

THE
COLORADO
EDUCATION
INITIATIVE

Transforming School Climate Strategy:
Building a Culture of Upstanding Allies

HOW TO CREATE AN **Allies in Diversity** P R O G R A M



Contributing Editors:

Barb Miller, Librarian
Manhattan Middle School
Boulder Valley School District

Bethy Leonardi, Ph.D
Educational Foundations, Policy and Practice
University of Colorado, Boulder

Julia Kantor
Writing Instructor- Student Academic Success Center
University of Colorado at Boulder- School of Education

Derrick Searle
School Social Worker, Poudre High School
Poudre Valley School District

Finessa Ferrell
Director - Initiatives
The Colorado Education Initiative





What is an Allies in Diversity program?

From a student's perspective, an Allies in Diversity program feels like a student club and is often referred to as such. Looking through an instructional lens, however, the content and purpose are strategic and aim to build student knowledge about social justice, equity, diversity and multiculturalism; create pro-social attitudes and beliefs toward all members of the school community; build critical student "upstander"¹ skills that are practiced and put into action; and create a safe space for students most at risk of experiencing cruelty and bullying to build relationships within the club with students who pledge to be their allies. "Ally" refers to the tight bonds that occur between members of the club and also refers to all club members' role in the larger school community to intervene and defend any student who is being unfairly treated and/or bullied on any given school day.

"Ally" then describes both the relationship between students (I am your ally) and action to be taken in defense of other students throughout the school (I will ally with them against others who are treating them badly).

Although an Allies Club shares some elements of a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), it is intended to be far more than a safe space, the traditional role of GSAs usually found at the high school level. An Allies Club at the middle school level functions as equal parts multiculturalism class, student skill building, character building and safe space for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning (LGBTQ) and/or gender nonconforming students, and does address LGBTQ diversity as a critical part of instructional content. (See "Why Must LGBTQ Diversity be Addressed?," page 4.)

This guide provides step-by-step instructions for establishing an Allies Club in your school. The guidelines are drawn in large part from the experience of a Colorado middle school over four years as it created and sustained an Allies Club. Each step provides instructional strategies and activities to use with club members as well as questions to consider when developing and supporting Allies groups. These resources could also be excellent resources for professional development.

"I want to be an Ally
because I want to help benefit
the world. Some people don't seem to
realize how easily you can hurt someone
and affect his/her lives. I want to prevent all of
the depression that comes with witnessing insults.
Everyone has the right to be different, no matter
what. I'm not exactly sure when bullying became
a part of the world, but I would think that the
human race would want to support each other.
We are capable of so much more when
we stand together."

*—Seventh-grader, Manhattan
Middle School*

¹ "Upstander" is a term that has emerged from the bullying prevention literature regarding the behavior of bystanders—the students and adults who watch bullying occur and do nothing or encourage it by laughing, pointing, taking pictures on cellphones, etc. Upstanders are students and adults who intervene and support the target student(s) who is being subjected to mean, cruel, harassing and bullying behavior at the hands of another student(s).

What do kids say about being an Ally?

Why do you want to be an Ally?

"I have gotten bullied all my life, and I never ever want anyone to ever go through what I had to go through."

"I want to be an Ally because I've seen bullying words like 'retard' being used, but I'm scared to tell people who are saying these things to stop."

What can you contribute to the Allies in Diversity program?

"I think I would be a good Ally because I believe that everyone deserves to themselves."

"I'm going to try to stand up for our Manhattan community, and I won't be a bully and will not say things like 'That's so gay!'"

"I can be one of the many people who encourage other people to be Allies, and they will encourage others to be Allies, and it will just keep going."

How will Allies help you?

"Allies was, and still is, a place that made me feel more comfortable in school. It is one of the places where I can go and totally be myself."

"My brother is having people pick on him and calling him gay, and I want to understand how I can help him look to the sun instead of the clouds."

"All of my friends say offensive words and I want to spread awareness about these words."

The Beginning: Manhattan Middle School

Barb Miller, the librarian at Manhattan Middle School in Boulder, Colo., has worked diligently over the past four years to create an Allies in Diversity Club that now has more than 100 student members. This group meets weekly to explore diversity as it relates to students' lives. The Allies group brings attention to the ways that certain groups are treated differently and works to understand the value of our differences and to accept all people for who they are. Through activities, deep reflection and connections to the community, Miller has helped to create a cultural shift at Manhattan where students are encouraged to support one another as allies in school and the community, standing up for those who are bullied and judged negatively for being outside the "norm," particularly those norms based on sexual and gender identity. The term "ally" has become a verb for Miller and her students as it is a practice to be cultivated and honed over time to best support fellow students, teachers and community members.

