

# CONFRONTING WHITE NATIONALISM IN SCHOOLS

— *A Toolkit*



**WESTERN STATES CENTER**



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## AUTHORING

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Authored by *Nora Flanagan, Jessica Acee, and Lindsay Schubiner*

Contact: *info@wscpdx.org*

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# INTRODUCTION

Americans across the country report a rise in white nationalism and other bigoted extremism. Because schools are hubs of our communities, they have become battlegrounds for extremist organizing. There is evidence that white nationalist groups are specifically targeting young people with their messaging. These groups test market slang on Twitter, rewrite popular songs with white nationalist lyrics, and join mainstream video game platforms, all to reach a young audience.

In this toolkit, we'll share strategies to counter white nationalist organizing in schools through sample scenarios that schools frequently encounter. Whether a student has been found passing out white nationalist flyers or buttons on school property, or more actively advocating for a "white pride" student group, the following pages offer advice for parents, students, teachers, school administrators, and the wider community. Many resources currently exist that address diversity, inclusion, and bullying in schools; a few of them are listed in the resources section. This toolkit is specifically focused on responding to white nationalist targeting and recruitment of students.

It's easy to miss an unfamiliar white nationalist symbol, or feel unsure about how to respond to a student citing a white nationalist source in the classroom. There's a lot to keep track of when working with young people; we want to make it easier to recognize these behaviors (and those responsible), and to take action.

Everyone who engages in the life of a school is in a unique position to isolate and push back against the growing white nationalist movement and the hateful narratives they tout. It's time to own that power. Our job is to build schools where everyone feels valued, and where our students can grow to be engaged citizens of an inclusive democracy.

"My site is mainly designed to target children" for radicalization, the editor of neo-Nazi site The Daily Stormer, Andrew Anglin, said on a radio show in 2018. "[Age] 11 through teenage years.... Young adults, pubescents ." <sup>①</sup>

## WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT WHEN WE SAY “WHITE NATIONALISM”?

White nationalism is a term that originated among white supremacists in the post-1960s Civil Rights era. While initially used as a euphemism for white supremacy, by the late 1990s, white nationalism emerged as its own distinct ideology with an emphasis on antisemitism and the creation of all-white ethnostates through violence and policies that increase the vulnerability, criminalization and removal of minorities and other targeted communities.

White nationalism is implicitly violent, as its goal of an entirely white nation state can only be realized through violent means. Short of achieving its end goal, white nationalism directly and

indirectly influences a myriad of policies ranging from immigration enforcement, voter disenfranchisement and suppression, and state disinvestments that continue to marginalize and repress communities of color. ②

Today white nationalism operates as a bigoted social movement that aims to build political power toward its goal of a white nation. It is distinct from white supremacy, which is a system of oppression designed to maintain control over people of color and the rights of all women.

White nationalists often mask their ideology using positive statements



*White nationalist flyers like these from the group Patriot Front are distributed in schools and communities as a way to draw attention and recruit members.*

of love for white people rather than overt hate, and they seek to recruit supporters based on disingenuous arguments that white people are victims. They argue that racial diversity and demographic changes are equal to white genocide. Identity Evropa, a white nationalist group now rebranded as American Identity Movement, has disseminated flyers that say “Protect Your Heritage,” or “Our Future Belongs to Us,” for example. White nationalists also use anti-immigrant, anti-Black, and anti-Muslim rhetoric focused on crime or terrorism to appeal to fear and prejudice among their audience. Misogyny, which describes hatred or prejudice against women, is similarly a key recruitment tool for white nationalist groups. These groups also mobilize homophobia and transphobia (bigotry directed at lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people) for similar purposes.

## ANTISEMITISM



White nationalists in the United States insist that the successes of the Civil Rights movement cannot be explained without some outside force to blame. The Jewish community is often portrayed as this outside force, with outsized control of television, banking, entertainment, education, and even Washington, D.C. It’s why the torch-wielding mob of white men in Charlottesville, Virginia chanted that it was “Jews” who will not replace them — the white race — as controllers of the United States.③ Antisemitism provides the rationale that white nationalism uses to power its racism, xenophobia, misogyny, and other forms of hatred. “Jews and non-Jews need to understand that we have a unified threat. The white nationalist movement in the United States doesn’t simply seek to spread hate; it seeks to use hate to build political power,” writes Eric Ward, Executive Director of Western States Center. ④

*The neo-Nazi website The Daily Stormer published a flyer that read:*

“White man are you sick and tired of the Jews destroying your country through mass immigration and degeneracy? Join us in the struggle for global white supremacy...” ⑤

## WHY THIS MATTERS

All teenagers seek a sense of identity and belonging. White nationalist organizations know this and look for ways to connect with young people in order to grow their base. It takes vigilance on the part of teachers, administrators and parents to ensure that all members of a school community feel connected in positive ways and are not left vulnerable to extremist rhetoric or recruitment.

Adults often dismiss early indications of hateful ideology as a student ‘pushing boundaries’ or ‘acting out,’ and while this might also be true, in many cases they are dismissing warning signs of a dangerous affiliation taking root. Race may not initially enter the picture: recent events demonstrate strong connections between

misogyny, the sexist subculture ‘InCel’ (short for involuntary celibate), and white nationalist ideology. What might seem innocuous or isolated, like a student scratching a swastika into a desk or a sudden spike in misogynistic or anti-Muslim language, warrants a response that clarifies behavioral expectations, affirms the value of all human life, and opens a dialogue with students to interrupt this behavior.

