

Dear Mrs. Shields, Mr. Knisely, and Guidance Counselors,

The Gay-Straight Alliance of Perry High School is one of the best things that has ever happened to me. It gave me an area to be myself without fear that anyone would judge or harass me. However, in middle school, I used to be relentlessly bullied for simply existing. Only my friends knew I wasn't fully straight, but those "friends" turned out to be gossip-spreaders. In time, I found myself retching at the very fact that I would need to leave my bed in the morning to go to school, the place where I got hit and pushed and laughed at. I felt alone in my identity of being a part of the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning) community. Just writing this letter, I received homophobic remarks instead of feedback from my fellow classmates.

According to a study conducted by the Human Rights Campaign and researchers at the University of Connecticut, 77% of LGBTQ youth have reported feeling depressed within the past week. Additional studies showed that 95% report trouble sleeping at night, 67% reported hearing their family members utilising negative comments regarding the LGBTQ community, and only 26% said they feel safe in their classroom -- and only 5% of these students say that every one of their teachers and staff support LGBTQ individuals.

While some might point out that the kids in middle school are "too young to know" or not capable to make decisions like this, what they may not realise is that the "Q" part of "LGBTQ" is where most middle schoolers, straight or not, fall. The Q means Questioning, which is where you work to find out who you're attracted to. Most middle schoolers go through the "questioning" phase, whether they realise it or not.

Some people may say that Perry as a town is simply too conservative or narrow-minded for a movement like this. While I see the point, I believe everybody has a chance to alter their point of view. I feel that if we form a strong relationship with the concept of LGBTQ individuals in our school, we can spread awareness to our community to help make the best out of Perry.

Middle school is the prime time of each student's life, particularly for the LGBTQ students, for hitting pubescence is where most students begin to experiment with themselves and try to seek out a way to fit in with the crowd. LGBTQ students have an even tougher time than normal to fit in, for they don't share identical experiences a typical student might. They face rejection and misunderstandings each day of their lives, creating the already torturous experience of middle school even worse. According to research conducted by The Trevor Project, a counselling service much like the Safe School Helpline, LGBTQ youth "seriously contemplate suicide at least 3 times more compared to heterosexual youth," and "Each episode of (LGBTQ) victimisation, such as physical or verbal harassment or abuse, increases the likelihood of self-harming behaviour by 2.5 times on average. (thetrevorproject.org)"

To make a difference and to work towards making a middle school GSA a reality, the high school GSA and I are willing to host talks and get-togethers within the middle school. If not, we will have the middle schoolers come to the high school for the talks and meets. We all

plan to work hard to assist the young students who are in positions we within the GSA currently understand and used to be in.

In order to assist younger LGBTQ students within the middle school, as well as help to prevent LGBTQ-targetted bullying, I strongly believe that a GSA within the middle school would be the most effective resolution to cater to the population of students who otherwise feel unsafe or like they don't fit in. Not only would the young students like me have a safe place to go to avoid bullying, it may also be a source of awareness and acceptance to educate the uninformed that being LGBTQ doesn't make anyone any different than another in a negative manner.

<https://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report>

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/preventing-suicide/facts-about-suicide/#>