



School Social Work Association of America  
Resolution Statement

**GAY, LESBIAN, TRANSGENDER, BISEXUAL, AND  
QUESTIONING YOUTH**

*Supporting GLTBQ Students in a Safe School Environment*

The School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) believes all students, regardless of sexual orientation, should be afforded equal educational opportunity in a safe and supportive school environment. SSWAA also believes that, for students who are struggling with sexual or gender orientation, each school district should provide appropriate school social work services and programs staffed by trained qualified school social workers.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (GLBTQ) youth are at greater risk for suicide; physical and verbal harassment; exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS; and, substance abuse. GLBTQ youth also often experience emotional and physical rejection by family and community, alienation from the school community, truancy and a higher rate of dropping out. Nearly 90% of GLBTQ students report incidents of harassment in school based on sexual orientation. The effect of these experiences may lead to increased feelings of inadequacy, depression and low self-esteem. GLBTQ youth require strong and caring advocates within the school setting to cope with these situations and to assist them in developing strong personal identities.

SSWAA believes a safe school environment should be provided to all students. Students should be able to attend school without fear of threat, harassment, or denial of rights. To achieve this positive school climate, SSWAA supports educating both students and staff regarding misconceptions about GLBTQ youth, appropriate ways to address discrimination and harassment, and the importance of mutual respect.

SSWAA supports the mandates of the Department of Education Office of Civil Rights as they pertain to harassment of GLBTQ students. Among these mandates is the requirement that schools acknowledge that harassment and bullying directed toward certain students on the basis of sexual orientation or perceived orientation is a violation of students' civil rights. When such incidents occur, schools are required to investigate and take action to remedy such violations. Schools are mandated to take steps to end the harassment, promote a more positive school environment, and prevent future incidents.

SSWAA believes the school social worker should serve as an advocate for GLBTQ youth on an individual basis, in the classroom, school wide, and within the school district. GLBTQ youth have the right to expect school social workers will be knowledgeable about issues regarding sexual identification and will respect and support students as they articulate issues and concerns. SSWAA believes all school personnel should be trained to recognize signs of bullying toward all students, and GLBTQ students in particular. SSWAA believes the school social worker must play an integral part in ensuring the school environment is a safe and respectful place for every student to learn and thrive.

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Approved by the SSWAA Board of Directors November, 2010.  
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