Left unchecked, white nationalist ideology and affiliation are dangerous. Once a student is connected to white nationalism, online or in real life, it is difficult for them to disconnect, so the best time to intervene in a young person’s affiliation is early. After they identify with white nationalism



## MISOGYNY



Misogyny and racism often go hand in hand, especially in online forums (like 4Chan, 8Chan, Reddit, and Gab) and gaming circles. Expressing simultaneous entitlement and disillusionment, white nationalists exploit online communities to nurture and often build upon angry young men's feelings of injustice and animosity, and this animosity often redirects toward women as well as people of color, immigrants, and religious minorities. When Elliot Rodger killed seven people in 2014, he left behind a “manifesto” expressing extreme misogyny (putting women in concentration camps) and racism (hatred of interracial couples).<sup>⑦</sup> He had been active in misogynist “alt-right” online communities and was celebrated in those spaces after the murders.

or another bigoted ideology, intervening can be very dangerous. We urge the utmost in caution at this stage. White nationalism brings inherently violent and escalating threats to the families and communities it impacts. It is no accident that a number of incidents of mass shootings have involved white nationalist ideology.<sup>⑥</sup> Scapegoating marginalized communities is one warning sign for violence.

White nationalist groups seek power and an organized base of support. Schools are an obvious target. This toolkit is designed to help you take back any space, however small or large, that white nationalism may try to carve out in your school community.

Cas Mudde, a Dutch political scientist who studies right-wing movements, describes the alt-right's assertion of women's inferiority as “a sexist interpretation of xenophobia. It's the same view they have of immigrants and minorities, that they're threatening their way of life. A life where men are dominant. A life where they have privilege in virtually every domain.”<sup>⑧</sup>

## HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit works best as a guide with suggestions and resources to help school communities navigate their own questions and challenges. Students, teachers, staff, administrators, parents, and other community entities can collaborate to adapt these approaches and find new solutions. Our goal is to provide effective resources to all members of school communities so that they may place obstacles in the path of those who would attempt to harm them.

We focus on high schools, but many of these resources also apply to middle schools and colleges. While this toolkit was created to offer tips and strategies on how to respond to white nationalist and other extremist organizing in schools, the following resources can and should be applied to any situation where you see potentially harmful activity. We encourage other anchor entities—libraries, faith-based organizations, community centers, and others—to discuss these scenarios and strategies, engage with local schools, and collaborate to strengthen community responses to hate.

A resource section is included at the end of this toolkit to aid your learning and help your school community grow stronger. One key resource is a list of proactive steps and best practices for schools. The section includes related resource guides, sample policies and language, and basic information on the white nationalist groups most likely to recruit in schools. Links to further reading also provide a starting point for your own research. Please consider reaching out to Western States Center at [info@wscpdx.org](mailto:info@wscpdx.org) to share your experience countering white nationalism in your school. We hope this toolkit is helpful as you strengthen your school community against bigotry.

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# SCENARIOS

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# ANONYMOUS USE OF HATE SYMBOLS OR SPEECH



The range of physical and virtual spaces in a school community provides ample opportunities for students to express themselves and communicate with one another. Anonymous spaces, however, can foster the kinds of

communication and expression that threaten the integrity of the school community. Bigoted graffiti, unsanctioned flyering, and anonymous online comment platforms challenge schools to maintain free and open spaces without making space for hate.

## EXAMPLES

- » School property is vandalized with a hate group symbol or phrase, with no means to identify the culprit
- » Someone has distributed a flyer promoting a white nationalist group, event, or ideology
- » Anonymous online content disparaging marginalized students or groups appears



# SUGGESTED APPROACHES



## STUDENTS

- » Document the incident if safely possible: take pictures or screenshots, and save a copy of any physical materials.
- » Report the incident to multiple staff members including administrators in ways that feel safest. Talk to a teacher or other staff member you trust about your concerns.
- » Talk to classmates and your parents, as well as any other stakeholders who can support you.
- » Engage with student-led groups as you feel comfortable, including student council, advisory committees or other student support groups.



## STAFF

- » Document the incident if safely possible: take pictures or screenshots, and save a copy of any physical materials.
- » Contact your administrator(s) to make them aware of the situation. Speak with colleagues to gauge their awareness and build a coalition of staff members committed to addressing the issue.
- » Disable anonymous commenting on classroom platforms.
- » If a specific student or group feels targeted by these actions, plan and provide aftercare.



## ADMINISTRATION

- » A quick and clear response can prevent escalation. While anonymous use of hate symbols is not generally considered an immediate threat to the school community, it is often cited after more serious incidents as an early indicator that went unaddressed.
- » Remove the content as quickly as possible, and make sure key stakeholders know you addressed the problem.
- » Share the incident, including evidence if possible, with your administrative team.
- » Connect with your faculty about the issue.
- » Contact any district supervisors who can assist you in responding.
- » Consider implementing a confidential or anonymous online reporting system as a way for students to make your team aware of situations like this.
- » Depending on the extent or severity, consider opening a community-wide conversation for other stakeholders to get information and ask questions.



## PARENTS

- » Ask your child to collect evidence if possible and safe to do so, and share this evidence with school administrators.
- » Engage with other parents and community members. Bring up the issue at any parent organizations or school community meetings you can attend. Cite other instances of this nature to substantiate your concerns.
- » Follow up with administrators to confirm that they are addressing this.



## COMMUNITY MEMBERS

- » Collect evidence if safe and possible to do so.
- » Contact school administrators directly.
- » Attend meetings open to members of the broader community to express your concerns.
- » Check in with relevant entities—after school programs, parks, libraries, shopping centers—to see if hate speech or symbols are present elsewhere in the community.

## SUCCESS STORY



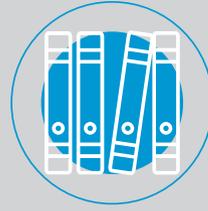
A swastika was found carved onto a library chair, with no way of knowing who had done it. The administration removed it immediately, and the school's newly formed culture and climate team discussed the incident and brainstormed ways to check in with students who knew it had happened and to be more vigilant about public spaces. The school also implemented an anonymous reporting system to encourage students to come forward with concerns.

## WHAT NOT TO DO



- X Don't ignore the incident or dismiss concerns.** While seemingly minor and untraceable, anonymous identifiers are often the first indicators of a nascent and potentially aggressive white nationalist presence.
- X Don't overreact.** Punishing the student body as a whole or fixating on identifying the perpetrator may shut down dialogue and render stakeholders reluctant to come forward with future concerns.