Starting, maintaining and garnering support for an Allies program takes personal work, purposeful planning and insight into the particularities of the school environment and student needs. There is no "magic formula" for developing a group that explicitly works to create an environment of safety and inclusivity, though we believe all teachers can learn from these considerations, drawn from the inspirational work Miller does with her students, as they work toward safer and more welcoming schools for *all* students.



[Watch Manhattan Middle School in action.](#)

Step 1: Getting Started

Habits of Mind and Heart

Cultivating the habits of heart and mind necessary to create and support an Allies group cannot be understated. Because the group is dedicated to supporting your most diverse students and to raising awareness and sensitivities around issues related to gender and sexual diversity, it is critical for teachers to "dig in" and personally reflect on not only why they would like to start this group but also what their biases might be around the LGBTQ community and the purpose of doing this kind of diversity work in schools. We will explore particular habits of mind and heart that, if cultivated, are likely to support both students and educators through the process of starting an Allies group and allowing it to flourish. Becoming an Ally with students takes consistent personal work that may even create a paradigm shift in how educators think about their role in the school and their students' lives.

a. Articulate why you would like to start an Allies group.

Starting an Allies group is about taking responsibility for kids' lives and caring about what they may be going through on a daily basis. Therefore, the why of this



work is a consideration worth fleshing out ahead of time. This why will undoubtedly be different for everyone, but we suggest that educators take time to articulate and discuss their reasons with colleagues, administrators, a few parents and perhaps a small core group of students.

Questions to consider:

- Why are you personally interested in helping to start an Allies program at your school?
- What about your current school environment suggests the need for an Allies Club?
- What school and district level policies might support or hinder your efforts?
- What are the goals for an Allies program and the student Allies Club specifically?

b. Reflect on your strengths and challenge areas as the instructional leader of an Allies program.

Creating and sustaining an Allies program involves vulnerability, personal reflection and acknowledgement of fears and needed supports surrounding such work. Many educators have not had the time or space to deeply reflect upon their feelings and thoughts about LGBTQ communities and what it truly means to talk about safety and inclusivity in schools. Many schools offer diversity trainings that encourage such processes, but it may be up to the educator to seek support.

Why Now?

“I decided to start an Allies Club because in 2011, [I heard of] at least five boys who were middle school age who all committed suicide because they were perceived as gay. And I can’t explain it more than just that it really created a profound shift in me. It made me think that if 12-year-old kids were that miserable in school that they killed themselves, that there were 12-year-olds in my school that were that miserable.

“I just sort of pictured myself walking through the halls and looking at all these kids during passing periods and seeing them walk by thinking that I’m going on in my day and that they are having days that are just hell on earth. Hell. And I just couldn’t walk by anymore thinking of my agenda. I started looking into their eyes and thinking, ‘I just have to help you.’ Enough. Enough of this.”

- Barb Miller
Librarian, Manhattan Middle School

Why Must LGBT Diversity be Addressed?

LGBT students are at disproportionate risk for bullying, name calling, harassment, isolation and physical assault. Research indicates that schools are often hostile environments for students who are gay, gender-nonconforming or perceived to be gay.

According to a 2009 survey done in Colorado:

- 87 percent of LGBT students were verbally harassed in school because of their sexual orientation.
- 90 percent of LGBT students regularly heard homophobic remarks or language such as, “gay,” “fag” or “dyke.”
- 40 percent of LGBT students were physically harassed.
- 33 percent were physically assaulted—punched, kicked or injured with a weapon—because of their sexual orientation.
- 89 percent of LGBT students felt deliberately excluded by their peers.
- 86 percent had mean rumors or lies told about them.
- 30 percent of LGBT students missed at least one school day per month because they were afraid to attend.

Schools with high rates of bullying of LGBT students are far more likely to have high incidences of bullying toward non-LGBT students. The two are inextricably connected.

Source: “That’s So Gay; Ending Bullying and Harassment Against LGBT Students in Colorado Schools” – A Resource Guide for Educators, Parents, and Community Members”

To do this reflective work, we suggest that you:

- Examine your own assumptions about all nondominant students
- Acknowledge your fears and the risks of doing this work.
- Examine your willingness to educate yourself—to be comfortable perhaps having knowledge gaps of your own—about diversity, including sexual and gender identity, LGBTQ experience, disability, autism, other ethnic cultures, eating disorders and other information that will make the work rich and meaningful to students.

