

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

How to Implement a NIOS Anti-Bullying
Campaign in Your School



a project of
The Working Group
www.niot.org/notinourschool

Working together to build safe,
inclusive and accepting schools and communities.

Guiding Principles to Implementing *Not In Our School*

In a *NIOS* campaign, the entire school community unites to say “*NOT IN OUR SCHOOL*” and communicate the principles behind it. While many effective programs and projects exist to end student bullying and improve school climate, *NIOS* offers a unique opportunity to link and amplify many unified voices working against intolerance and hate in campaigns across the country.

NIOS is not a cookie cutter program; it is a network of school-led initiatives that share common beliefs, but not prescribed activities. *NIOS* adheres to a few, powerful tenets, which include:

- Identification of problems of intolerance and bullying,
- Solutions defined by students and addressed through peer-to-peer actions, and
- A collective voice from the entire school community banding together to say “*NOT IN OUR SCHOOL.*”

Taking on this challenge includes opening dialogue and naming the issues, with an ultimate goal to create inclusive and “identity safe” climates for students, staff and parents. An identity safe environment is one where all members are validated for who they are, which may include their background, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion and perceptions of learning ability. These qualities are valued as part of a rich and diverse community, which in turn creates conditions that promote an atmosphere of respect and trust.

Who Initiates a *NIOS* Campaign?

NIOS can be initiated by any individual from any part of a school system, from administration to the teachers and students to the parent community. Participation for *NIOS* can be as small as one classroom or as wide as the entire district or community.

A Single Teacher and a Simple Beginning: A teacher can show one *NIOS* film followed by a discussion and writing activities using the lessons offered within this Kit. The teacher can then facilitate deeper involvement through student-led action within the classroom, or carry it even further, extending to multiple classrooms or even across an entire school setting through cross-grade or cross-school activities.

Clubs or Committees: Student clubs or teacher-student-led committees can plan and implement *NIOS* activities (see the Teacher Tips from Gunn High School in Section VIII) for the entire school.

Site Principal: A principal can launch *NIOS* by sharing *NIOS* resources with the staff or by purchasing this Kit and providing training for the teachers. The staff can then collaboratively work together to identify effective ways to proceed for implementing *NIOS*.

District-wide Efforts: District leaders can form district-wide committees with students, staff and parents to organize assemblies and actions within or across schools, as well as community-wide gatherings or events.

Variation of *NIOS* Actions and Events

Creativity plays a large role in *NIOS* initiatives, with each new idea or variation sparking attention and a desire to act. Across several districts

in Lancaster, California, a *NIOS* campaign was implemented reaching 35,000 students (video and success story included in this Kit). A single district can initiate a campaign, such as the annual *NIOS* week in Palo Alto, California. (Video and profile story included in this Kit.) Just one school or even a single classroom can trigger a response that extends to the entire community. One *NIOS* initiative inspires ideas for the next. In this Kit, some of the most innovative ideas are presented for use with the videos. These can serve as models to emulate, or spur you and your students toward your own thoughts and ideas in order to get started on your *NIOS* campaign. Here are a few ideas you will find in this Kit:

Teacher-Initiated Efforts Lead to Student-Initiated Action

In many cases, teachers have shown *NIOS* videos and incorporated *NIOS* curriculum in their classrooms, which has led to student-initiated projects on their campuses. The following actions are examples:

- In the video, *Students Teach Students to Stand Up to Bullying* (in Section III), students at an East Cleveland high school learn about the qualities for being an upstander, and reflect on their personal experiences with bullying. After brainstorming solutions, a group of students made presentations to the local elementary school, designing their own anti-bullying program with role-plays focused on helping the younger students understand what it means to be upstanders.
- The video, *Lakewood is Changing* (in Section V), features an Ohio high school classroom that, after examining issues of intolerance, discovers the shifting racial make-up of their community. Students learn about racial stereotyping as they research how their community has changed and explore ways to formulate a new identity that embraces the shifting demographics.
- The video, *Students Take on Cyberbullying* (in Section III), chronicles two classrooms in Watchung, New Jersey who take action after attending a school-wide assembly by a hate crimes task force officer, initiating a positive campaign on Facebook to counteract cyber-bullying.

Student-Initiated Leadership Groups and Clubs Take Action

Student groups and clubs also have come up with very original ideas to address issues of concern. Often the process begins with viewing *NIOS* videos, leading to discussions around issues at their school and brainstorming ways to engage their peers. For example:

- A middle school teacher in Memphis introduced *NIOS* in her *Facing History* classroom where students planned and led an anti-bullying program (*Stand Up, Stand Out: No Checking, No Capping, No Bullying* video in Section III).
- A school counselor in a Palo Alto, California middle school formed a student leadership group where the counselor galvanized the students and made a video of them discussing how to end racism and intolerance on their campus. A *Not In Our Town* film was piped into every classroom simultaneously followed by a dialogue led by student leaders. Each classroom then had their own discussion of the issues and brainstormed solutions (*Students Tune In and Speak Out* video in Section IV).
- An advisor to a California high school Gay-Straight Alliance student club reached out to other student clubs on campus and initiated *Not In Our School Week* (*NIOS: Palo Alto* in the Section IV).