# INVOCATION OF WHITE NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY



The best classroom environments support students seeking and engaging with outside sources. Research skills remain among the most vital to postsecondary success, alongside critical thinking and the ability to assess source material. White nationalist online personalities, bloggers, public speakers, and other prominent

figures actively seek to influence and enlist young people with access to larger school communities. Students need support as they navigate the endless material available to them to ensure that their social, emotional, and cognitive development are not impeded by the dangerous rhetoric of extremism.

## EXAMPLES

- » Students citing white nationalism or extremist source material in schoolwork
- » Students citing, invoking, or parroting white nationalist source material in class discussions
- » Students distributing or promoting these materials on school property or through school-sanctioned platforms, including learning management systems or class web pages



# SUGGESTED APPROACHES



## STUDENTS

- » If you feel comfortable, ask follow-up questions of your classmate in a discussion or in peer editing situations: examine resources and viewpoints.
- » If a student shares materials outside of class, bring these to the attention of a staff member you trust.
- » Lead by example: research all source material, and research any sources with which you are not familiar to check for bias or problematic affiliations.
- » Ask your teachers if they keep lists of trusted online sources or if they can prepare a lesson to help students better understand bias in source material.



## STAFF

- » Establish assessment criteria for source material in student work, including for any structured discussions or other classroom activities to create and clarify accountability. See sample language for teachers on structured assessment of student work in this toolkit.
- » Collaborate with students to set classroom policies and procedures that establish community standards for cited materials.

» Consider a workshop at the start of each year to review how students can vet source material for bias.

» Meet with the student's counselor or other wellness staff members to see if they have noticed any increase in aggression or frustration that might correspond to an interest in extremist ideology.

» Make an administrator aware of your concerns; include evidence and relevant links.



## ADMINISTRATION

- » Meet with students and teachers involved to understand their concerns.
- » As appropriate, meet with the student who cited or promoted this material to understand the appeal and interest: for what frustrations are they seeking validation from extremists?

» Consider a workshop for staff to help promote effective online research practices across disciplines. Involve your school librarian to design and implement research practices.

» Ask teachers what resources might help them reinforce effective research skills, as well as what norms and policies have worked in their classrooms to clarify acceptable and valid source materials.

» Consider adapting some of these as standards across the school.



## PARENTS

» A basic awareness of what kids absorb online is elemental to maintaining their safety and understanding their evolving perspectives. Sites not explicitly dedicated to white nationalist ideology—including Reddit, 4chan or 8chan—can host robust sections where kids are actively recruited.

» Open a conversation with your child about the spectrum of validity and bias in online resources, both academic and those rooted in personal interest. What YouTube channels do they follow? What podcasts have they heard about what subjects?

» If you have concerns, make an appointment with a counselor or staff member you feel knows your child well. If your child shares concerns with you, help them voice these concerns to staff members they trust.



## COMMUNITY MEMBERS

» The ability to teach and reinforce effective research often hinges on the resources necessary to do so. Advocate for a certified full-time librarian in each of your local schools, and request information about how the school teaches research methodology.

» Consider joining or seeking election to advisory boards or panels that help make decisions about a school's budget and goals.

## SUCCESS STORY



In a US History class, a student repeatedly cited from white nationalist online sources, including speeches by Richard Spencer. His parents did not seem receptive to the teacher's concerns when she met with them. The teacher revised future assessment rubrics to account for the viability and academic validity of source material, ruling out the vast majority of white nationalist publications and figures.

A student used a recognized hate symbol as her avatar on a classroom discussion page. Concerned students emailed the teacher about it. The teacher met with the student outside of class, and she insisted she didn't know the image carried racist connotations. The teacher shared evidence with her from reputable sources, and they agreed that she would remove the avatar out of respect for her classmates.

## WHAT NOT TO DO



**X Don't treat all student sources as equal; they're not.** Validating white nationalism is not the same as valuing other viewpoints. Rather, it concedes credibility to rhetoric that demeans members of our school communities.

**X Don't sweep it away and move on.** Young people are seeking and finding white nationalist sources at alarming rates. Sharing this material via schoolwork or otherwise can indicate that a student needs support. Plan and provide aftercare by engaging with school wellness staff.

# WHITE NATIONALIST ICONOGRAPHY AND GROUP IDENTIFIERS



Overt expression of white nationalist ideology or identification as part of an organized hate group reflects a more urgent problem. In these instances, students feel some combination of frustration and alienation, along with the

confidence to reveal their stance to the school community. This increased visibility seeks to grab attention, unsettle others, and recruit more members. School communities are not helpless in the face of these efforts.

## EXAMPLES

- » Students displaying white nationalist symbols, slogans, or other identifying iconography on clothing, school supplies, cars parked on school property, or school-issued computers
- » Students identifiably distributing materials that depict white nationalist imagery or ideology, including buttons, stickers, avatars, screen names, or other visual representations to the school community



# SUGGESTED APPROACHES



## STUDENTS

- » If you feel safe doing so, gather evidence.
- » Report the incident to multiple staff members including administrators in ways you feel safest. Include documentation.
- » Talk to a teacher or other staff member you trust about your concerns.
- » Engage with student-led groups as you feel comfortable, including student council, advisory committees or other student support groups.
- » Consider organizing a meeting with peers to brainstorm response strategies in your school community. Include adults who share your concerns and can support your efforts.



## STAFF

- » Contact your administrator(s) to make them aware of the situation.
- » Provide documentation about the threat of the ideology being promoted, as well as evidence of the danger these groups pose to school communities.
- » Speak with colleagues, including wellness staff members, to gauge their awareness and build a coalition of staff members committed to addressing the issue.

» If a working relationship exists, meet with the student to share your concerns and ask questions. Consider inviting an additional trusted staff member to join this conversation.

» Increase the visibility of symbols of diversity and tolerance in your classroom, including pride flags, culturally affirming posters, and portraits of pioneering members of historically marginalized groups.



