

The Sister Schools Mission:

Promote peace through mutual respect, cooperation, and understanding –

one student, one school at a time

Sister Schools Goals:

- Integrate the Sister Cities model of citizen diplomacy into youth and education
- Offer, “people-to-people,” connections to students
- Motivate cultural exchange and global awareness among students through project-based learning

Introduction

Welcome to Sister Schools! Your local Sister City organization has chosen your school as a candidate for participating in the Sister Schools program. The Sister Schools program is a change for schools to introduce an international curriculum and cultural exchange program to their students.

The staff at Sister Cities International looks forward to working with your school and the local Sister City organization in making your school a part of Sister Schools.

The following is a guide for starting and running your Sister Schools program based on pilot partnerships, existing Sister Schools organizations and the research and experience of Sister Cities International's Youth and Education Department.

The packets and different worksheets in the Sister Schools Toolkit are meant to guide you through all the processes of finding, starting and running a Sister Schools program.

If you have any questions or need any further assistance, use the contact information at the end of the toolkit to contact Sister Cities International. As a teacher or principal, your role in a Sister Schools partnership is pivotal to its success. Thank you for your interest and commitment to bringing global awareness and cultural exchange to your students.

What is Sister Schools?

Sister Schools brings together schools within existing Sister Cities. The Sister Schools partnerships can be between individual classes, entire schools or even school districts. Teachers and Principals in partnered Sister Schools have their classes participate in collaborative projects together.

Why Start a Sister Schools Program?

Sister Schools participate in collaborative projects together so that students can work with and learn from fellow youth in their Sister City. These collaborative projects provide students with an understanding of international and cultural differences.

Through these cultural exchanges, students not only gain a more global perspective on subjects, but learn about their own community by sharing it with their Sister School.

Interacting with their international peers allows students to become active citizen diplomats and ambassadors for their country. These interactions create a mutually beneficial relationship for all participants and rewarding experiences for your schools and students. Thank you for your interest, and again, welcome to the Sister Schools program!

The Three Components of Sister Schools:

To conduct a Sister Schools program, three components will be needed to ensure its success:

- ✓ The Schools
- ✓ The Local Sister City Organization
- ✓ Sister Cities International

The individual roles of each of these components are detailed in the following. Please make sure to note your role and responsibilities in a Sister Schools program.

✓ **The Schools:**
Conduct the program by designing projects between Sister Schools, and sustain the partnership through consistent communication

Schools need **motivated teachers and principals** to:

- Work with the Sister Schools Coordinator to find a Sister School
- Communicate with their Sister School to structure the partnership
- Conduct the program by organizing projects between Sister Schools
- Maintain consistent contact and communication with their Sister School
- Update their Sister Schools Coordinator about the program

The Principals and Teachers

The schools need the following to fulfill their roles:

- A supportive principal
- At least one teacher who is willing and excited to employ the program in their class.
- Consistent Communication between Sister Schools!

The school's role in a Sister Schools partnership is of course the most important and pivotal to its success. Your school needs to have motivated teachers and principals who recognize the value and importance of bringing international curriculum into their schools and classes. This is in order for the program and Sister Schools projects to be successful, effective, and rewarding for your students.

The following is a more detailed summary of the Principal and Teachers' roles in Sister Schools, and the objectives and goals of the program.

Your Role as a Sister Schools Teacher

Your role as teachers will be the driving force behind the Sister Schools partnership.

After you have structured the partnership and organized communication details with your Sister Schools teacher, your role is to choose and implement projects between your schools. This should be done after teachers have expressed their interests and goals for the program. The projects between your Sister Schools can be very basic and take up little class time, be more involved joint-curriculum, or even advanced year-long projects. You and your fellow Sister Schools teachers will develop the program to adapt to your schools: projects may vary in their frequency during different times of the school year, or teachers may decide to do the same project every year to simplify the partnership.

- **No matter how you set up your partnership, the important thing is to communicate with your Sister School, and enable your students to learn from each other and gain mutual understanding.**

Decide how much time and commitment your schools can spend on projects. Look through the Sister Schools Project Packet to decide on a project together, and modify it to fit your schools' needs. Teachers can design their own project, or collaborate on one through the i-EARN website.