***NIOS Blends Well
With Existing School
Curriculum and
Initiatives***

In most schools, there are existing initiatives that serve to address school climate issues. *NIOS* can be an effective complement to these programs. Further, many *NIOS* videos and lesson plans are readily incorporated into daily curricula and meet many learning standards. Specifically:

*Anti-Bullying and
Character Education
Programs*

Many *NIOS* videos highlight ways that students have been bullied, how they feel about it and highlight positive models of students moving from bystanders to upstanders. A teacher from Tennessee said, “*NIOS* did not compete with the bullying program already in place in my district, but rather it enhanced it because *NIOS* is student-centered. Viewing *NIOS* videos inspired students to become leaders and resulted in taking pride of ownership. The students truly embraced and responded to the mind shift necessary for change.” *NIOS* video resources also link well with character education programs by highlighting important values of respect, kindness, empathy, acceptance, responsibility and honesty. They also pose dilemmas that allow students to examine their values and feelings.

Curriculum

NIOS activities can easily link to many curricular areas, particularly English Language Arts, Social Studies, Health and Visual and Performing Arts. The activities can be incorporated to address grade-level reading, speaking and writing standards found in the Common Core State Standards in the area of English Language Arts. In Social Studies, *NIOS* activities can address civics and history, particularly in the areas of the 14th Amendment, civil rights and the Holocaust. In Health, *NIOS* activities can incorporate ways to create a safe and healthy environment and teach communication and decision-making skills. The activities are versatile and can also link to visual arts, theatre and music.

*Improving School
Climate*

Sustained implementation of *NIOS* initiatives can help to create safe and more inclusive school climates. A high school teacher from California shared that the strong message received from *NIOS* week gave students the language needed to be upstanders all year long. He wrote, “Over the years, we have found that having a *NIOS* week actually helps create a sense of community, as well as build empathy for one another. By providing the students and staff a safe space to share their voice and their experience, we have found that students learn more about one another and begin to realize and understand how their words and actions influence the Gunn community. Our *NIOS* week gives students and staff the necessary tools and permission to stand up against hate or discrimination throughout the year.”

*Facing History
and Ourselves*

Through *FHAO* programs, students engage in a deep exploration and study of the history of racism, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance combined with analysis and dialogue. *NIOS* videos underscore students as leaders, linking with a key element of *Facing History* that encourages students to engage in civic participation and work as agents for positive change. *Facing History* has developed many lesson plans and guides for *NIOS* films. *NIOS* is also featured on the *Facing History and Ourselves* website.

Tackling Challenging Issues and Potential Resistance

While most will agree that they want to free their campus of hate and bullying, charting a path of change is rarely direct and not always easy. Though the initial work may be hard, the rewards are great in light of the life-changing differences that are created for students who may be silently suffering from exclusion or bullying.

Facilitating Controversial Conversations

Some teachers may feel concerned about taking on the challenge to discuss these difficult topics. It is usually best to start slowly and find the allies needed to support a network at your school or among colleagues with whom you may talk through your plans. *N/OS* has online support mechanisms, as well as professional staff available to consult with as you as you begin your efforts.

When discussing issues of racism, anti-gay bigotry and other kinds of intolerance, strong emotions and tensions can emerge. For that reason, having a set of agreed upon norms of behavior that include the exercise of respect, listening and understanding of multiple perspectives is essential. This helps when one person's opinions may be offensive to another. Teaching students to use I-messages that describe their feelings without purporting to speak for others helps avoid outbursts and hurtful discussions. Reminding students that no matter what they believe, every student is entitled to feel safe and free of hurtful and abusive language at school. The video *What Do You Say to "That's So Gay"?* (included in Section V), depicts a teacher artfully navigating a difficult discussion in his classroom. He creates an environment where students feel free to speak up, yet he does not create undue pressure before a student is ready to open up. The other students respond respectfully and make their points without being aggressive or judgmental. It may feel risky the first time you try to address controversial issues, but in time you will become adept at facilitating sensitive conversations.

Suggested Ground Rules

It is usually most effective to establish ground rules collaboratively with students. However, if time is limited and/or the group is having trouble identifying ground rules, consider some of the following ideas:

- We will speak for ourselves and use "I" statements.
- We won't try to represent a whole group, nor ask others to represent or defend an entire group.
- We will seek to understand one another's perspectives and beliefs.
- We will listen with resilience, "hanging in" when we hear something that is hard to hear.
- We will share airtime and refrain from interrupting others.
- We will "pass" or "pass for now" if we are not ready or willing to respond to a question—no explanation required.
- We will value the confidentiality of this space.

*Ground Rules adapted from
Fostering Dialogues Across
Divides: A Nuts and Bolts
Guide from the Public
Conversations Project at
publicconversations.org*

**Facing Resistance to
Your Efforts**

Any effort to raise awareness, point out negative conditions, or influence behavior can run into resistance, which is a natural and common reaction to change.