## ADMINISTRATION

- » Acknowledge the concerns of students or staff members who brought an incident to your attention.
- » Collect evidence about the nature and threat of the ideology being promoted, especially for any community meetings that may arise in response.
- » Reach out to student leadership groups to engage them in brainstorming solutions.
- » Reach out to civil rights organizations, locally or nationally, for resources and suggestions.
- » Examine your school's policies. Do the symbols fall under the category of gang activity or hate speech? Can they be considered disruptive to the educational process? Often these incidents are already prohibited under existing policies.
- » If such policies don't exist to cover these contingencies, start the process to create them.

» Concurrent with any policy-based responses, open and continue a conversation with the student(s) involved, including wellness staff members when appropriate, to address underlying issues and support students on all sides.

» Consider establishing a culture and climate team to discuss ways to prevent similar issues in the future. This can be a committee of staff members, ideally with student input, dedicated to ameliorating issues of inequity within the school community.



PARENTS

» If your child shares concerns with you about a white nationalist presence at school, work with them to brainstorm the best way to open a conversation with school staff and administration.

» Help them gather evidence of the threat posed by this presence, and ask them if they have specific concerns that you can help address. Are they worried about the potential for violence? Does the school seem unresponsive? Continue to check in with your child to help them manage the stress of this situation.

» If you feel comfortable doing so, attend a school board or council meeting to express your concerns.

» Reach out to community organizations, locally or nationally, for additional resources and suggestions.

» If you are worried about your child, please see the resources at the end of this toolkit, and reach out to a school counselor immediately.



COMMUNITY MEMBERS

» The health of a school community depends on the commitment and engagement of the community as a whole. Community-based entities, including libraries, after-school programs, service opportunities, sports teams, civic and faith-based organizations can all play a role in uniting the community in response to the presence of hate groups. If a student or group of students is increasingly affiliated with white nationalist groups, community entities can brainstorm positive responses to engage all students and build a stronger community—instead of fertile ground for hate group recruitment.

## SUCCESS STORY



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An art student added a lesser-known white nationalist symbol to a class mural, and classmates noticed. The students brought the issue to the teacher's attention, who then consulted with colleagues and administration to decide on a course of action. The teacher and an administrator met with the student, but the student was inflexible and unremorseful about the harmful nature of what he did. Wellness staff was alerted and asked to watch for signs of increased stress or agitation in the student, and the teacher followed up with the initially concerned students. When the student subsequently threatened a classmate, the school had a record of the initial incident on which to base their concern and to advocate for additional intervention, which was then provided.

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A top ranking high school in Chicago discovered that their recently printed yearbook contained 6 photos of students flashing a white power sign. The school decided to reprint the yearbooks at significant cost to make clear that hate has no home in their school. The principal wrote a thoughtful letter to his school community addressing the photos and the decision to reprint and reinforcing the school's stated values. ⑨

## WHAT NOT TO DO



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**X Don't categorize hate speech as free speech.** White nationalist symbols are the schoolhouse equivalent of yelling 'fire' in a crowded theater; this is dangerous speech, and it threatens not just the fabric of a school community, but the day-to-day safety of students and staff.

**X Don't settle for a solely punitive response.**

While legitimately invoking policies that forbid the presence of hate symbols and rhetoric at school removes the visible indicator, it doesn't resolve the conditions that brought these elements into the school. Continue to seek and facilitate dialogue with student(s), staff members, wellness staff, and administrators to understand how this element gained currency in your community and what each stakeholder can do to address the problem.

# EVIDENCE OF WHITE NATIONALIST ORGANIZING OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL



Students who have been recruited by an organized white nationalist group will soon be pressed to recruit and proselytize in their school communities. Research traces a longstanding pattern of

approaches, all of which aim to further increase visibility and membership, as well as destabilize diverse school communities.

## EXAMPLES

- » Students distributing, physically or electronically, organizational propaganda to recruit new members and disseminate hateful ideology—website links, pamphlets, manifestos, videos, mp3s, books, zines, and other formats all turn up in school settings as efficient ways to reach students
- » Students distributing information, physically or electronically, about upcoming white nationalist events—rallies, marches, speaking appearances, concerts, membership meetings, and other gatherings

# SUGGESTED APPROACHES



STUDENTS

- » If you feel safe doing so, gather evidence.
- » Report the incident to multiple staff members, including administrators, in a way that feels safe. Include documentation about the ideology being promoted.
- » Engage with student-led groups as you feel comfortable, including student council, advisory committees or other student support groups. Consider organizing a meeting with peers to brainstorm response strategies in your school community. Include adults who share your concerns and can support your efforts.
- » As tempting as it might be, don't confront the student(s) involved. At this point, your classmate may be fully involved with a violent extremist organization, and confrontation is not a safe option.



STAFF

- » Clarify that white nationalist materials are not welcome in your classroom in any form.
- » Collect evidence and report the efforts to an administrator immediately.
- » In conjunction with administration, discuss the issue with students as necessary and appropriate.

» In conjunction with administration and wellness staff, meet with the student's cohort of teachers to share observations and discuss ways to support this student as the issue goes forward.

» Open a line of communication with the student's parents to work together in support of this student.

» If you have not already done so, collaborate with students to draft or revise classroom norms and policies that prohibit any materials that promote hatred and bigotry of any kind.



ADMINISTRATION

- » Acknowledge the concerns of any students or staff members who brought this to your attention.
- » Collect evidence about the nature and threat of the ideology being promoted, especially for any community meetings that may arise in response.
- » Work with your staff to assess any level of threat this student might pose, and consider a systematic, holistic response: wellness issues are as vital to an effective response as academic and behavioral aspects.
- » Reach out to student leadership groups to engage them in developing solutions.

# SUGGESTED APPROACHES

» Reach out to civil rights organizations, locally or nationally, for resources and suggestions.

» Most school districts have explicit guidelines about the distribution of outside materials, as well as policies that prohibit hate speech or otherwise offensive materials. If your school's policies don't cover this scenario, begin the process to revise the rules. No school community is obligated to allow the distribution of hateful materials from outside organizations.



PARENTS

» Check in with your child to help manage the stress of increasing white nationalist rhetoric at school.

» Engage with wellness staff and teachers to keep lines of communication open.

