



Not In Our School Quick Start Guide



Across the country, students and teachers are sharing stories, joining together and taking action to create safe schools free from bullying, stereotypes, intolerance and hate. They are part of a movement called **Not In Our School (NIOS)**. For more than a decade, Not In Our School has inspired students of all ages to develop and share innovative ways to resist bullying and promote an atmosphere of acceptance and inclusion. The Not In Our School videos, activities and resources on the **website** showcase the immense capacity, energy and creativity of young people who are finding new ways to make their schools safe for everyone.



Not In Our School Quick-Start Guide

A Not In Our School campaign (NIOS) is an ongoing commitment to empower students to create safe and inclusive environments that are free of bullying, anti-gay harassment, bigotry, racism and all forms of intolerance.

Every NIOS campaign takes on the characteristics of the school community and responds to local issues and needs. A Not In Our School campaign mobilizes students to be “upstanders” who take action to stand up for themselves and others, and to create a climate that reflects the values of safety, respect and inclusion. Here are the guiding principles:

Identification of problems of intolerance and bullying

The focus is on problems that result from students bullying or being exclusionary and hateful. Often, harassment is based on gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, appearance or disability. The first step is to start with a dialogue about the particular problem.

Solutions defined by students and peer-to-peer actions

Students are supported in defining the problems and solutions needed to incorporate peer-to-peer actions, make their schools safe, and help bystanders gather the courage to become upstanders.

Collective voice

The entire school community unites to say “NOT IN OUR SCHOOL.” This action could take many forms—buttons, banners, slogans, T-shirts, pledges, assemblies, and school-wide activities—but it needs to grow out of authentic discussion and efforts to create a safe and welcoming environment for students of all backgrounds and identities.

The many activities presented in this guide have been successfully implemented in schools, and may be viewed in videos with lesson guides on the [Not In Our School](http://NotInOurSchool.org) website. A set of core principles to address bullying and intolerance, [ideas for implementing Not In Our School](http://NotInOurSchool.org) and testimonials from administrators, teachers, and students are available on the website (notinourschool.org) as well.

I. Connections Across the Curriculum

NIOS activities 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 skills of communication and decision-making. The activities are versatile and can also link to Visual Arts, Theatre, Music and can strengthen character education programs.

II. Ten Steps for Starting a Not In Our School Campaign



1. Start a club and/or create a coalition to lead efforts



Your coalition can include students, teachers and administrators. The group will be even stronger if it embraces representatives from both school and the community at large. Possible groups to approach include student clubs, parents and PTAs, librarians, community organizations such as the YMCA, after school programs, interfaith groups, churches, synagogues and local government officials (e.g., school board and city council members, the mayor). The broader the coalition, the more powerful the results. However, it is important to remember that even very small groups can make a big difference. For information on starting a NIOS club, go to Part III of this guide.

Once you have secured a meeting with a person or group, the following guidelines can help tailor your presentation:

- Create an inviting atmosphere and accept all levels and offers of time, energy and commitment.
- Be non-exclusive and hear suggestions and ideas from all participants.
- Keep your goal in mind and communicate your passion.
- Be ready to enlist, support or encourage others to act. Be prepared for the next step, such as showing a video.
- Before leaving, remember to ask for participation and support.
- Stay flexible and adaptable.
- If some students choose not to actively participate, do your best to make friends and encourage them to support your efforts.

2. Identify issues in the school community with your students

Ask students questions to determine how they feel at school and identify issues that keep the classroom/school from being safe. Tally the results and identify the areas of the highest rating as the least safe.

Sample questions:

- If you could change one thing about the climate and culture of your school, what would it be?
- Have you or other students from different racial backgrounds teased and bullied another or others in this classroom/school?