Some staff members may be afraid to face the reality that their school climate is less than perfect, while others may be wary of conflict or controversy of any kind. It is not uncommon for some school and district leaders to fear opening what they may consider to be a Pandora's Box. They may harbor fears that bad feelings could emerge and leave them in worse shape than when they started. Indeed, when undercurrents flow as a result of unexpressed feelings or unresolved issues, it could get worse before it gets better. Most likely there is an array of feelings and perspectives simmering under the surface of any diverse group of adults or young people. Yet that is exactly why it is important to create safe venues that allow people to explore and express their feelings and perspectives, thereby averting a terrible, or even tragic, event or situation resulting from the repressed emotions. Take heart! In this Kit, you will find multiple ways to approach individuals or groups in your community.

In other situations, the resistance may take the form of apathy. Some people may not see these issues as a priority. There are many pressures on school administrators, teachers and students, and not everyone sees the urgency. Sometimes school officials feel a paucity of time; student performance and raising achievement scores are considered more urgent and fall into competition with other issues for their attention. They are probably not aware that statistics show that students who are bullied have lower grade point averages and are more likely to be absent from school. Facts such as these can help to sway leaders to see that efforts to improve school climate will ultimately have a positive impact on test scores and other administrative concerns. Also, you can assure these officials that any campaign may be timed and coordinated so as not to conflict with testing.

If you feel you are, or may be, a lone voice naming the negative issues in your school or community, here are a few thoughts:

- It is important to find allies to join you. These may be fellow staff and students who recognize the issues and can align their efforts with yours.
- Be ready to engage in *respectful* dialogue, including those who may or may not support your efforts, about why it is important to take action.
- Be willing to compromise on the strategic initiatives without compromising your commitment to addressing the issues.
- Take solace and encouragement from the idea that your courage will make a big difference in the lives of your students.

Understanding Bullying and Intolerance

The Prevalence of Bullying and Social Cruelty

The basic need for belonging is a powerful force and a double-edged sword that can move people to both positive and negative acts in an effort to seek approval. In most cases, unaddressed, small acts of social cruelty serve as precursors to greater acts of hate. Especially in the school setting, the need to impress others can be exacerbated when students experience alienating environments at home or school, and may choose to follow peers down paths that lead to trouble.

Racism and anti-gay attitudes have led to brutal killings committed by young people, such as those in several widely publicized hate crimes: High school students killed a transgender Latina in Newark, California in 2002; an Ecuadorian immigrant was killed in Patchogue, NY in 2008, by a group of teenagers who made a sport of hunting down and beating up immigrants; in Jackson, Mississippi in 2011, two carloads of teens sought, found and participated in the killing of an African-American man. Recently, the nation was rocked by a string of suicides of teens who had been relentlessly bullied for allegedly being gay. Anti-gay and racist hate-messages, frequently the focus of bullying, are spurred on by the media and societal attitudes that influence teens and members of a community in powerfully detrimental ways. These incidents have raised national awareness about the seriousness of unsafe school environments and bullying.

The most severe acts of racism and other forms of hate may well have their precedence in some school cultures, both on and off campus. Consider the more garden-variety forms of social cruelty that manifests in a process that many students refer to as “drama,” which includes some of the qualities of bullying (Boyd & Warwick, 2011). As young people today connect for significant blocks of time using online social networks, they may act out many of the negative behaviors exhibited by personalities on reality television shows, as one example. They parrot actions and attitudes garnered from shows that glorify catfights among contestants and celebrate exclusion when people are “voted off” the show. One principal shared that students would “vote” their peers off the lunch table in the school cafeteria. Hostility also shows up in digital media in the form of gossip, cruel jokes and mean-spirited arguments. Half-serious jests like “you’re such a slut” are posted with alarming frequency. Often students don’t consider this bullying because they feel they are just “joking” around and should not be taken seriously. The targets may act like they do not care, but often are devastated, as a female student explains in the video *Students Take on*

Cyberbullying. (See Section III.) She relates that being called a slut online led to her staying home from school. These cyber-attacks contribute to very unsafe worlds for young people navigating within ever-widening influences that include not only their peers at school, but also all those individuals participating on the Internet.

The prevalence of bullying and social cruelty is revealed in statistics showing that one out of three youth report they have been bullied, and 85% of students have stood by during a bullying incident (Hawkins, Pepler & Craig, 2001). Most students who bully and harass are not outliers on the fringes of school or general society. University of California researchers Robert Faris and Diane Felmlee (2011) found that the most popular and least popular students are not the main perpetrators of bullying behavior. Rather, the students who are seeking to move up the social ladder and increase their status are the ones most commonly found to engage in acts of social cruelty. The researchers also found that, contrary to what students believe, bullying does not improve popularity.

Rather than institute zero-tolerance programs that have proved ineffective to end bullying, attention needs to focus on the bystanders, who constitute the majority of the student population. Bystanders can learn effective practices to stop bullying and teasing when they see it. They can be taught how and why to speak up.

The Power of Positive Peer Influence

While it is significant that the general community is taking issues of bullying and intolerance more seriously than in past decades, as evidenced in anti-bullying legislation now passed in 49 states, many anti-bullying programs in schools are not that effective in stopping bullying. In many cases, they resemble what may be termed “band-aid” solutions, implemented through large, school-wide assemblies that talk at, and not with, students. Or these programs are presented in one-shot campaigns that are not comprehensive and rarely take hold on a large-scale basis. In other cases, the programs are punitive and divide students into “bullies” and “victims.”

