook, and all that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The secretary of the club just sent out an email today to all the members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The secretary sends out an email to make sure that everybody knows what’s going on. And to get feedback or input ahead of time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meetings</th>
<th>Twice a month, every other Thursday.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Every other Wednesday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We meet every other week. It comes a lot faster than what you realize.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They meet every other Tuesday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There's about five or six kids that [attend regularly] We've gotten up to 20 kids a few times.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It was standing room only and this is a large class I'm in. But at the end of last year, there were only maybe six to 10 kids showing up because it had devolved.

Right now we're averaging 30 kids per meeting. And that's when we had like 54 kids show up and we'd had like eight before. Kids started coming and coming and coming. And we were like, "this is awesome, but I don't know what to do with all of you.”

Anywhere from 15 to 35. Last year it was a really small group. We had like six, eight people coming.

It just kind of depends. You get closer to exam time and when grades are due and stuff like that, you'll have a few fewer.

It's good when they join early and make friends early because then they see them. I think that's how you keep kids involved a lot.

I would say, anywhere from 10-25. And it ebbs and flows. If something big is due and right here this last week, so much stuff is due tomorrow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment</th>
<th>So I think we're still kind of struggling with how to pull in [new students].</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Word of mouth a lot helps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It comes down to the student leaders because I can’t [recruit].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I [as the media specialist] will put it on the announcements that go across the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They'll make the posters to put up around the schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So last year, [because so many seniors left] there was a huge push and a lot of advertisement about the first meeting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tangible Resources</th>
<th>I try to let the kids know that GLSEN and PFLAG and other groups that are out there for you. And let the leaders know, &quot;Here's some resources and they've written them up on the board, so kids can go to these,&quot; They go to the GLSEN site a lot to get ideas. There's all kinds of great resources.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And GLSEN’s website is awesome because it has enough stuff that you can find everything and anything that you need to talk about, which is really, really great.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**APPENDIX L: FOCUSED CODES BEFORE AND AFTER SECOND REVIEWER**

Table 8

*Focused Codes Before and After Second Reviewer*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focused Codes Before Second Reviewer</th>
<th>Focused Codes After Second Reviewer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support Type</td>
<td>Mission: Support Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activist Type</td>
<td>Mission: Activist Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Type</td>
<td>Mission: Social Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguity of Mission</td>
<td>Mission: Ambiguity of Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-Sanctioned Group</td>
<td>School-Sanctioned Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Run Group</td>
<td>Student-Run Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive Group</td>
<td>Inclusive Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisors as Mentor</td>
<td>Role of Advisor: Mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Students</td>
<td>Role of Advisor: Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with Students and Admin</td>
<td>Role of Advisor: Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Ally</td>
<td>Role of Advisor: Ally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory Reporter</td>
<td>Role of Advisor: Mandatory Reporter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Advisor</td>
<td>Support from Colleagues: Co-Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity of GSA Advisor</td>
<td>Support from Colleagues: Continuity of GSA Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Barriers</td>
<td>Culture of Community: Barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Hiding from Parents</td>
<td>Culture of Community: Barriers- Students Hiding from Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Facilitators</td>
<td>Culture of Community: Facilitators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Barriers</td>
<td>Culture of School: Barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Facilitators</td>
<td>Culture of School: Facilitators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Administration</td>
<td>Supportive Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigating Rules and Regulations</td>
<td>Navigating Rules and Regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescents</td>
<td>Student Characteristics: Adolescents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation of Students</td>
<td>Student Characteristics: Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Leadership</td>
<td>Student Characteristics: Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity of Student Leadership</td>
<td>Student Characteristics: Continuity of Student Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Communication with Advisors and Administration</td>
<td>Student Characteristics: Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>Recruitment</td>
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<td>Tangible Resources</td>
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</table>
**APPENDIX M: LIST OF CATEGORIES**

Table 9

*List of Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GSA Characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Advisor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX N: THEMES, CATEGORIES, AND CODES