“You don’t need to be an expert on any of this. Be open to learning and saying, ‘I don’t know. Maybe we need to go find that out.’”

–Barb Miller, Librarian,
Manhattan Middle School

c. *Learn with students.*

At the core of this work is a shift in thinking about the role of educators and students who are Allies. Because the process must start with students and their needs, supporting an Allies program should not only have students at its center, but oftentimes allow them to be the experts on the topics that emerge. This means truly believing that students who represent various types of diversity and have diverse experiences to share should be encouraged to become strong voices among other Allies. It also means encouraging a constant process of learning from all students about what they need from their peers and teachers, and about the questions they have about the work of being an Ally or, generally, about LGBTQ or other issues. Effectively, this work requires educators to learn with students rather than expect to be the expert on all diversity issues.

Questions to consider:

- How do you typically think about the role of students and teachers in terms of knowledge production (i.e., who has legitimate knowledge to share)?
- Who are the students who are teased and bullied in schools? Marginalized students in school? Why are they bullied?
- What can you learn from these students?
- What can you learn about the environment and how it affects these students? In other words, what needs to be done (education) with the students who make these students feel unsafe?

d. Define and redefine “Ally” with students.

Before starting an Allies group, educators need to become very clear on what they mean when they use the term “Ally” and what skills students would need to have to be effective members. Miller uses “ally” as a verb and, with students, continually returns to what it means to respect self and others, have empathetic understanding for those who are different from them and raise awareness about critical issues affecting the lives of their peers. It is an iterative process that she and her students must revisit to determine their shared understanding of what it means to be an Ally.

Questions to consider:

- How do you define “Ally”?
- What experiences can you share that help others come to a shared understanding of this role?
- How can you allow students to take the lead in defining this term?
- What does an Ally believe?
- What does an Ally do—for whom, how often and where?
- What discussions and activities would you lead with students in the very beginning to get them thinking about the role of an Ally? (See sidebar.)

Are You Ready to Be an Ally?

DISCUSSION (15 MINUTES)

Ask the group:

- Who has ever seen someone being bullied?
- If you saw someone being bullied, how might you respond?
- Have you ever used the word “gay” in a derogatory manner or heard others use it in a negative way? Do you think this could be considered bullying?

CONTEXT SETTING (10 MINUTES)

Read the following:

Everyone knows that we all need to do our part to put an end to bullying, but it’s not always as easy to know how and when to get involved. Here are some ideas to help guide your actions and efforts.

Keep the following three goals in mind every time you consider getting involved:

- Be sure that your intention is to always attempt to de-escalate the situation. Don’t ever try to engage in behavior that could also be considered bullying.
- Always support the target.
- Keep yourself and others safe from harm.

Keys to keeping yourself safe when defending a target:

- Never put yourself in danger. If it is a case of physical bullying, get an adult!
- Make sure everyone keeps their dignity. If the bully is ridiculing the target, don’t ever agree with him or her!
- Don’t bully back. Just keep the target safe!
- **DOING NOTHING IS NOT AN OPTION!**

Have the class brainstorm things to say in a bullying situation, such as:

- Verbal bullying (i.e., derogatory comments or verbal harassment)
- Social bullying (i.e., exclusion from friend groups or social situations)

Show the two videos titled “That’s So Gay!” (30 seconds each)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWSOGVOQPs0>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_Mlb3mYznE

BE AN ALLY HANDOUT (10-15 MINUTES)

Read the header of the handout aloud. Then ask students to read aloud one of the sections and have a short conversation about what was just read. Try to leave the conversation with a sense of hope—hope for ways we, at XXX Middle School, can combat bullying and hatred. Together we can achieve more!

Step 2: Getting Support and Buy-In for an Allies Program

Establishing and supporting an Allies group requires not only dedication to creating safe and inclusive spaces for all kids, but also gaining support from fellow educators, administrators, parents and community members. While there are people who will initially support the effort of creating an Allies group, fears about how parents or community members might react to the content of an Allies program may prevent them from lending full support until others show they are willing to take reasonable risks. Having the support of your administrator and a group of other educators is critical before presenting the idea to the entire staff.