Not In Our School believes that students need to be in the driver’s seat when it comes to finding and administering solutions. *NIOS* efforts focus on turning bystanders into “upstanders,” those who stand up or speak out for themselves and others who are being hurt. Through videos and meaningful dialogue, *NIOS* empowers young people to take action. The whole school community, including staff, students and parents, are involved in creating a climate that reflects the values of safety, tolerance and inclusion. Finally, for lasting change, staff training and parent education must become an ongoing effort.

Approaches to bullying and harassment have a better chance of success if bystanders, who make up the vast majority of the student population, become the focus of efforts to shift social norms. Rather than engaging in former behaviors, which may include gathering around a fight, actively or passively participating in an act of bullying, or spreading a hurtful video or text as if it were entertainment,

students can reject such acts of aggression and cruelty. Positive behaviors, like negative behaviors, are contagious and can spread through social networks.

The video *Class Actions: Lancaster* (included in Section III), highlights the effectiveness of a peer-to-peer initiative. In the film, a Lancaster teacher asks his class “Has anything in your lives at school changed since we started doing this?” A student responds, saying, “The phrase *Not In Our School* means a lot more now. Sometimes people could be bullying some other people and the people around them will say ‘*Not In Our School, Not In Our School.*’ And they’ll just be like ‘What?’ and then they will just stop. The phrase has really helped out a lot.” Another student said “Going to this program changed me and made me feel stronger mentally. Now I know how to handle bullying and I know how to handle it when someone is getting bullied and how to deal with the person, how to tell them to stop and go tell somebody about it.”

Lauri Massari, a school counselor, said, “We emphasize the impact of peer power versus peer pressure. You have a power with other students and if you use it positively, you can have a tremendous impact.” Lancaster Superintendent Regina Rossell reported, “Prior to the anti-bullying program, 62% of the students said they felt safe at school. A survey taken subsequently showed 92% of the kids felt safe at school.”

Defining and Recognizing Bullying and Intolerance

A first step for understanding the bullying phenomenon involves knowing how to recognize bully behaviors and embracing an explicit definition for it. The entire school community needs to understand and identify bullying and intolerance when they see it.

Bullying The generally accepted definition of *bullying* is an *act of verbal or physical aggression with an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and victim that is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, again and again*. An imbalance of power may be physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity, which is used to try to control or harm others. However, power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.

Intolerance *Intolerance* is often revealed through unkind remarks with stereotypical comments regarding a person’s identity, such as their race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, religion or ability. These attitudes can be developed and/or supported via the attitudes, actions and behaviors—sometimes conscious and sometimes not—of peers, family, teachers, coaches, or other individuals in a child’s life, but also through the media, music and the Internet. Students may express intolerance towards others overtly in a classroom or public setting, but this also often occurs in venues where adults are not even aware it is taking place. It is important for schools to address *all* acts of bullying and intolerance, and *all* forms of social cruelty in order to truly change the climate to one that is caring and empathetic.

Although bullying and harassment sometimes overlap, not all bullying is harassment and not all harassment is bullying. Under federal civil rights laws, harassment is “unwelcome conduct based on a protected class (race, national origin, color, sex, age, disability, religion) that is severe, pervasive, or persistent and creates a hostile environment.” Bullying behaviors may include harassment, but not always.

Addressing Bullying

While *Not In Our Town* is not a curriculum that teaches step-by-step anti-bullying strategies, educators can find many excellent resources and programs available for this purpose. Michele Borba, author and expert in anti-bullying techniques (see micheleborba.com) describes a framework for approaches to bullying. Borba has defined six R's as a mnemonic for addressing bullying in schools, which are: Rules, Recognize, Report, Respond, Refuse and Replace. Applying the *NIOS* approach and philosophy as a framework, Dr. Borba's six R's are expanded in detail below:

Rules Schools need to state the rules, norms and expectations for the behavior of adults and students. These rules are most effective when they are clearly defined and when students understand their purpose and share in making meaning out of them. The norms include exercising mutual respect, listening to one another and valuing empathy. Democratic classroom environments, where students have a voice, have been found to increase student involvement and empathy while an autocratic environment and the use of zero-tolerance policies have not led to safe environments or even a decrease in aggression or bullying (Test Punish and Push Out, 2010).

Recognize Again, school staff, parents and students need to be informed and educated; understanding the definition of bullying described above and that bullying can take different forms such as verbal, sexual or physical threats and harassment. Attacks can be carried out in person or via electronic means. The adults also need to be watching students for signs of depression or isolation to determine if they are possibly being bullied, but have not told anyone.

Report The entire student body, along with the parents, needs to know how to report an act of bullying or harassment safely. Adults need to occupy every wing of the school and the main office to assure students that they will find help when they need it. In addition, a phone number that students can text or call for immediate help, as well as confidential reporting locations such as locked boxes in convenient rooms, are needed.

Refuse Students can be taught refusal skills: stay calm, respond to rude remarks with an effective comeback (e.g., “Your comments are all untrue, so please stop saying that about me”) and respond firmly while looking the person in the eye.