» Request updates from administration about their efforts to block recruitment.

» Attend any meetings open to you on these issues. Parents can obstruct attempts by white nationalist groups to infiltrate a school community for recruitment purposes, as well as attempts to increase their presence in the community at large.

» Parents enjoy connections across community entities, and those entities can build an effective response. Talk to community organizations, local businesses, elected officials,

faith-based groups, parks staff, and others. Facilitate a meeting to develop an action plan.



COMMUNITY MEMBERS

» Collaborate with school staff, parents, students, and other community entities to monitor and formulate a response to increasing white nationalist efforts in your area.

» All aspects of a community play a vital role in that community's overall health; no one is helpless or without a way to contribute. If you have a meeting space available, host leaders and residents from across your community to share information, ask questions, and brainstorm solutions. If you can donate food or supplies for these events, that's a huge help. If you can attend and encourage others to do so, that matters just as much. Your local school is the heart of your community, and it needs you involved.

## SUCCESS STORY

A school newspaper student staff member composed an editorial advocating for a white history month, using language and argument support common in mainstream white nationalist rhetoric, and the faculty sponsor ran the piece. In a subsequent edition, faculty and staff submitted response pieces, all maintaining respectful tones, and no disciplinary action was involved. Administration and wellness staff agreed to check in with the student periodically, as well as with her teachers, and the situation never escalated.

## WHAT NOT TO DO

**X Don't let white nationalist groups frame the conversation.** Stay focused on the values of your community and the needs of students. White nationalist groups will co-opt language about free speech and cultural identity to steer the dialogue away from the hateful nature of who they are and what they do.

**X Don't ignore the needs of the community as a whole.** At this level, a school community may see bystander trauma among students encountering these recruitment efforts, and the visibility of white nationalist groups in the area may introduce additional complications outside of school. Keep wellness staff engaged and responsive, check in with students, and reach out to all aspects of the community.

# ORGANIZING IN SUPPORT OF WHITE NATIONALISM AT SCHOOL



In tandem with active promotion of existing white nationalist groups, students are often pressed to organize within their school communities. Hate groups have a playbook, and pushing students to form white student unions or argue in favor of teaching a white history month remain elemental to their efforts to deceptively empower

young recruits. Students are convinced that they are the marginalized group, and as a result, they should demand rights and recognition they have never lacked. To be clear, the pro-white or pro-European group or event the student seeks to establish is a tool of white nationalism.

## EXAMPLES

- » Approaching teachers or administration to advocate for school events or groups promoting pan-European culture—a ‘white student union’ or ‘European history month,’ among other examples
- » Establishment of pro-white online spaces within or adjacent to the school community as it exists online—a Facebook group, a discussion thread, a tweet, or any other facilitation of white nationalist online discourse

# SUGGESTED APPROACHES



## STUDENTS

- » This situation requires committed student advocates for tolerance and racial justice. Connect with leaders of a wide range of student groups, and enlist a faculty facilitator.
- » Plan a meeting to share concerns and ask questions.
- » Keep the health of your school community central to stated goals, rather than punishment for perpetrators. Pushback from peers can backfire, increasing tensions and seeming to justify requests for separate white entities and events.



## STAFF

- » In conjunction with the administration, gather information on the history of white student unions (and similar efforts) as anti-diversity, especially since the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement.
- » Share resources for colleagues to respond to students' questions about the issue, because by the time teachers hear about it, the student body has already been discussing it.
- » Volunteer to facilitate meetings among student leadership to counteract these efforts.
- » Record students' questions and concerns to share with administrators, as students may not feel comfortable doing so.

» Be prepared to field questions in class, and be alert to tensions building outside teachers' field of vision.

» Wellness staff should be prepared to support bystanders impacted by incidents at this level.



## ADMINISTRATION

» Meet with the students making these requests. Listen to everything they want to say, record their requests, take supporting information from them, and ask thoughtful questions. Often, these students have little more than dogma to offer, but some students may have impassioned and intricate stances that have led them to this point. They will likely not listen to an administrative response if they feel they have not been heard, which may further cast them as victims of racial discrimination—the misguided perception that drives these requests.

» With that said, the answer still needs to be 'no.' Many schools have groups celebrating specific European heritage groups, but this is vastly different from a pan-European or 'white pride' group. Latinx student groups and black student unions exist to mitigate long histories of social and education inequities. The same need does not translate to white students, and to maintain a school community that promotes tolerance and refuses space for white nationalism, these requests cannot be dignified as viable.



## PARENTS

» Parents occupy a unique space from which to respond positively to students' formal attempts to organize within the school. As staff handle the intricacies of policy and the tense interactions likely taking place around the school building, parents can counterbalance these tensions.

» Speak to administrators to find out how parents can support existing student organizations that promote tolerance and racial justice. What events might the school community organize in response to increased hostility from white nationalist students?

» Consider planning a community dinner to unite the students and families in your area, a fundraiser for a local nonprofit serving marginalized communities, or a book drive to diversify the school's library materials.



## COMMUNITY MEMBERS

» Increase the visibility of existing inclusive community organizations. Plan and promote events and activities for students and their families to counter attempts by white nationalists.

» Continue to connect community entities with one another and with staff, administrators, students and their families to support the school and further its goals of tolerance and equity.

## SUCCESS STORY



A student who was found carrying dozens of copies of a flyer for a longstanding white nationalist group was initially suspended without additional support, and tensions surrounding his situation escalated. At the urging of staff members, follow-up counseling was provided, and the student's relationship with the school community greatly improved. He stopped wearing paraphernalia and espousing white nationalist beliefs a few months later.

## WHAT NOT TO DO



**X Don't downplay the significance of these efforts.** For years, white nationalist groups have incited young recruits to push their racist agendas at school. This is a pivotal part of the white nationalist playbook, and schools must respond decisively.

**X Don't wait for someone else to speak up.** White nationalist organizing within a school can be unfamiliar and intimidating, making it difficult to respond. This is why communicating with all members of the community matters: everyone has the right to resist white nationalism.