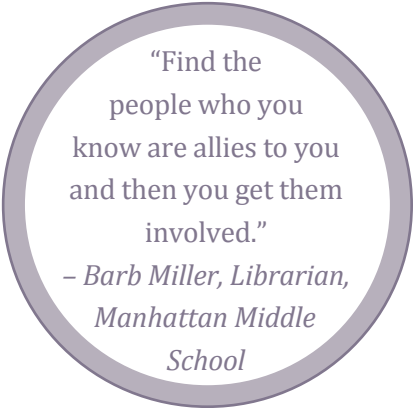
While fears around this work in schools often stem from fears related to talking explicitly about gender and sexuality in schools (and assumptions around what this could mean), there are productive and supportive ways to address their apprehension. Take care not to let the LGBTQ or gender-identity content hijack the entire conversation. Focus on building upstanding skills and character traits such as courageous decision-making, respect for all individuals, fairness and equity. Explain that being an Ally involves stepping in and stepping up to defend the inherent respect all humans are afforded regardless of whether they are your friends. Talk about building student leadership skills and student ownership in creating a schoolwide positive climate.

While some may resist, getting broad approval and buy-in for these larger goals rather than allowing specific content pieces to dominate from the beginning will allow space for reasonable discussion of those thorny content issues. Use data that indicate clearly that students outside the gender and sexuality norms—and often perceived to be gay regardless of whether that is true—bear the disproportionate impact of mean, cruel and bullying behavior at the hands of other students. For this reason, gender and sexual diversity must be addressed as part of the instructional practice of the Allies Club as well as communicating schoolwide that there is a safe and supportive space for all students.

Principal Support

Your principal is likely the most important person to have on board because of the influence he or she has in the school and within the district. Some ways to encourage your principal's support and involvement follow:

- Communicate with the principal throughout the process. He or she (like you) must trust in the process and the inevitable ups and downs.
- Be transparent about the group's purpose, activities and direction.
- Know school and district policies about cultivating safe and inclusive environments.
- Use research to support your reasoning and decisions behind forming an Allies group.
- Make connections between the Allies work and the social and emotional development of students—a professional practice principals are responsible for demonstrating.



“Find the people who you know are allies to you and then you get them involved.”

– Barb Miller, Librarian,
Manhattan Middle School

Teacher Support

- Part of the grass-roots nature of this work is to encourage other teachers to engage in the importance of courageous conversations in schools and, ideally, to participate in helping to form and support the program. Here are some ways to encourage their participation:
 - Invite them to help in determining the “lay of the land” at the school in terms of gender and sexual diversity as well as other challenging diversity that might be an issue at your school (e.g., refugee population; Middle Eastern or Muslim students; tension between rural and urban students; poorly treated nonathletes; band, choir or drama students; etc.).
 - Invite them to observe Allies group meetings or to share personal stories that are helpful, instructive and inspirational.
 - Listen to their fears and experiences with this sort of work.

- Provide or recommend professional learning opportunities and resources.
- Make connections between the Allies work and the caring, diverse and inclusive classroom communities teachers are responsible for creating as an element of professional practice.
- Tap into the librarian for support in providing high-quality texts that encourage new understandings and ways of talking about diversity, stereotyping, gender norms and different cultures. Get to know your district's policies about the approval and banning of books. Then do what you can to include books about the experience of being outside cultural norms and that have lead characters who exemplify these alternatives.

Parent Support

- Communicate early and often.
- Provide educational resources and research for support.
- Be transparent about the goals and commitments of the Allies group, perhaps using a Back-to-School Night.
- Involve parents and family members in activities (e.g., movie night, Diversity Day).

Community Support and Engagement

Harness your community assets by bringing in community groups and members who represent, support, research, assist or advocate for different populations. These adult representatives facilitate great discussions with students and answer questions that students may have that you may not. They can act as role models and provide new ways of seeing and thinking about the issues at hand. Also consider bringing in high school students to connect around various issues of diversity.

Questions to consider:

- Where can you find/who can you talk to about school and district policies regarding safe and inclusive classrooms?
- In your school, who would you consider your allies in doing this work? How can they support you?
- What kind of research do you need to support the purposes and goals of the Allies group?
- How can you connect school-approved curriculum and standards to the group's purposes and goals?
- How can you involve parents in the group's processes?
- What community groups could lend their support and expertise?