Respond *Students:* To respond effectively to bullying, the bystanders need to know alternatives to bystanding through previously agreed upon and

practiced models of response. They can be taught ways to respond by befriending the target and speaking up to tell the person who is bullying to “quit it,” or letting the person know that they are leaving to get help. They can also encourage the other bystanders to leave the scene.

Staff: Once a staff member hears a student is being bullied, the teacher or administrator needs to respond swiftly with the strategies defined in the school’s discipline policy. These techniques differ from the ones used in conflict-resolution among peers in non-bullying situations. Bullying should never be handled by student conflict managers, but by adults who can assess the balance of power that manifests differently in each bullying situation. The person who is bullying and the bullied students should not be brought together. Adults can work with the perpetrator and the victim separately. The target can describe what happened and how he or she feels. Then, the student can role-play using refusal skills. The adult should inform the targeted student that the bullying incident is being addressed and the person doing the bullying will be disciplined. The teacher and other staff should check back frequently to assure that the bullying has ended (Frey, Hirschstein, Snell, J. L., Edstrom, MacKenzie, & Broderick, 2005). The person who has bullied should receive defined consequences, in accordance with school policy that should also include a form of restitution to give back to the community.

Replace The students who bully others need attention, too. It is better not to call them bullies, as they may unwittingly lock this label into their identities. Rather, it is important to convey to these students that they can change their behavior. With support and assistance in building empathy, they can learn to replace bullying behaviors with new ways of interacting. They also need to develop skills for self-control, anger management and conflict resolution. Models of restitution can include service-oriented projects, such as helping in another classroom or assisting in the school cafeteria. Students may also engage in a process called restorative justice, where they take opportunities to discover and identify their good qualities, followed by a brainstorming session to create ideas for giving back to the community. This model has been used with both youth and adult criminal offenders and has enjoyed considerable success.

For some children, leaving behind the tendency to bully takes time and requires numerous parent conferences and sessions with the school counselor. However, statistics show that students who habitually engage in bullying by third and fourth grade are six times more likely to end up in prison by age 24 (Maine Project Against Bullying, 2000). The repeated effort is well worth it.

NIOS Framework for Combating Bullying

NIOS has a clear perspective on effective approaches to confronting and combating bullying in classrooms and schools. After decades of deeply examining bigotry, hate crimes and the devastating consequences of bullying and intolerance on young and old alike, *NIOS* sees beyond the act of bullying to the root causes. We recognize pervasive societal forces that feed and perpetuate negative stereotypes and bigotry. Our stories and interviews include countless first-hand accounts of the lifelong impact of intolerance, not only on those being targeted, but also on families and entire communities. For that reason, *Not In Our School* promotes the following critical elements that are often missing or not sufficiently highlighted in many anti-bullying efforts.

Address both bullying behaviors and attitudes of intolerance.

In addition to enforcing anti-bullying practices and initiatives, *NIOS* provides tools for supporting students from key groups who are often targeted for their ability, race, religion, real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. We also help teachers learn how to facilitate dialogue as a crucial component of building awareness, understanding and empathy.

Engage all students to move from bystanders to upstanders.

Upstanders are those who learn to speak up and stand up for themselves and others, not just intervening, but shifting the culture of the school. Learning to stand up and speak up is a skill that can be taught, modeled and practiced. In that way, it is more likely that a person will have the courage to take a stand when the time comes. Upstanding can happen in the moment, when a person intervenes to help another. A person can also speak up to raise awareness and lead a response to intolerance.

Give students active leadership roles in school-wide anti-bullying efforts.

We believe that students, just like communities, need to take ownership and find solutions that work in their context. We also know that youth are more likely to listen to their peers. We provide inspiring examples with films and lessons showing schools that have done just that.

Avoid using the word “bully” as a label for a child.

Just as we do not tell children they are “bad” and rather say their “behavior is bad”, we do not want young people to think that their bullying behavior defines them as a bully. We believe that at any age, people can change and that is especially true for children. We help students who are doing the bullying shift their self-image and change their behavior. They can stop being part of the problem and can be part of the solution.

Support and applaud administrators and teachers for efforts to create and sustain safe, accepting and inclusive environments for all students.

We believe that to ensure bullying is reduced and schools are safe, the most important action is to shift the entire school culture to one where students feel and exhibit empathy and all students feel they belong.

Creating Identity Safe Classrooms

Not In Our School involves effectively addressing negative attitudes, intolerance and hate with the goal to make every classroom in every school safe and inclusive. This includes an assurance that bullying and harassment will be prevented not only during structured class-time, but on the other side of the classroom doors as well. Students often report the hallways, bathrooms, yards, cafeterias and the Internet as the places where bullying happens. In many cases, bullying occurs where it is not visible to the authorities. For that reason, the efforts to make schools safe must go beyond the mere creating of consequences for negative behavior. They must provide the conditions for students to internalize and practice values of respect and acceptance in all aspects of their lives.

Identity safety is a concept introduced in 2003 that recognizes the need for students to feel their identity is valued.