Remember: enthusiasm is contagious! If you are excited about your Sister Schools partnership, your students will be. To emphasize the Sister School partnership:

- Introduce the Sister School to your students with a small presentation on the culture and details of the school you are partnering with.
- Trade pictures of your schools and share them with your students or display them in your class.
- Ask students what they are interested in learning about their Sister School's culture to help you design and direct the program.

Look for project ideas and other tips in the Sister Schools Project Packet!

Teacher Tip:

It is sometimes best if teachers in the partnership take turns as the leading role in designing and implementing projects.

One teacher chooses a subject, the project approach, and creates a time-line, and proposes the project to their fellow Sister Schools teacher. The fellow teacher can make suggestions and modify the project to accommodate their school's interests and needs. Both teachers will confirm and finalize the project plan and timeline. This process is a more efficient way of planning Sister Schools projects.

Objectives:

The main objective of Sister Schools is to use project-based learning to bring cultural exchange and global awareness to students, enabling youth to learn from their international peers. Projects should have

specific goals, or questions they are trying to answer, and should be completed in a timely manner for students to gain maximum benefits from participating in them.

Your Role as a Sister Schools Principal

Your role as a principal is one of coordination and support. Your primary functions are to:

- Confirm, structure, and acknowledge your Sister Schools partnership
- Stay in contact with your Sister School and the Sister Schools Coordinator
- Support teachers at your school who are conducting Sister Schools' projects in their classes. Principals will certify the partnership and announce it to their school. Principals will also support and assist teachers as needed for Sister Schools related events and projects. Principals should also keep updated information for all Sister Schools contacts and resources. Principals may submit articles or stories of their partnership to Sister Cities for newsletters and other Sister Schools publications if they would like to announce their achievements.

The principal's responsibilities will vary depending on the structure of the partnership. If it is a partnership that incorporates the whole school, the principals will be more involved as a leader of the program.

No matter how the partnership is structured, Principals from both Sister Schools should be in contact with each other throughout the school year. Monthly e-mails with one another should be scheduled to ensure a successful Sister Schools partnership, and sustain it for future school years.

Also, stay in touch with your Sister Schools Coordinator and relay any concerns or updates to them. They will act as an additional resource and part of your Sister Schools support team!

Principal Tip:

Make your school aware and excited about your new Sister School! There are many ways to have the partnership be visible and accessible to students!

For example:

- Have special assemblies to announce the partnership, and present your new Sister School to your school as a whole.
- Hold annual, school-wide events to commemorate the partnership (such as international holiday festivities or other types of cultural events).

Consistent Communication between Sister Schools

Consistent Communication cannot be emphasized enough. It is the key to keeping a Sister Schools relationship active and sustained, year after year. The easiest way for a Sister Schools partnership to end is by schools failing to communicate regularly. Communication should be kept between teachers in partnered classes, and principals at both schools throughout the school year. Schedule regular check-in days to ensure Consistent Communication!

Teachers at Sister Schools should e-mail once a week, or as often as needed, to update one another on their class's progress on current projects, and to discuss future plans. Feel free to contact your local Sister Schools coordinator or Sister Cities International at any time for more advice and help with your partnership.

✓ **The Local Sister City Organization:**
Locates a Sister School in a Sister City through current contacts, supports the program, and keeps updated information for the Sister Schools program

For a more successful program, it is recommended that the local Sister City organization has a **Sister School Coordinator** to:

- Facilitate the pairing of Sister Schools between Sister Cities
- Keep updated contact information of both Sister Schools
- Provide basic support and resources for the Sister Schools program
- Act as a contact between Sister Cities International and the Sister Schools

The Sister Schools Coordinator

The Sister School Program must have the following to fulfill its goals:

- A Sister City staff member or volunteer willing to act as a, **“Sister Schools Coordinator”**
- A staff supportive of incorporating a Sister Schools partnership in their community
- An active partnership and contacts in the Sister City where they wish to have a Sister School.

