

Not In Our School Campaign A 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 another or others and create a climate that reflects the values of safety, respect, and inclusion in these ways:

Identification of problems of intolerance and bullying: The focus is on problems that result from students bullying, harassing, 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 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 gender identities.

The many activities presented here have been successfully implemented in schools and may be viewed in videos with lesson guides on the notinourschool.org website. An array of testimonials from administrators, teachers, and students are available on the website, as well.

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 learn 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.

Steps for starting a Not In Our School Campaign

1. Create a coalition to lead efforts: Your coalition can include students, teachers, and administrators. The impact of your coalition will be even stronger if it embraces representatives from both school and the community-at-large. Possible groups to approach both on and off campus include student clubs, parents and PTAs, librarians, community organizations such as the YMCA and afterschool programs, interfaith groups, churches, synagogues, and local government officials (school board members, city council, the mayor). The broader the coalition, the more powerful the results become, however it is important to remember that even very small groups can make a big difference.

Once you have secured a meeting with a person or group, the following guidelines can help in tailoring an attractive 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 a person or group chooses 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 most unsafe.

Sample questions:

- If you could change one thing about the climate and culture of the 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 welcomed? Do they actively participate in all school activities?
- Do you hear racist slurs, or have you seen racist graffiti around the campus?
- Have you or other students been teased or called anti-gay names?
- 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 (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 be the consequences 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, teasing, and intolerance: Complete the NIOS pledge or adapt it to your community. Each student or classroom can complete their own and submit it, or the pledge can be written on huge sheets of butcher paper and students can sign the bottom of the butcher paper.

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

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 schoolwide assembly with student skits and speakers.
- Do the “Dissolving Stereotypes” activity where students recall and record the negative stereotypes that have personally impacted them on rice paper 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 and perform 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 film showing of a NIOS film followed by student-led small group discussions.
- Sponsor a broadcast of a NIOS film on 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: Change does not happen overnight and these efforts need to be ongoing. Holding Not In Our School week each year assures the students that NIOS, 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 stay the course and hold true to the values.

9. 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. You will receive a certificate that your school community is a member of the Not In Our School Network.

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 to him or her -- and to the world. They 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.