Identity safe classrooms validate students' experiences, backgrounds and identities. These classrooms are free from negative relationships and teaching practices that implicitly, or explicitly, link students' identities (e.g., race, gender, religion), to academic performance.

— (D. M. Steele)

The premise stresses the need for schools to provide the appropriate conditions for students to discover or strengthen their identities and understand their uniqueness. In an identity safe classroom, each child's identity is viewed as an asset with which they may make life-long contributions to their culture and society as a whole. School environments need to ensure that all students feel validated for who they are because of, and not in spite of, their backgrounds and identities. In an identity safe environment, differences in identity are acknowledged and celebrated. The negative influences of stereotyping are averted. This leads to a climate that reduces bullying and builds empathy and intercultural understanding.

Stereotype Threat Undermines Safety

Often the term "colorblind" is associated with an environment that is free of racism and bias. The sad reality is that racial divisions have not gone away and neither children nor adults are blind to our differences, nor should they be. Colorblind practices are neither possible nor constructive for students who feel, and may have experienced, their own difference as a barrier to inclusion. When teachers ignore racial, ethnic and other student differences, stereotypes go underground.

We all have many different aspects or contingencies that make up each of our identities: our age, race, religion and gender, to name a few. According to Claude Steele, renowned social psychologist, "If you have to deal with things in situations because you have a certain identity, that identity will be important to you. Most psychologically impactful identity contingencies are those that in some way threaten the individual." These contingencies have a tremendous hold over people's psyches, so strong that the person who is stereotyped is adversely affected even by being afraid to confirm a negative

stereotype. This fear of possibly confirming a negative stereotype is what Steele dubbed “stereotype threat.”

Stereotype threat (Steele 2009) is a theory that suggests people whose race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or other immutable aspects of one’s identity have been negatively stereotyped are affected even when the stereotype is not overtly mentioned. Negative stereotypes are so pervasive that people fear that they are being viewed through this negative lens. In hundreds of studies, *stereotype threat* has been shown to negatively impact student achievement and attitudes (see reducingstereotype.org).

As an antidote to the colorblind environment where stereotypes continue to manifest in both spoken and unspoken ways, an identity safe classroom creates a space where student differences are not ignored. Students feel valued and appreciated as they bring their whole identity into the classroom.

**Creating Identity
Safe Classrooms,
an Integral Part of
Student Success**

An identity safe environment is intentional. Characteristics of identity safe classrooms and schools have been shown to have a positive effect on student learning and their enjoyment of school, in spite of real stereotypes and powerful social inequalities operating in the outside world.

Characteristics of identity safe classrooms include building positive, accepting relationships and creating a sense of belonging for students. Such classrooms are meaning-centered and challenging curriculum combined with a teacher’s high expectations convey the belief that students will succeed. Teachers honor the different backgrounds of students and incorporate them into the curriculum. Students see themselves reflected on the walls of the classroom and learn about each other’s cultures and backgrounds.

In an identity safe classroom, students feel accepted and have positive relationships both with their teacher and fellow students. They feel emotionally comfortable in a warm and caring environment. Pro-social behavior is taught as part of the curriculum and practiced through specific and meaningful activities where students can engage each other. Bullying or hurtful comments are reduced and students learn empathy and are taught positive ways to communicate and interact.

By providing opportunities for autonomy, students experience that their decisions matter and they take responsibility for their learning and behavior. To develop autonomy, they are given opportunities to exercise choices within the classroom and leadership in the school setting. Students have a voice in the life of the classroom.

These characteristics or elements identified above, when combined together, promote social and academic competence and belonging. These strategies of identity safety are doable in any classroom and work in powerful ways to improve student performance and create positive environments. Many models for character education and anti-

bias education incorporate elements of identity safety and positively impact school climate, serving as sustainable antidotes to bullying and intolerance.

As part of the *Not In Our School* philosophy, we believe that social cruelty and intolerance will continue to plague schools unless anti-bullying efforts include a focus on creating identity safe, inclusive and accepting environments.

References

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Suggestions for Using *Not In Our School* Videos

The following implementation recommendations can be applied to any *N/OS* video. Providing a framework for preparation, viewing and processing the videos will help to support students' learning, understanding and application of the content. These ideas are meant to be flexible, however, and teachers are encouraged to modify or add to them, and to create specific lesson plans relevant for students.

Establishing Discussion Guidelines

Engaging students in a process of establishing ground rules for dialogue can help to ensure a safe and productive environment when discussing potentially controversial topics. Inviting students to develop these through a collaborative process helps to create common ownership of the agreed-upon rules. Additionally, if conflict emerges, the agreements can serve as a reminder of the need for respect and sensitivity.

An easy way to do this is to ask students to share their own ideas of 5-7 communication rules or behaviors that they can all commit to in the dialogue. You can prompt them with 1-2 such as "We will listen more than we speak" or "Be open to new perspectives." Make sure the agreed upon ground-rules are posted in a visible place, where they can be referred to as needed.

Preparation

Prepare your discussion questions in advance. However, be open and flexible to allowing students to take the conversation in unexpected directions and raise new ideas that are meaningful to them.

