



THIS STUDENT CLUB IS FORGING AUTHENTIC CONNECTIONS AT NORTHGATE SCHOOL DISTRICT

It can start small — a rude comment here, an intolerant remark there. But that's the thing about intolerance: Given oxygen, it's not long before it grows. Before you know it, rooting it out can be a daunting challenge.

That's why Northgate School District is prioritizing efforts to nip such behavior in the bud, replacing nascent hate with something far more optimistic and future-focused: the possibility of tolerance.

A growing, student-driven initiative is making sure that the destructiveness of intolerance, which can take an enormous toll on young people, is identified, interdicted and — in the best cases — eradicated entirely.

Northgate's deep involvement in the "No Place for Hate" effort and the district's leaders' commitment to finding multiple ways to promote inclusion and tolerance are helping to define the ways it educates its students and helps grow the surrounding community.

And so it does, in fact, start small — right where intolerance can begin.

"Big activities are great, but it's the day-to-day interactions," says Zack Burns, a guidance counselor at the

high school who hosts the No Place for Hate club in his office. "We were having a discussion and somebody made an insensitive joke. And other kids were like, 'Dude, that's not cool to say at all.'"

"Students are willing to talk to each other about, 'What is the climate that we want?'"

THE MEANING OF 'NO PLACE FOR HATE'

"No Place for Hate" is a national initiative that encompasses more than 1,800 schools across the country, and Northgate is but one thread in the tapestry. Students and school leaders see great value in participating in this and other national projects. But they're also charting a distinctive, Northgate-flavored course that reflects life on the ground in the district.

The national No Place for Hate guidelines are a meaningful beginning, not an endpoint.

"What matters is what the local version of that looks like in your community. What are the issues of this community that we need to contend with? What do we do next?" says Michelle King, a consultant who works closely with the district.

Northgate's national connections include attending the Eradicate Hate Global Summit. Students who

attended last fall were deeply moved by the powerful documentary "Repairing the World," about The Tree of Life shooting in Pittsburgh's Squirrel Hill neighborhood.

"They asked things like, 'How do you recover from something like that? And how do you still try to get people to feel included when you think they're wrong?'" Burns says. "It was a wonderful conversation."

Northgate sent six students to that event. They and three more students attended the follow-up Eradicate Hate Student Summit earlier this year, gathering with teens from other high schools to discuss how to make real change in their communities.

What they've learned during these gatherings has helped inform their "No Place for Hate" work. The students also met like-minded peers from other schools, forming friendships and growing their sense of community.

Community is key here: On Martin Luther King Jr. Day this year, Northgate hosted a community night organized by the No Place for Hate group. They screened "Repairing the World" and students hosted a panel discussion afterward that included a shooting survivor.

Northgate's staff, meanwhile, did a day of service rather than the

professional-development day they would typically experience on the holiday.

LOCAL, LOCAL, LOCAL

Northgate is part of the Western Pennsylvania Learning 2025 Alliance, a regional cohort of school districts working together — with support from The Grable Foundation — to create student-centered, equity-focused, future-driven schools. Led by local superintendents and AASA, The School Superintendents Association, the Alliance convenes to help districts like this one innovate in ways that will create a better world for their students.

The growing community of students who make up the No Place for Hate group are determined to make that better world happen. And little by little, week after week, participating in the No Place for Hate group is giving them tools to do that.

Students say it has helped them express themselves better, connect with each other in substantive ways, and build a vocabulary of equity and tolerance that, they hope, will radiate outward to the rest of the district population.

“We want the work to stick with them,” Burns says. “Because that’s where we’re going to have the most impact in the communities. It’s when people leave here and then go teach their kids that. The work doesn’t end at 3:30 when Northgate gets out.”

“I started speaking with other students and talking about hard topics to help me learn how to help other people and myself,” says ninth-grader Asher Lardo. “I was in a not-so-great place, and it helped me grow in how to deal with my own personal issues. And it helped me learn how to work with other people and have a common collective goal.”

Burns hears that and marvels: “The honesty we’ve seen in this club.”

The goal identified by Asher is tangible — eradicating hate — but also lofty and deliberately broad. Because, as the faculty and staff sponsors say, this is not a give-directions-and-get-things-done effort. It’s a way to grow a mindset of tolerance toward fellow humans

that will ripple far beyond the students’ high-school years and into a society where such skills are pivotal to their success — and, arguably, to the future of humanity.

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Adds King, with emphasis: “Yes, we’re not achieving justice by Friday.”