- Do you think that immigrant students feel welcome? Do they actively participate in all school activities?
- Do you hear racist slurs or have you seen racist graffiti around the campus? Do you hear slurs based on someone's religion?
- Have you or other students been teased or called anti-gay names?
- Have you seen swastikas or KKK graffiti at school?
- Do you hear the phrase "that's so gay?"
- Have you or other students been teased or bullied about being overweight?
- Have you or others been teased or bullied about being dumb or not as smart?
- Have you or others been teased for how much money you or your family has?
- Where do you see bullying and cruelty taking place?
- "I feel safe here." Is this statement true for you? Why or why not?

Select and view NIOS videos for inspiration and learn from other NIOS campaigns. Hold class and staff discussions about the issues that keep a school from being safe. Answer the following questions:

- What strategies might students use to address these issues?
- What are the risks, if any, to taking these steps?
- What challenges might students confront?
- What would success in addressing these issues look like?
- How could success be measured?
- What resources do students need to be successful?
- What might the consequences be of doing nothing?

3. The leadership group chooses the identified issue(s) of the highest concern

For the most impact, a NIOS campaign needs to include meaningful discussions with the participation of all students for both exploring the issues and identifying authentic and sustaining solutions.

4. Sign a Not In Our School/Not In Our Town pledge to stop bullying, name calling and intolerance

Create a NIOS pledge and adapt it to your community. Each student or classroom can complete a pledge and submit it or the pledge can be written on huge sheets of butcher paper and students can sign the bottom of the paper.

Students then discuss their commitment to the words in the pledge and recite it together.

Sample pledges can be found on the [website](#).

5. Select three or more from the following activities or design your own activities to implement during Not In Our School Week

Keep in mind that a Not In Our School campaign can extend over an entire month, a week, or just a single day as long as build-up and follow-through activities are in place to support focus, clarity and lasting change.

- Create your unique NIOS slogan. For example, “Stand Up, Stand Out: Not In Our School.”
- Watch NIOS films in the classroom followed by discussions.
- Hold a school-wide assembly with student skits and speakers.
- Do the “Dissolving Stereotypes” activity where students recall and record on rice paper the negative stereotypes that have personally affected them and place them into a pool where they dissolve.
- Hold a flash mob in the school cafeteria led by the leadership group.
- Sponsor a poster or video contest on the theme of NIOS.
- Design NIOS t-shirts, buttons, posters or stickers and distribute to all students.
- Teach students to be upstanders and create scenarios where they can role-play and practice.
- Organize a cross-age service learning project where older students teach the younger ones by performing skits about responses to bullying.
- Have each department in the school identify a theme and organize a special classroom activity for students to reflect on the theme.
- Link your NIOS campaign to the curriculum. Have the students research the areas of most concern and write essays.
- Have the students write letters to the newspaper and local officials describing their commitment to NIOS and making their school safe.
- Map the places where bullying happens in the school.
- Have students prepare a presentation or video to teach younger students about bullying.
- Collaborate with the city council or mayor’s office to craft and pass a resolution for Not In Our School Week.
- Sponsor a community event with a showing of a NIOS film followed by student-led small group discussions.
- Sponsor a broadcast of a NIOS film on public media or the local cable station followed by a student panel.



6. Document and publicize what is being done

Take photos, film interviews, write articles and collect and publish student writing assignments.

7. **Identify the impact of your NIOS Campaign** After the actions and activities, again ask the students how safe they feel at school to determine the impact of the campaign and identify future actions.
8. **Review the data and determine next steps** After the actions and activities have been completed, ask the students to evaluate their efforts and the roles that they each played. How can efforts be improved or expanded? Can they identify lasting change or impact?
9. **Reaffirm the commitment** Change does not happen overnight and efforts need to be ongoing and reaffirmed every year. Holding Not In Our School week each year assures the students that the values of inclusion and an environment free of bullying and intolerance are here to stay. It also can serve as a reminder to the students during the year to hold true to NIOS values.
10. **Join the NIOS Network** Put your school/district on the NIOS [map](#). Send in a NIOS Campaign Form with a list of your completed activities.