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# WHEN WHITE NATIONALISM COMES FROM STAFF MEMBERS

As disheartening as it is to imagine, a number of communities have encountered white nationalist ideology from the adults with whom they entrust their children each day. Endorsement of white nationalism from teachers, administrators, or parents in and around the school setting is especially troubling, and it presents unique challenges in responding. We hope, for example, that students would feel comfortable approaching an administrator about a teacher denying the reality of the Holocaust in class, but we understand that this level of trust and confidence might not be widespread. A parent might

not know how to report an administrator found to be posting in an online hate group, or a teacher could feel conflicted and nervous about reporting a colleague's troubling remarks to administrators. Like all of the scenarios in this toolkit, responding to these incidents requires that we apply what we know about our school community, its stakeholders, and its power structures. Here are a few suggestions for how to respond when an adult authority figure in the school community promotes white nationalist views or attempts to recruit students to white nationalist groups:

» As always, document as much as possible. What was said or written, where, and when? If it's online, get screen shots. If it was spoken, connect with others who witnessed it.

» Start with someone you trust and who you know would also stand against bigotry: a parent, a trusted colleague, an administrator or board member who has spoken out against hate in the past.

» Keep your school's stated values at the center of the conversation. What elements of a school mission or vision statement might provide guidance and serve as a reminder of what really matters?

» Explore your school or district's structures: is there a board meeting you could attend or a general email to which you can send concerns? Check school and district websites for comment forms or other

outlets, and decide if you feel comfortable using identifying information if it's required and de-escalation training for your school.

» Consider engaging with a nonprofit dedicated to confronting bigotry. Several organizations have staff who liaise with schools and communities in the wake of these incidents.

» Challenging people in positions of power can be intimidating. Seek support and don't give up. If one approach doesn't yield results, consider other options: another administrator or board member, district human resources, or union representation. If the staff member offers up one of the Five Common Defenses of White Nationalism (pages 36-37), you can respond. We can't let abuse of authority in our schools go unchecked.

» A situation in which school staff members promote bigoted or white nationalist views threatens to destroy community trust in the school's ability to provide factual and unbiased education and calls for immediate action by school administrators. Administrators who encounter white nationalist rhetoric or activity from a staff member must consider appropriate disciplinary actions as well as direct support for any students or other school community members who may have been impacted. A full review of the staff member's responsibilities and areas in which they may have caused harm may be appropriate. Administrators should also consider broad reparative actions to reinforce inclusive values and regain trust across the school community.

W S C

04

# PROACTIVE STEPS & BEST PRACTICES



# PROACTIVE STEPS



Before problems arise, schools can take concrete steps to make their communities less vulnerable to white nationalism. Consider some of the following steps.

- » Foster and support strong student organizations.
- » Involve parents and parent organizations in school functions whenever appropriate.
- » Maintain strong ties to a wide range of community organizations: libraries, community centers, faith-based groups, and service organizations can play vital roles in reporting and responding.
- » Maintain dedicated and fully staffed wellness specialists: counselors, social workers, a school nurse, and other vital roles. Encourage your wellness specialists to familiarize themselves with white nationalist ideas and symbols.
- » Take student claims of harassment seriously, whether they are based on race, gender, immigration status, sexual orientation, or any other identifier.
- » Make training available to help all staff identify students who may be vulnerable to recruitment or already exploring white nationalist ideology.
- » Explore restorative justice models and de-escalation training for your school.
- » Increase the visibility of symbols



of diversity and tolerance throughout your school community.

» Encourage students, teachers, parents, and administration to engage in a discussion about updating school curriculum to reflect a strong community that values the identities and stories of all of its members.

» Encourage teachers to establish norms and policies for classroom work and behavior that reinforce tolerance and obstruct white nationalism.

» Build skills among students for gathering, assessing, questioning, and critiquing source material.

» Maintain an active, responsive school-wide curriculum to keep students aware of the long-term impacts of how they represent themselves and interact with others online.

» Host an informational event for parents to understand the threat of white nationalist ideology online.

» Examine learning management systems and other school-sanctioned online platforms for their capacity to offer space for hostile discourse.

» Review school policies as they might apply to white nationalist symbols and potential efforts to promote or recruit, including on social media.

» Implement a confidential or anonymous online reporting system through which students can share safety concerns.

» Establish a culture and climate team at your school to monitor and discuss issues related to equity and racial justice.

# BEST PRACTICES



Before, during, and after a school encounters white nationalism, several approaches remain vital to the wellness of a school community.

- » Keep students central to conversations, and trust their experiences.
- » Avoid an alarmist tone; keep the situation as calm as possible.
- » Focus on the values at stake, and use ‘we’ as the default pronoun on behalf of the school community.
- » Document everything. When incidents arise, gather evidence and submit all concerns in writing.
- » Access digital content. A student’s school-issued device or any device used on the school network can be searched, and parents should have access to their kids’ device contents, too. When probable cause arises, searching devices is akin to searching a student’s locker—if not more important.
- » Any digital content collected from a student should be handled carefully. Thoughtful judgement should be used when deciding who to share it with to ensure the safety of all students.
- » Report all incidents to multiple people at different levels within the school community.
- » Involve law enforcement prudently. Direct threats and other





situations in which a student or community member's safety is in question warrant law enforcement involvement. Often other situations are better resolved with a holistic school community approach.

- » Keep lines of communication open.
- » Always discuss how everyone involved can move forward in a positive way.
- » Follow up on conversations and concerns.

# FIVE COMMON DEFENSES OF WHITE NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY



01

“It’s about pride, not prejudice.” This argument is often invoked when white nationalist efforts are identified as hostile and discriminatory, sometimes going as far as equating ‘white pride’ with Latinx pride or Pride Month in support of LGBTQ+ communities. This is a false equivalence. Historically marginalized groups gather to celebrate as a way to stand against long histories of discrimination and violence against them; white nationalists attempt a false equivalence by claiming the same. The truth is that hateful rhetoric is never far from assertions of ‘white pride.’