Step 3: Setting Up for Success

Once the Allies Club was established and popular with students, Manhattan Middle School developed an application process made up of three questions (see below) and required one teacher recommendation. The advantage of an application is to see in the student's own words what his or her motivation is for joining and to get upfront buy-in from the recommending teacher.

Students may not have a great understanding of what an Ally is or what Allies do until being in the Allies Club for a while. Promoting a schoolwide effort to prevent bullying and harassment and using schoolwide messaging about being an Ally and upstander help make that language commonly understood. Consider the following questions and guiding principles to find what works best for your school.

Questions:

- Why do you want to be an Ally?
- What can you contribute to the Allies in Diversity program?
- How will being in the Allies Club help you?

a. Establishing Structure: Guiding Principles

- Let kids lead the way.
- Engage students to set ground rules for respectful and caring behavior during club time.
- Welcome all kids into the group while considering that it must remain a safe space for all. This means that there must be thought behind letting those who are considered "bullies" into the group. To make the group effective for the whole school, this will likely mean working with different kids in different ways.
- Ask students to show their commitment to the group. Consider an application process for students.
- Meet every week at minimum and prioritize this meeting time.
- Tell students that membership is a privilege and should not undermine academic work

"In the beginning, anybody could be in the Manhattan Middle School Allies Club as long as we knew they weren't a bully. Allies Club meetings were held once a week during our study hall period. In the beginning, we did not have attendance requirements because we wanted students to feel like they had a choice of staying in study hall if they needed to or attending club meetings. The implication of not having an attendance requirement was that students really had to find those first meetings very valuable and keep coming by choice. Offering Allies at the same time as study hall also comes with having to discuss with a few students that the club is about personal passion and commitment, not just getting out of study hall. There are ups and downs in the beginning and you just have to keep thinking about what makes sense."

- Barb Miller

Librarian, Manhattan Middle School



Questions to consider:

- How will you engage students—hook them—in the first few club meetings?
- How will students be consulted about the direction and purpose of the group?
- How will students be invited to and recruited for the club?
- If there is an application process, what information do you want to know about students to gauge whether they are committed?
- What times and places are most promising for meetings?

Establishing Structure: Space, Snacks, Supplies, Identity

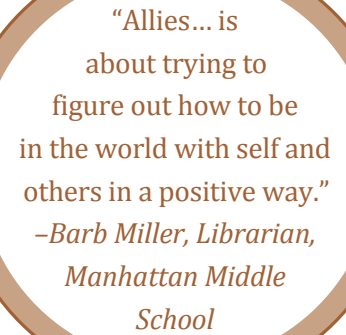
- Find a welcoming space and provide healthy food options.
- Carve out time during the school day for Allies Club meetings.
- Create Ally buttons and/or T-shirts for members to wear to school as often as possible and always on club meeting days. Engage students in designing their own logo and branding.
- Make sure you have all the supplies necessary for the activities of each club meeting. Consider assigning a rotating group of students to be the helpers and organizers of meeting supplies.

With students, establish the commitments of an Ally and of the group as a whole. Respect and safety are key components. For example, remind students that whatever happens in Allies, stays in Allies. Encourage students to come to club meetings with curiosity instead of judgment and to have an open heart and mind.



Step 4: Establishing Instructional Practices with Allies

Once the Allies group is established, the focus shifts to supporting the students to do the thinking and work they set out to do with themselves, one another and in their school and community. The first few meetings are critical for setting the tone of the group. Educators can gauge the group's commitment, where students would like to grow as Allies and what support they might need to move forward. Various instructional practices enable students to begin looking at themselves and others with curiosity, compassion and love. Importantly, both teachers and students must go through the process together. Remember to allow sufficient time to participate in activities with purpose and depth. See [Rules for Being Human](#).



*"Allies... is about trying to figure out how to be in the world with self and others in a positive way."
–Barb Miller, Librarian,
Manhattan Middle
School*