Think about how to handle silence or lack of participation. Some ways to engage reluctant participants may be to invite students to talk in pairs to answer a question and then share with the larger group; to write down responses to a question anonymously that can be submitted to be read aloud; inserting some physicality into the discussion such as inviting students to stand if they agree with a statement. Conversely, plan ahead on how you will respond/redirect students who may dominate the conversation.

Arrange the room in a way that supports open dialogue, a circle of chairs is ideal; consider sitting with the students rather than standing in front of them. Have chart paper or a Promethean board ready, as needed, to capture action ideas or plans that may emerge from the discussion.

Pre-Viewing

Before watching a particular video, identify for your students the nature of the problem that the students in the video are trying to solve. For example, are they seeking to address a particular hate crime in their community, gun violence, bullying at school, anti-gay bigotry or other expressions of hate? Then ask students to respond to the following questions:

- *What strategies might students use to address this problem?*
- *What are the risks, if any, to taking these steps?*
- *What challenges might students confront as they try to remedy this problem?*

- *What would “success” in solving this problem look like? How could “success” be measured?*
- *What resources do students need to be successful?*
- *What might be the consequences of doing nothing?*

Post-Viewing To help students comprehend and interpret what they viewed in a NIOS video (and to give you evidence of student learning), here are some ways to structure students’ responses to the video. For links to *Facing History* step-by-by descriptions of these activities, go to notinourschool.org/how-do-i-use.

3-2-1 After viewing, students can record 3 facts from the video, 2 questions raised by the video and 1 feeling they experienced while watching the video.

Text-to-Text, Text-to-Self, Text-to-World Below are examples of the kinds of questions you can use with this strategy:

- *Text-to-Text:* What events or ideas from this video remind you of other things you have seen or heard (books, movies, songs, television shows)?
- *Text-to-Self:* What events or ideas from this video remind you of something you have witnessed or experienced?
- *Text-to-World:* What events or ideas from this film remind you of something that happens in your community, nation, or world?

Levels of Questions Here is an example of the kinds of questions you can use with this strategy:

- *Level One:* What were students responding to in this video? What action did they take?
- *Level Two:* What do you think of their response? In what ways was it effective? What else could they have done to address the problem they saw in their school or community?
- *Level Three:* What power do you think young people have to change attitudes and actions? What gives young people power? What limits their power?

Two-Column Chart On the left side of a page, students record information presented in the film. On the right side, students record their reactions to this information such as a question, a comment, a feeling or a connection to something they know or have experienced.

Journal Writing Often a simple prompt such as “What struck you about this film? What ideas are on your mind?” is enough to prompt student responses. Here are some additional prompts that can be used to spark reflective writing.

- *When viewing this video, what felt familiar to you? What was new or different?*
- *What moment in the film stood out for you? Why?*
- *Do you see a need for a “Not In Our School” movement at our school? Why or why not?*
- *What could our school do to create a more peaceful, tolerant community?*

- *What responsibility do you think teenagers have to address bullying problems and/or hate crimes in their schools and communities? Do they have more, less, or an equal responsibility to address these problems as the adults in their community?*
- *What are the risks of confronting bullying, hate and violence? What could be done to mitigate (or reduce) these risks? Under what conditions, if any, would you advise someone not to intervene to stop injustice or intolerance?*

Student Presentations

Assign small groups a video to present to the larger class. Presentations might address questions such as:

- *What were students responding to in this video? What problem were they trying to solve?*
- *What did they do? What strategies did they employ? What resources did they draw from?*
- *What risks did they take? What challenges did they confront?*
- *What do you think of their response? What did they accomplish?*
- *What advice would you offer these students? What could be some next steps these students could take to further address this problem?*
- *What more do you want to know about this situation? If you had the opportunity, what would you want to ask the students in this video?*

Whole Class Conversation

After students have had the opportunity to process a video independently or in small groups, facilitate a whole-class conversation. Here are some specific strategies you might consider using for facilitating these discussions:

Wraparounds

Wraparounds give all students the opportunity to share an idea or question before a discussion begins. After viewing a video, you can ask each student to share one thought or question that is on their mind, or one moment that stood out for them.

Fishbowl

Fishbowl is a strategy that helps students practice being active listeners and participants in a discussion. Half the class can debrief the video while the other half observes. Then students can switch roles.

Big Paper, Building a Silent Conversation

Ask students to record important quotations from the video or you can ask them to suggest questions the video raised for them. These quotations and questions can serve as the focus of a silent conversation activity.

Roundabouts

Have students form two concentric circles facing one another. Students discuss a question with the person opposite them until the facilitator announces that the inner circle should move one space to the right (usually after 3-5 minutes). Then students begin a conversation with their new partner. This process can be repeated for several rounds using the same or different questions for each round. Often this is followed by a full group conversation about the ideas shared in the brief conversations.

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Suggestions for Using the *Not In Our School* Website

To prepare students to explore the *Not In Our School* website, we suggest implementing one or more of the following activities that can help to:

- Familiarize students with vocabulary used on the website.
- Engage students with themes the website explores.
- Provide background information about *Not In Our School*, hate crimes and bullying.
- Establish norms for a safe classroom community that respects different points of view.