What is a NIOS Club and What Are Its Benefits?

A NIOS club is a group of students at a school site who lead activities to address bullying and intolerance and to make their school safe, accepting and inclusive. The club serves as a hub for NIOS work and assures that NIOS initiatives are student-led. NIOS clubs can transform schools into identity-safe environments. An identity safe climate is one where students from all ethnic and religious groups, gender identities and backgrounds feel welcomed and included.

Determine Who Will Participate

A NIOS club works best when it has representatives from many groups at school. The club can either be a coalition of members from different clubs, or its own unique club. In either case, it is good to coordinate with and include the other student clubs on campus.

Student leaders from all sectors (ASB, athletics, music, drama, different ethnic clubs, Gay-Straight Alliance) who influence others make good

members. Also consider recruiting some students who are not already the most successful. While it takes a bit more time, you might see that a student like this can transform and move into a leadership role in a meaningful way. It is also important to have students from various grade levels to assure continuity from year to year.

Recruit Members Sometimes an assembly or school-wide event can be used to get students excited and to announce the formation of a new NIOS Club. At some schools, interested students have had a table at lunch and handed out wristbands to get others involved. In other cases, students go around to classrooms with brief presentations during an advisory period or at another time.

Hold an Introductory Meeting The first meeting needs to have three goals to:

1. Create a positive welcoming tone.
2. Find out why each student joined the group.
3. Get students excited about taking action and recruiting others.

The meeting is a kick-off and the mission and purpose needs to be defined and articulated. From there, it is important to make a plan for the year. Many NIOS clubs identify leadership roles or elect officers. Meetings need to be welcoming and fun snacks help, too.

Assess School Needs Each club responds to the needs of its particular school and community. Survey the staff and students or go to each class to gather input. Suggestions on how to gather information to assess the school issues can be found on pages 3 and 4.

Identify Club Themes and Activities At meetings, have the students watch NIOS films to get a sense of the whole array of activities that other schools have done. Identify NIOS films that address the needs of your school. Based on the results of your needs assessment, have students brainstorm activities for the NIOS Club Plan. Here are just a few ideas from the 50 NIOS short films at the [Not In Our School](#) website.

- [Sign a School Pledge](#)
- [Lead an Assembly](#)
- [Create an Online Kindness Campaign](#)
- [Learn about Problem-solving](#)

Pay Careful Attention to How Everyone Works Together

It is important that your club has ground rules. The topics of NIOS

are at once deeply personal and at times controversial. **About NIOS** on the NIOS website has more suggestions for ground rules and facilitating conversations. Always support students in learning positive communication and conflict resolutions skills.

Coordination with School Leaders and Student Groups

Whether your club has representatives from other clubs or not, it is always important to coordinate with other clubs on campus. Sometimes a NIOS club has merged with another club to maximize impact. In one school, the Cyberbullying club and the NIOS club were separate one year and merged the next.

IV. Not In Our School: A Movement for Lasting Change

As a movement and campaign, NIOS is an effort that asks everyone to change the atmosphere that can lead to bullying and intolerance. Although the process can begin with these nine steps, a safer climate for students does not happen overnight. It requires a sustained and collaborative effort of students, parents, educators and community members who work together to model and practice empathy, thoughtful responses and respect for different backgrounds and perspectives. It grows out of authentic discussion and efforts to create a safe and welcoming environment for students of all backgrounds and gender identities.

School needs to be a place where students discover their identities and where each student feels that a unique identity is an asset. Students need to feel emotionally comfortable in a warm and identity safe environment where stereotypes and stereotype threat (the fear of being judged by a negative stereotype) are addressed. Efforts to build empathy and involve students in the process of change can shift the school culture to one where offending or hurting someone else, either in person or online, is not seen as cool. The whole culture can become a warm, caring environment where bullying is much less likely to occur.



Learn more at notinourschool.org

Find community resources and films at niot.org.

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