Instructional Principles

- Start the meeting with a meditation or silent time to allow students and educators to settle into the space and arrive. In addition, there is ample evidence that practicing mindfulness is a powerful boost for academic performance and that learning the practice of self-calming is important to life success.
- Engage students in rich discussion about what happens in your school—who is bullied, how, where, what scares him or her. Ask students to describe the norms about how girls, boys, athletes, music students, etc., should look and act. Encourage students to share what they perceive are best and worst aspects of the school and how students who are different are treated. Always ask them about language—how language is used to label, to wound, to embarrass. Ask about rumors, gossip and social media.
- Model vulnerability for students. Share stories and uncertainties. Take risks sharing what you are unsure about with students.
- Determine and address “gaps” in knowledge.
- Encourage students to do internal work intensively in the beginning before working on upstanding skills. Dive deep into what their values are and how they know. Explore their self-esteem and confidence. Ask them to write about their experiences. Let them ask questions, build character and courage.
- Be aware that some students love to talk, process and share feelings while others can be hesitant. Engage all students with a balance of hands-on and discussion-based activities.
- Prioritize listening to one another. For example, give students “listening time” where they pair up and each person gets one minute to talk about what’s going well in his or her life and what’s not. The person on the receiving end listens until it is his or her turn.
- Build group cohesiveness, team unity, shared purpose and trust among members.
- Always end each meeting with a purposeful closing. For example, ask all students to share one sentence about how they are feeling.
- Work with “soft” Ally skills before moving to higher-risk intervention techniques. For example, brainstorm some lower-risk, specific actions students can take, such as scanning the lunchroom and sitting with someone sitting alone, giving kindness tokens or bracelets to other students when they observe them acting with kindness, starting a social media campaign to compliment other students, etc.

Questions to Consider:

- How will you begin to support and enforce the commitments Allies make to themselves and others from the outset?
- Given the established main goals for the group, what do kids need to know and practice from the very beginning?
- What resources do you need?
- Who can support you in these opening exercises?

Instructional Strategies: Activities to Consider

Fishbowl

- Ask students to anonymously write questions about any issues they are wondering or concerned about to start the group. With the students in a circle, a teacher can pull out a question, pose it to the students (sometimes with discretion) and begin a discussion. This will help alert you to what student needs are and what they are more interested in pursuing.

Topic of the Day

- Select a meeting topic based upon students' experiences, interests or what a teacher has been noticing about the school community.

Teaching About Values

- Download and facilitate the teaching about values lesson.

Mirror Work

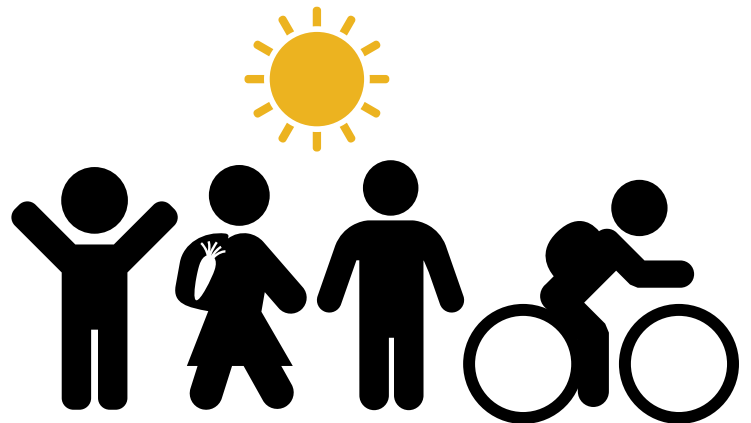
- Give each student a handheld mirror. Then ask students to share the first three things they see when they look in the mirror. Typically, students will have negative comments. Educators should model this process of seeing oneself and honestly comment on what they see when they look in the mirror. Miller says she often notices her wrinkles, will criticize them and share her thoughts with her students.
- Ask students to then take another look at themselves and turn those perceived negative characteristics into something positive. ("These lines around my eyes mean I laugh a lot!")
- Discuss the importance of loving yourself before being able to love someone else.

Appreciations

- Ask two students to face one another, about an inch apart, and make eye contact for a full minute (timed). Then ask them to tell their partner three things they think are beautiful about the other student.
- Have students race each other to the front of the room, and the "winner" has to say something kind about someone on their team.

Getting to Know Each Other

- Download and facilitate the following activities:
 - Describing Myself
 - Cultural Scavenger Hunt
 - Find Someone Who



Trust-Building Activities

- Ask students to lead one another around the room while one partner is blindfolded, trusting one another to keep them safe.

Teaching About Stress

- Download and facilitate this lesson on stress management and reduction.

Cultural Diversity

- Download the cultural diversity lesson and the following resources on diversity.
 - [The Global Village](#)
 - [Diversity Necklaces](#)
 - [Diversity Pledge](#)

Combating the Use of ‘That’s So Gay’

- Review this guide with students.

Question or Journal Prompts—Low Risk to High Risk

- Use these questions or journal prompts to facilitate discussions.