The purpose of *Not In Our School* is to help students think about what is happening in their own school community and to take steps to create more tolerant, inclusive communities. Conversations about what happens in schools in general and in the students' own school in particular, can bring up sensitive topics such as inclusion, exclusion, cliques, racism, sexuality, homophobia and gossip. Thus, before approaching this material on the website, we encourage you to review norms for a respectful classroom community with your students. (See recommendations for Establishing Discussion Guidelines in the preceding document.)

Suggested Activities

Introducing and Developing Vocabulary

Hate crimes, bullying, bystander, upstander, homophobia, tolerance, bigotry, inclusion and exclusion are some terms students can define before exploring the *Not In Our School* website. Word Walls or Word Clouds can help students present their definitions. (Websites such as **wordle.net** or **tagxedo.com** can help students create word clouds.) Below are some specific ideas for helping students develop an understanding of upstander, bullying and hate crime:

Defining Upstander

Facing History and Ourselves defines an upstander as someone who takes a stand against injustice. Ask students to brainstorm examples of people who have acted as upstanders. Examples could come from their own lives, current events, history, literature or movies. Then students can present their upstander examples as a think-pair-share or wraparound. When they finish sharing, invite students to add to *Facing History's* definition of upstander.

Defining Bullying

Many of the resources on the *Not In Our School* website concern “bullying”—a term that people use in different ways to describe acts of hate, intimidation and harassment among young people. (Consider what acts of bullying are often called when the perpetrators are adults: Hate crime? physical assault? libel?) Before students explore the examples provided on the website, you might ask students to clarify their own definition of bullying. At what point does a joke, a comment, or an action become inappropriate, offensive and/or hurtful? While some examples of bullying or intolerance appear obvious, other actions may be more subtle. There may not be agreement about what actions should be labeled as “bullying.”

Defining Hate Crime The *Not In Our School* website also includes resources documenting how students have responded to hate crimes in their communities. Before exploring these resources, have students define the term “hate crime.” The FBI website [fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/civilrights/hate_crimes](https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/civilrights/hate_crimes) includes the legal definition of hate crime and other information you may want to review with students prior to having them look at responses to these crimes.

Journal and Discussion Prompts:

To prepare students for the themes and situations they will explore on the website, consider the following prompts for journal writing or small group discussions. (Note: The think-pair-share teaching strategy combines time for individual writing, small group conversation and whole class discussion.)

- What does the phrase “not in our school” mean to you? What behaviors and attitudes don’t belong in school? Do you think others would agree with you? Why or why not?
- Identify a recent example of hate, intolerance, bullying or prejudice you witnessed or experienced in your school or community. Identify a recent example of friendship, tolerance or kindness you witnessed or experienced in your school or community. Which example was easier for you to come up with? What do you notice more, acts of kindness or acts of meanness? Why?
- A 14 year-old girl from New Jersey said, “Being bullied over the Internet is worse... They say sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. That quote is a lie and I don’t believe in it. Sticks and stones may cause nasty cuts and scars, but those cuts and scars will heal. Insults hurt and sometimes take forever to heal.” Respond to this girl’s comments. Do you agree or disagree with her? Do you think verbal bullying, including cyberbullying, is as harmful as physical bullying? Why or why not?
- What risks are involved in standing up to bullying, prejudice and hate? What can help people overcome those risks? Under what conditions, if any, might it be unwise to stand up to perpetrators of violence and intolerance?
- Why do people sometimes engage in bullying or mean behavior? Why do people engage in acts of kindness?
- What does it mean to “do the right thing” when you see students being bullied? What makes it hard to always do the right thing? Have you ever been in a situation where you were not sure about what was the “right” thing to do? Describe this situation. What made it difficult for you to determine what was the best or “right” course of action?
- Psychologist Ervin Staub wrote, “Goodness, like evil, often begins in small steps. Heroes evolve, they aren’t born.” What encourages people to take these “small steps”? Where do people learn how to act as “heroes” or “upstanders”?

Anticipation Guide Anticipation guides ask students to express an opinion about ideas before they encounter them in a text or unit of study. Often teachers ask students to return to their anticipation guides after exploring new material, noting how their opinions may have shifted or strengthened as a result of new information. Here are examples of statements you can use to encourage students to think about the ideas addressed on the *NIOS* website and in the videos:

- Students are the most powerful influence on their school's tone and climate. They decide what kind of behavior is acceptable and unacceptable.
- Stepping in when you see someone treated unfairly is easy.
- The adults in the school are the ones who are responsible for creating a safe learning environment for all students.
- It is unrealistic to think that schools can be places where all students are treated fairly and kindly.
- Some students are excluded or teased because they deserve it.
- If students feel unsafe at school, they should go to a teacher or school administrator for help.
- If someone is verbally or physically attacking another student, someone you do not know, the best thing to do is stay out of it.
- If someone is verbally or physically attacking a friend, the best thing to do is intervene to stop it.
- Bystanders have the power to stop injustice.
- If bullies knew their behavior was unacceptable, they would stop acting that way.
- The best way to stop teasing, harassment and bullying is to have a stronger system of enforcement and punishment.

Please visit notinourschool.org and facinghistory.org for more information on the above.

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