The Sister Schools coordinator’s position is to help you, as a principal or teacher, make contacts with a compatible school in your Sister City. While you will probably be communicating and working with several people at your local Sister City organization, the Sister Schools coordinator will be your main contact throughout the process of starting the program.

If you have not been in contact with your local Sister City organization, call Sister Cities International to receive instructions on how to do so. If you have already been in contact, make sure to designate a Sister School coordinator if the position has not yet been established.

✓ Sister Cities International:

Provide resources, toolkits, and project ideas to the schools and Sister City organizations to start and sustain their Sister Schools program

Sister Cities International’s Youth and Education Department:

- Supplies project ideas and other resources for Sister Schools to help develop and strengthen partnerships
- Provide Sister Schools members with resources and tools to help sustain the program

The Youth & Education Department

Sister City International's Youth & Education Department will fulfill the following role:

The role of Sister Cities International is to provide the resources, toolkits, guides, and other materials necessary for the Sister City organizations and Sister Schools to independently run a successful and sustainable Sister Schools program between their communities.

Sister Cities International will:

- Provide members with the resources and guidance needed to start a Sister Schools program
- Will help the Sister Schools coordinator and school staff in contacting a Sister City and locating a Sister School
- Will provide project packets and resources for teachers to use as a direction for the partnership
- Will provide tools and ideas for sustaining the partnership

Sister Schools Models

There are three basic models to base your Sister Schools program on. As a teacher, you would only be responsible for conducting the program within your own classes. A principal would play more of a leadership role in partnerships that incorporate the whole school. No matter which model you choose though, your Sister Schools partnership should be celebrated and recognized at your school to promote the program and your schools' commitment to each other.

• **Class to Class**

A Sister Schools program can be as simple as partnering a single class at each school to partake in projects together. Ideally, classes should be matched by age, and close in size. (If you want to conduct a pen-pal/ e-mail exchange between your students, you may have to pair a student with two pen-pals if the class sizes are not perfectly even. Ask your students who would be interested in having more than one pen-pal, there are sure to be some takers!)

The Class to Class model allows for a more intimate cultural exchange experience to occur between students and teachers at Sister Schools. Teachers can pair their students up as pen-pals, and can easily monitor projects between their classes. As teachers in class to class partnerships, you will form close bonds with your Sister Schools colleague, designing and completing projects year after year that will strengthen your program.

Sister Cities International Tip:

The Class to Class model is recommended by Sister Cities International as the best starting point for a Sister Schools program. The program is more manageable this way, and is therefore more rewarding and effective for the students involved.

If you would like to incorporate the whole school in the program, we still suggest starting with the Class to Class model. If Sister Schools start by pairing one class, the relationship will tend to spread throughout the school to include more classes and students in the program over time.

Having a Class to Class model does not mean that the Sister Schools partnership can't be celebrated by the whole school. Assemblies and school wide events to commemorate the partnership and update the school on current projects should still be planned.

• School to School

A Sister Schools model can be between schools as a whole by conducting school-wide Sister Schools projects or events. The principals will take more of a leading role in this model.

The School to School model can have schools participating in joint fundraising events, art projects, letter-writing campaigns, festivals commemorating your Sister Schools' holidays, or exchange visit programs between schools. The possibilities for projects are endless, but they must be structured carefully between schools to succeed in their efforts. A school to school model may also be the appropriate starting point when partnering with a more hierarchical culture or school government, such as in China or Japan. An annual Sister Schools Day could be considered for any model as well, to renew appreciation for the program every school year!

• School District to School District

There are circumstances when a School District to School District model is the best. This model may work especially well when working with a hierarchical international school district. A District to District model offers a larger program which may be more inviting to financial sponsors, and support from the district may allow for more diverse opportunities for activities and in-person exchanges. A great challenge in a District to District model is making sure the teachers are invested in the program. Teachers may see a district Sister Schools program as just another of many they are required to implement.

Two of the most successful programs, Sister Schools San Diego and Sister Schools Chicago are school district wide, but still operate as a voluntary opportunity for interested district teachers. Both of Sister Schools San Diego and Sister Schools Chicago have become independent non-profit organizations. They each have staff and volunteers to run Sister School partnerships at schools throughout their entire school districts. These are exceptional examples of a Sister Schools program, and would only work for Sister Cities who have the means and volunteers to manage such large endeavors.

