

Human and Civil Rights Award Winner

◆ GSAFE ◆

Virginia Uribe Award for Creative Leadership in Human Rights



From its start in 1991 as a volunteer-based grassroots organization operating out of private homes, under the name Gays and Lesbians against Discrimination in Education (GLADE), GSAFE has successfully added “gender identity/expression” language to non-

discrimination policies in the state of Wisconsin. The organization switched its focus from programs in South Central Wisconsin to serving the entire state, connecting with over 200 Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) networks across the states. GSAFE has aimed to work with Wisconsin students, educators, community members, and elected officials to create safe educational environments where LGBTQ individuals can learn and gain the confidence to become successful.

GSAFE ensures that students at hundreds of schools have access to reliable programs and spaces that increase feelings of belonging and safety. This organization has developed and provided programs that have helped other students learn to respect diversity and refrain from abusive behaviors such as bullying and stereotyping. This student club network works with numerous school districts and various professional education organizations every year in order to provide educators of all grade levels the tools to navigate the sensitivities of identity and sexual orientation in the day to day classroom setting and within their school communities.

More recently, GSAFE launched Foundations of Leadership (FOL), an innovative class for advanced learners in the area of leadership. FOL enhances the education of LGBTQ students, particularly students of color, whose experiences are at the center of the class. The course strives to reorient the community's understanding of who is considered talented and gifted and lifts up the leadership of LGBTQ youth of color who are underrepresented and often absent from advanced learners courses. The project has expanded in unique ways to include providing one-on-one instruction for youth experiencing suspension and/or incarceration and has piloted classes inside the restrictive confines of the Dane County Juvenile Detention Center. FOL is an essential project particularly in the state of Wisconsin and the city of Madison, which has one of the country's highest rates of school push out and incarceration of youth of color, particularly African-American youth.

GSAFE advocates for including milestones in LGBTQ history as part of public school curriculum, from the persecution of homosexuals in Nazi Germany, to the Stonewall Uprising of 1969. Because of their advocacy and dedication, over half of Wisconsin school districts have gender-inclusive policies. In 2010, GSAFE heralded the first Lieutenant Governor's Conference on LGBTQ Youth in Wisconsin and is planning their inaugural LGBTQA Students of Color Summit in Madison. GSAFE has continued to help districts pass and implement inclusive policy, and has continued to collaborate with statewide partners. GSAFE has become a “go-to” organization for the education and political community alike for creating safe and supportive environments for LGBTQ youth.