02

“This is a free speech issue.” In addition to falling under the same category as shouting ‘fire’ in a crowded theater by endangering others, white nationalist rhetoric is not protected speech in schools. A range of legally upheld policies support the rights of schools to keep hate speech out.

03

“This is all just political correctness by social justice warriors.” Here are two terms that have been co-opted and redirected in their intentions. Challenge those who mock them in defense of bigotry to replace the first with “basic respect for others” and the second with “people who are against racism.”



04



“What about reverse racism?” Claims of reverse racism fly in the face of data that demonstrate systemic advantages for white people in access to education, economic opportunity, the application of criminal justice and life expectancy. While members of any group may commit acts of bias against any other, these acts do not add up to systemic, historically-rooted racism (also called institutional racism or white supremacy) that disproportionately produces negative outcomes for people of color.

05



“Racism is over.” Unfortunately, it’s not. Recent years have seen sharp increases in hate crimes against marginalized groups, including racial, ethnic, and religious groups, as well as immigrants and members of LGBTQ+ communities. We have work to do together, and we need to listen to one another’s experiences instead of denying reality.



Strong schools foster strong communities. When we recognize and address the signs of white nationalist organizing promptly within our schools it sets an indelible example, for teachers, students, and the community at large.

Everyone has the right to embrace their identity, but white nationalism and other forms of bigoted extremism threaten the safety of the vulnerable, robbing us all of our humanity and the things that link us together. Students who are attracted to white nationalism are often vulnerable themselves. They may be disillusioned, feel marginalized, or struggle with untreated trauma or mental health issues. We must show them compassion when it seems the hardest to give, because that is what white nationalism cannot offer our students. We can care for our young people while also starving white nationalism of the oxygen it needs to grow. We hope this toolkit has offered you options to this end.

The threat of white nationalism is a holistic school community issue. It's more than an isolated incident, farther reaching than an anonymous flyer, and larger than the anger or alienation of a few students. We must ensure there is no room in our schools for movements that call for dehumanization based on race, religion, gender, ethnicity, or nationality. Our job is to construct a democracy where everyone has value. If we can model that for each other in our schools, it will be easier to translate to other institutions of public life. By working with all stakeholders to handle these situations thoughtfully and incrementally, we can push back white nationalism in all facets of our community.

RESOURCES

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## RESOURCES

State and national organizations can provide essential information to guide school-based responses to white nationalist activity. Below you will find a number of resources that may be helpful as a place to start. We encourage you to reach out directly to research organizations, professional associations, and advocacy groups to receive additional support.

## CONTACT US



Please consider contacting Western States Center directly at [info@wscpdtx.org](mailto:info@wscpdtx.org). Depending on capacity, we may be able to provide direct guidance, additional resources, or connections to other schools dealing with similar challenges. We also hope you will share with us your experiences with white nationalism in your school or resources your school uses or develops.



## HATE SYMBOLS

### [Anti-Defamation League Hate Symbols Database](#)

The largest searchable database of neo-Nazi, KKK, and general hate symbols.

### [Southern Poverty Law Center Hate Tracker #Hashtag tool](#)

The Hate Tracker detects trends in far right online users over time.

### [Vice News Round-Up of Alt-Right Memes](#)

Common internet-based white nationalist symbols.

### [Southern Poverty Law Center: Symbols Used by Far-Right Groups in Charlottesville](#)

Many of the most common white nationalist and far-right symbols in use today.

## KNOW YOUR OPPOSITION

Each white nationalist group operates in unique ways, targeting distinct populations and often using different slogans and tactics. It is important to inform your response to white nationalist activity by understanding the ideology behind each group, their

common recruitment strategies, and their past actions. The list below includes background information on some of the white nationalist groups most likely to influence high school and middle school students.



### American Identity Movement (formerly Identity Evropa)

Founded in 2016, Identity Evropa focused its white nationalist recruitment on college campuses and to some extent on high school students. Identity Evropa’s almost exclusively male members intentionally concealed their bigotry with an intellectualized discussion of white identity and a polished look. When their overt racism and antisemitism were exposed through leaked chat logs, the group rebranded as American Identity Movement. Their views and tactics remain unchanged.

### Patriot Front

Patriot Front is a white nationalist network that splintered off from Vanguard America in 2017 after participating in the deadly “Unite the Right” rally. The group cynically exploits patriotic symbols to spread its bigoted ideology.

### Atomwaffen Division

Atomwaffen Division is a network of underground terror cells based on promoting white supremacy and civilization collapse. The network arose from an online fascist forum and is composed of young men, some with military training.

### National Policy Institute

Richard Spencer’s National Policy Institute is a white nationalist think tank that cloaks bigotry in intellectualism. With papers on its website such as “Understanding Jewish Influence,” the group is one troubling source that may show up in school papers.

### The Daily Stormer

The Daily Stormer is the world’s biggest neo-Nazi website. It’s run by Andrew Anglin and is known for its violent rhetoric and “Stormer Troll Army,” as Anglin calls his readers. The site is modeled after BuzzFeed, Vice, and Gawker, and peddles in snark and hyperbole to draw in younger viewers.

## COMMON WHITE NATIONALIST SYMBOLS

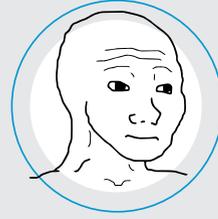
Memes and other symbols of white nationalist ideology are an important way that young people express their interest or affiliation. Some of them may come across as tongue-in-cheek rather than serious, but the “trolling” orientation of online far-right culture is part of the way it appeals to new potential recruits.

The symbology of online far-right and white nationalist spaces is constantly evolving. Below are some common symbols, but it is important to do ongoing research to recognize new and changing symbols. The Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League are good sources for updated information.

## FAR-RIGHT MEMES



Pepe the frog is a comic character that was appropriated by far-right online spaces, particularly 4chan, and is now well-known as a neo-Nazi mascot.



Wojack, or “Feels Guy,” is a meme often used in concert with Pepe the frog and in similar online spaces such as /pol/ on 4chan.