If such a model interests you, please inform Sister Cities International and we will provide you with more contacts and information for taking on such a program.

10 Steps to Sister Schools

Forming Your Sister Schools Team

1. Talking to your Local Sister City Organization
2. Introducing Sister Schools to your School Colleagues
3. Have a Sister Schools Team Meeting: Choose a Model

Finding a Sister School and Structuring the Partnership

4. Fill out a Sister Schools Application
5. Working with your Sister Schools Coordinator
6. Having a Sister Schools Dialogue

Implementing your Sister Schools Program

7. Choosing Projects for Sister Schools
8. Creating a Sister Schools Schedule
9. Introducing Sister Schools to your Students!
10. Enjoying your Sister Schools Partnership!

Forming Your Sister Schools Team

1. Talking to Your local Sister City Organization

- Throughout the program, your main contact for information at your local Sister City organization will be with the Sister Schools Coordinator. If this position has yet to be filled at your local Sister Cities, it will need to be assigned as soon as possible.
- Your Sister Schools Team will consist of the following:
 - All the teachers and the principal at your school who are interested in the program
 - The Sister Schools Coordinator
 - Anyone else involved at the local Sister Cities organization who is interested in working on the program
 - And once you find a Sister School – the teachers and principal from your Sister School

2. Introducing Sister Schools to your School Colleagues

If you are a school principal:

- Hold a meeting to discuss the program with your staff. You may want to include a Sister City representative to help explain the program to teachers.
- Invite teachers you think would be interested in incorporating cultural exchange curriculum into their class. Remember to consider language and social studies teachers. Anyone who is interested in global studies or international subjects would be an excellent candidate as well.
- Share the Project Packet with teachers. Share some project ideas that stood out to you, and share your vision for how the program would function at your school. Ask the teachers for their input as well.

If you are a teacher:

- Make sure your principal is on board with the program. You will need their approval and support to help run the program.
- Organize a meeting with your principal and other interested teachers.
- Look through the Project Packet and share some ideas at the meeting. Discuss how you would be interested in implementing the program in your class; what types of projects, what goals you would have for the program.

School staff - Remember!

- Sister Schools need motivated and willing participants who recognize the value of cultural exchange and international curriculum at their school. At least one teacher is needed to implement the program in their class, and the principal is needed to support the partnership. Talk to your local Sister City organization and your school staff about your options. If there is more than one Sister City in your community, you may have options between several Sister Cities to pursue a partnership in. (Our advice is to choose a Sister City that your city has an active and successful partnership with, since this means there will be the most current contacts there.)
- Check if anyone on your staff already has any connections or contacts with schools in your Sister City. It's a small world! You never know...
- Decide who is on board for the program, and take the next step!

3. Have a Sister Schools Team Meeting: Choose a model

- Hold a meeting, for the Sister Schools Team members to discuss details of the program.
- We suggest you read the Sister Schools Project Packet first. This will help you get an idea of what type of projects the program could have Sister Schools doing together. Also, pick out a few that are of interest to you. This will help your Sister Schools Team structure the program.
- At the meeting, express your intentions and vision for how you would implement the program at your school and in classes. Be honest with your availability and commitment level. Sister Schools can be tailored to fit any schedule. Projects can vary between basic or advanced in their structure, and still be rewarding and exciting for students.

- Choose the model that best fits your school. Remember – Class to Class is the suggested set-up for starting a Sister Schools program.
- If there has not been a Sister Schools Coordinator assigned yet, this is the time to do it. They will be your main contact for finding a Sister School, and for any future communications between your school and the Sister Cities organization.
- Also, ask how much the Sister City organization is planning on being involved. Will members be assisting on the projects, or will it be run independently by the schools? Make sure to work out these details to avoid any confusion about the program's structure!

Finding a Sister School & Structuring the Partnership

Remember: The process of searching for and finding a Sister School who shares your school's interests and goals can take weeks or months. Therefore, your search must be extremely well organized and undertaken with great planning and commitment. While Sister Cities International is happy to help you and your Sister City organization in your search, it is up to *you* to also take a **proactive** role in this process!