Building Upstander Skills

- Act out/role-play bullying scenarios with students. Allow Allies to discuss the scene and develop ways to intervene, both as single individuals and with a buddy. Discuss which felt better, intervening with a buddy or alone. Have the group constructively offer different solutions about how to successfully intervene, narrowing down the best tactics and then practicing those.

Learning about LGBTQ Diversity

- Invite members off community groups that deal with gender and sexual diversity to visit the club meetings.
- Create a panel of adults or students who act as a resource for kids who have questions and want to hear stories from LGBTQ community members, allies or high school students who are LGBTQ.

Learning to Be Yourself

- Ensure students feel as though their Allies group is a fun place to be, where “being yourself” is encouraged along multiple lines. Silliness and letting go are encouraged.



Engaging the Whole School Community

Being an Ally extends beyond the Allies group to the whole school community. An Allies Club’s responsibility is to make sure that other students are not only aware that the group exists but that they also feel supported by this group to be exactly who they are. The following practices can be adapted to fit a particular school environment:

- Create valentines for all kids and delivering them.
- Ask student Allies to lead classroom discussions about the use of language in the classroom, bullying in the school, etc.
- Select an Ally of the Week.
- Plan and lead schoolwide [Diversity Days](#).

Step 5: Evaluating the Allies Work

As with any program, it is critical to evaluate the impact Allies have on individual students and the school culture as a whole. Best practices include finding out directly from students the things that are working and the things that aren't, which creates a continuous improvement loop so that the program gets stronger and easier to sustain. This information can be gathered in a survey, individual interviews or small focus group discussions that are recorded.

At a minimum, Allies Club members should be asked how they have changed as individuals, what they believe they have learned during Allies, what they liked and disliked most, and to share at least two specific instances where they stood up in defense of someone else. Other best practices follow:

- Measure your school climate. Many districts and schools already use a school climate survey. Review it to see what information it collects and how you can use it to inform the Allies work. If you do not currently measure your school climate, consider purchasing or creating a school climate survey. There are many affordable school climate surveys; a resource guide about measuring school climate is available at www.coloradoedinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Measuring-School-Climate-Toolkit.pdf. Or instead of using a school climate survey, schedule schoolwide student focus groups.
- Ask Allies Club members to own and analyze school climate data (or other data you may have such as Healthy Kids Colorado survey data or [Student Perception Survey](#) data, etc.). Students can be surprisingly insightful when asked to look at school data and are quite adept at creating school climate improvement action plans when engaged in partnerships with adults. This project can also be designed as a math assignment in conjunction with an engaged math teacher.
- Ask teachers to report changes they see in individual student behavior or during passing periods, in the cafeteria, etc. It is important to keep all teachers supportive of Allies. Enlisting them to help identify ways that the Allies work is impacting student behavior keeps them involved.
- Make a list of what you would expect to see if the Allies Club was successful. Be sure to list changes in Allies themselves (e.g., skills gained, attitudes or beliefs, knowledge, demonstrations of leadership) as well as changes in the schoolwide culture (e.g., decreased fighting, bullying incidents, suspensions, increased observed acts of kindness, increased feelings of safety and/or acceptance).

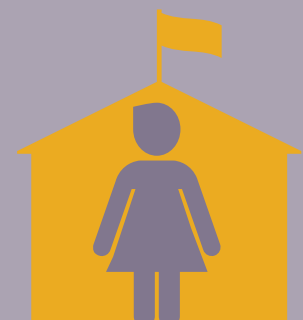
"This is a place of peace."

- Eighth-grader

Manhattan Middle School

The words of this Manhattan Middle School student resonate strongly given the work that has been done to create a space for students to be themselves, support others in doing the same and create inclusive spaces. Such work inspires students to disrupt bullying practices and be educated around topics related to diversity in schools and within the larger community. Future directions for Allies Clubs could include becoming more integrated into the academic curriculum of schools, perhaps becoming an elective course for students. The group could also begin earlier than middle school, providing a mentoring opportunity for older Allies to work with elementary school students.

While this work takes time, patience, purposeful inquiry into student needs and a willingness to acknowledge personal biases, it is a necessary step that all educators can take to help make our schools safer spaces for all kids. Indeed, all students ought to be able to say that their schools and classrooms are places of peace.





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1660 Lincoln Street
Suite 2000
Denver, CO 80264
(303) 736-6477
coloradoedinitiative.org