

The Gay-Straight Alliance at Ware High School is made up of students who want to improve the school's climate for all students, making learning a priority by reducing social pressures. The GSA is part of the high school Advisory program and meets weekly.

Fifteen GSA members who wanted to improve their skills and broaden their horizons attended a symposium at Westfield State University on March 25. Students had a chance to choose from programs on topics like how gay and lesbian students can talk to family members, how straight students can work toward being an ally to gay and lesbian students who face social pressures in school, and how to avoid labeling and prejudging people.

Students wrote responses to the program after their return and were overwhelmingly positive. One student wrote, "I think the GSA Conference was a really good experience. It was a very good eye-opener and it showed me how badly people get hurt due to the action of others. I heard about many people's experiences and stories and it was very sad hearing about all of those things." Another wrote, "The most memorable experience was seeing everyone's honesty as they told their stories about what they had gone through. It was very touching to see that everyone could be so open with the things they have to suffer through every day. During the workshops my group took part in, we witnessed another member break down into tears as they released the sadness they hold in every day, from being picked on or being unable to tell the people close to them about their identity." A third student added, "At the GSA conference, I really felt like I'm not the only one who has been through those hard times."

The students, most of whom are just starting to think about choosing a college, also benefited from a tour of the Westfield campus. As a student wrote, "The tour around the campus was nice as well. It actually convinced me to look into going there even though I'm only a freshman."

The GSA trip was made possible by a grant from the LBGT Coalition of Western Massachusetts, which gave a grant to pay for the bus, and by the QSA of Westfield University, which provides the program, including breakfast and lunch, without cost to the students.