The “Happy Merchant” meme is an anti-Semitic cartoon used in far-right online spaces to suggest greed or a Jewish conspiracy.

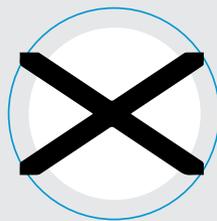


Images of helicopters, often with people falling from them, have been used by a number of alt-right groups including the misogynist paramilitary group the Proud Boys and Anti-Communist Action.

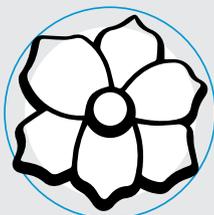
## WHITE NATIONALIST LOGOS



Logo for American Identity Movement, a white nationalist group that primarily recruits young men and attempts to conceal its bigotry by using the language of identity politics. It is the rebranded iteration of the former Identity Evropa group.



The “Southern Nationalist flag,” designed by Michael Cushman for the neo-Confederate League of the South. Designed to be reminiscent of the Confederate Battle Flag, the “SN flag” has seen some adoption by groups and individuals outside of the League consistent with its designers intent.



The logo for Identity Dixie, a neo-Confederate offshoot of the the alt-right podcast The Right Stuff. The group wants to form an ethnostate based around the “traditional” culture of the United States southeast. The magnolia logo is often paired with a black and white “Southern Nationalist” flag.



The logo for Patriot Front, a group that uses patriotic language as the public face of an agenda that explicitly supports an all-white ethnostate.



The logo associated with the Daily Stormer, a neo-Nazi website.

# SAMPLE LANGUAGE AND TEXT

## Sample language for a STUDENT email to a staff member or administrator:

*Emphasize the perceived threat to the safety and integrity of your school community.*

- » I'm concerned about something I saw at school recently.
- » A classmate said something very disturbing during a discussion yesterday.
- » I am worried this situation will escalate.
- » A group is meeting to plan a public event.

## Sample language for TEACHERS on structured assessment of student work and structured discussions:

- » Source material meets established criteria for
  - » Credibility
  - » Lack of bias
  - » Use of data
  - » Interaction with academic research
- » Contributions to discussion reflect respect for the identity and beliefs of classmates
- » Student maintains appropriate academic tone and language

## Sample language for ADMINISTRATORS to craft policies to obstruct white nationalist presence in schools:

*These are examples of existing policy approaches.*

- » Clothing is prohibited which might “disrupt the educational process.”
- » Prohibiting use of school networks or hardware to access “inappropriate content.”
- » “Exhibiting or publishing any profane, obscene, indecent, immoral, libelous, or offensive materials”

- » “Offensive language and gestures, propositions, behavior, or harassment based on race, color, national origin or immigration status, sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, gender identity, gender expression or disability”
- » “Overt display of gang affiliation”
- » “Use of any computer, including social networking websites, or use of any information technology device to threaten, stalk, harass, bully or otherwise intimidate others”

Here are a few examples of schools speaking out against bigotry through policy and public statements:

- » Orange County, NC revised the student dress code - “Students are not to wear clothing, buttons, patches . . . including items that are reasonably expected to intimidate other students on the basis of race (for example KKK, swastika, and the Confederate Flag), color, national origin, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age or religious affiliation.”<sup>①①</sup>
- » The Charlotte-Mecklenberg School’s superintendent stated : “The racism and violence must be condemned in the strongest terms. As we approach the opening of school, I want you to know that as your superintendent I will not and do not tolerate hateful words or actions, bigotry or any form of racist behavior in our classrooms, schools or on our grounds. There simply is no place for it.”<sup>①①</sup>
- » The Highline School Board in Washington issued a strong statement in support of all students: “We are committed to our promise of knowing each of our students by name, strength, and need, as well as protecting, advocating for, and valuing our students equally no matter their race, language or ethnicity.”<sup>①②</sup>

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## OTHER RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

### [Southern Poverty Law Center: Responding to Hate and Bias at School](#)

A detailed 2012 guide for school administrators to respond to individual incidents of bigotry.

### [Not in Our Town: School Response to Bullying, Intolerance, and Hate](#)

Introductory advice to parents, teachers, and school administrators regarding bullying and bias incidents.

### [National Association of School Psychologists](#)

A list of resources for school safety, crisis support, grief, and violence prevention.

### [Stanford History Education Group](#)

Lessons and assessments for teaching civic online reasoning.

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## ARTICLES

### [The Alt-Right is Killing People](#)

A detailed account of the most recent wave of white nationalist violence. 2018, *Southern Poverty Law Center*

### [All-American Nazis](#)

An in-depth feature on a young neo-Nazi who committed a double murder in Florida, with details about his life and indoctrination. 2018, *Rolling Stone Magazine*

### [As White Supremacy Falls Down, White Nationalism Stands Up](#)

An explanation of white nationalism, white supremacy, and the difference between the two. 2017, *Pop Culture Collab*

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### Mobilizing Misogyny

A report on the rise of misogyny in the Trump era and its connection to “male supremacy” and racism.

2017, *Political Research Associates*

### The Alt-Right Curriculum

An article with examples of teachers educating their students on the white nationalist movement.

2017, *The Atlantic*

### How a Danish Town Helped Young Muslims Turn Away from ISIS

Success story of a Danish town whose civic government worked to make its immigrant residents feel valued and included.

2016, *National Public Radio*

### The Myth of Reverse Racism

An examination of white resentment about discussions of reverse racism and affirmative action.

2017, *The Atlantic*

### How to Handle the Rising Tide of Hate in School

A thoughtful article on school responses to expressions of bigotry among students following the viral photo of students in Baraboo, WI giving a Nazi salute.

2018, *Slate*



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EVERYONE WHO ENGAGES IN THE  
LIFE OF A SCHOOL IS IN A UNIQUE  
POSITION TO ISOLATE AND PUSH  
BACK AGAINST A GROWING  
THREAT TO UNDERMINE  
EDUCATION AS A CORE PILLAR  
OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY.



PO BOX 40305 PORTLAND, OREGON 97240  
WESTERNSTATESCENTER.ORG