**Table 10**

*Themes, Categories, and Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question One</th>
<th>Theme One: GSA Framework of GSA</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme One: GSA Mission: Social Type</td>
<td>GSA Characteristics</td>
<td>Mission: Social Type</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mission: Activist Type</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mission: Ambiguity of Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School-Sanctioned Group</td>
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<td>Student-Run Group</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role of Advisor</td>
<td>Navigating Rules and Regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Factors</td>
<td>Student Characteristics: Motivation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Student Characteristics: Leadership</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students Characteristics; Communication</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School Factors</td>
<td>Culture of School: Facilitators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question One</th>
<th>Theme Two: Roles of Students</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GSA Mission: Ambiguity of Mission</td>
<td>GSA Characteristics</td>
<td>Student-Run Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inclusive Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role of Advisor</td>
<td>Role of Advisor: Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Factors</td>
<td>Student Characteristics: Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Characteristics: Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students Characteristics; Communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Research Question One | Theme Three: Roles of Advisors | Role of Advisor | Role of Advisor: Monitor  
|                       |                                |                | Role of Advisor: Support  
|                       |                                |                | Role of Advisor: Communication  
|                       |                                |                | Role of Advisor: Ally  
|                       |                                |                | Role of Advisor: Mandatory Reporter  
|                       |                                |                | Navigating Rules and Regulations  
|                       |                                |                | Tangible Resources  
| Research Question Two | Theme One: GSA Supporting Students Regardless of Parental Approval | GSA Characteristics  
|                       |                                | Role of Advisor: Monitor  
|                       |                                | Role of Advisor: Support  
|                       |                                | Role of Advisor: Ally  
|                       |                                | Navigating Rules and Regulations  
|                       |                                | Community Factors  
|                       |                                | Culture of Community: Barriers  
|                       |                                | Culture of Community: Barriers—Students Hiding from Parents  
| Research Question Two | Theme Two: Role of Advisor Navigating School Policy | Role of Advisor: Monitor  
|                       |                                | Navigating Rules and Regulations  
|                       |                                | Culture of School: Barriers  
| Research Question Two | Theme Three: GSA Setting Up Students for Success | GSA Characteristics  
|                       |                                | Role of Advisor: Monitor  
|                       |                                | Navigating Rules and Regulations  
|                       |                                | Student Characteristics: Adolescents  
|                       |                                | Student Characteristics: Motivation  
| Research Question Three | Theme One: GSA Aligning with Supportive Administration | GSA Characteristics  
|                       |                                | Role of Advisor: Monitor  
|                       |                                | Navigating Rules and Regulations  
|                       |                                | Culture of Community: Barriers  
|                       |                                | Culture of Community: Facilitators  
|                       |                                | Supportive Administration  

212
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question Three</th>
<th>Theme Two: Relying on Colleagues</th>
<th>School Factors</th>
<th>Support from Colleagues: Co-Advisor Support from Colleagues: Continuity of GSA Advisor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Three</td>
<td>Theme Three: Utilizing Outside Resources</td>
<td>Role of Advisor</td>
<td>Tangible Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Question Three</td>
<td>Theme Four: Establishing Student Leadership and Facilitating Transitions in Leadership</td>
<td>GSA Characteristics School Factors Student Factors</td>
<td>Student-Run Group Inclusive Group Recruitment Culture of School: Facilitators Student Characteristics: Leadership Student Characteristics: Continuity of Student Leadership Student Characteristics: Communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX O: RESEARCH QUESTION ONE THEMES, CATEGORIES, AND CODES

## Table 11

**Research Question One Themes, Categories, and Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme One: Framework of GSA</strong></td>
<td>GSA Characteristics</td>
<td>Mission: Support Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mission: Activist Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mission: Social Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mission: Ambiguity of Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School-Sanctioned Group</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student-Run Group</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role of Advisor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Navigating Rules and Regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Characteristics: Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Characteristics: Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Characteristics: Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td>Culture of School: Facilitators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme Two: Roles of Students</strong></td>
<td>GSA Characteristics</td>
<td>Mission: Ambiguity of Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student-Run Group</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inclusive Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role of Advisor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Role of Advisor: Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Characteristics: Motivation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Characteristics: Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Characteristics: Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme Three: Roles of Advisors</strong></td>
<td>Role of Advisor</td>
<td>Role of Advisor: Monitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role of Advisor: Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role of Advisor: Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role of Advisor: Ally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role of Advisor: Mandatory Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Navigating Rules and Regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tangible Resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX P: RESEARCH QUESTION TWO THEMES, CATEGORIES, AND CODES

Table 12

Research Question Two Themes, Categories, and Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme One: Supporting Students Regardless of Parental Approval</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GSA Characteristics</td>
<td>Role of Advisor</td>
<td>School-Sanctioned Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Factors</td>
<td>Role of Advisor: Support</td>
<td>Role of Advisor: Ally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Navigating Rules and Regulations</td>
<td>Culture of Community: Barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culture of Community: Barriers—Students Hiding From Parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Two: Navigating School Policy</th>
<th>Role of Advisor</th>
<th>School Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role of Advisor: Monitor</td>
<td>Navigating Rules and Regulations</td>
<td>Culture of School: Barriers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Three: Setting Up Students for Success</th>
<th>GSA Characteristics</th>
<th>Role of Advisor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission: Ambiguity of Mission</td>
<td>Student-Run Group</td>
<td>Role of Advisor: Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Run Group</td>
<td>Navigating Rules and Regulations</td>
<td>Student Characteristics: Adolescents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Characteristics: Motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


## APPENDIX Q: RESEARCH QUESTION THREE THEMES, CATEGORIES, AND CODES

### Table 13

*Research Question Three Themes, Categories, and Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme One: Aligning with Supportive Administration</td>
<td>GSA Characteristics</td>
<td>School-Sanctioned Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role of Advisor</td>
<td>Role of Advisor: Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community Factors</td>
<td>Navigating Rules and Regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Factors</td>
<td>Culture of Community: Barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Culture of School: Facilitators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supportive Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Two: Relying on Colleagues</td>
<td>School Factors</td>
<td>Support from Colleagues: Co-Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Support from Colleagues: Continuity of GSA Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Three: Utilizing Outside Resources</td>
<td>Role of Advisor</td>
<td>Tangible Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Four: Establishing Student Leadership and Facilitating Transitions in Leadership</td>
<td>GSA Characteristics</td>
<td>Student-Run Group</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Recruitment</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Culture of School: Facilitators</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Student Characteristics: Continuity of Student Leadership</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Student Characteristics: Communication</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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