4. Fill out a Sister Schools Application

- The principal and each teacher participating in the program should fill out a Sister Schools Application.
- When filling out the application, look over the Sister Schools Dialogue worksheet to help you identify certain needs and interests to address in your partnership description.
- Be detailed in your descriptions, but remember to keep specifics of what you are looking for in a Sister School partnership as flexible as possible.
- Be general enough to keep your options open, but remember to identify any specifics that are imperative for a partnership with your school.

For example:

Our Sister School must have internet access for us to partner with them, and teachers will need to be able to speak English.

Our school is interested in exchange visits, but we will consider having a joint-curriculum based partnership as well.

5. Working with your Sister Schools Coordinator

- Schedule times with the Sister Schools Coordinator to regularly check-in on progress with Sister Schools leads.
- School staff and the Sister Schools Coordinator should include each other on all e-mails during the search for a Sister School, to keep everyone up to date.
- Support your Sister Schools Coordinator in their search for your Sister School. We know that educators have very busy schedules, but taking a little time to participate in the search will be helpful. Contact them frequently and ask if there are any leads you can look into.
- Be proactive.

6. Having a Sister Schools Dialogue

- Once a possible Sister School has been identified, make sure that introductions between your schools start right away! It is the schools' responsibility to establish the partnership between them.
- Have a Sister Schools Dialogue! This worksheet is a guide for discussions with your Sister School on how to organize the structure of your partnership. It will help both schools start their partnership, "on the same page," and help you foresee any potential problems with the partnership that need to be addressed.
- Teachers whose classes will be partnered together should start to communicate immediately, as well as principals, to make sure the schools are compatible. Ask your Sister Schools Coordinator if they would like to partake in a conference call between the schools!
- We suggest that teachers and principals talk over the phone at least once. This builds a stronger foundation to base the partnership on than e-mailing alone.
- If there are still conflicts in schedules/ interests after you have a Sister Schools Dialogue, have a further discussion with your Sister School to work them out. Ask your Sister Schools Coordinator or contact Sister Cities International if you need any help with this step.
- **Sign a Sister Schools Contract and become official Sister Schools!**

Implementing your Sister Schools Partnership

7. Choosing Sister Schools Projects

- Conducting projects between your Sister Schools is the most important part of your partnership. It is how the cultural exchange and educational benefits of Sister Schools is brought to your students.
- Make sure you and your fellow Sister Schools teacher are committed to starting and completing projects you take on to ensure that it is a rewarding learning experience for students.
- When first starting the partnership, Sister Cities International suggests choosing a project at the basic level. These projects are easier and quicker to implement, and will be a good way to start the partnership on a high note.

- Look through the Sister Schools Project Packet! This 18-page packet will help you choose projects or design your own.
- It may be more efficient if one teacher takes the lead in designing and suggesting a project. The other teacher should of course approve of the project, and make any suggestions for modifying that is needed.
- Also, utilize yours and your Sister School's interests when creating projects. Perhaps there is a certain subject or current event that you would like to address as Sister Schools. Make your partnership an opportunity to teach students about unique subjects involving global perspectives and cultural differences. That's what Sister Schools is all about!
- Utilize online resources for free international education curriculum – such as i-EARN - or the other resources listed in the Sister Schools Resources Packet.

8. Coordinating Schedules & Creating Time-lines!

- Make sure to coordinate and schedule your communication as teachers!
- Remember – Consistent Communication is an important task for teachers in Sister Schools to ensure a successful program.
- Once you have agreed on a project, Sister Schools teachers should coordinate their schedules for communication with each other and create a time-line for the project.
- During projects, teachers will most likely need to communicate at least once a week to update each other on their classes' status. Schedule a certain time to e-mail each other during projects, such as every Monday morning. Stay committed to the schedule you make with your fellow teachers/ and or principal.
- Creating time-lines for your Sister Schools projects will help you stay on target and complete them in a timely manner. Make sure starting dates, intermediary steps, and an estimated completion date are included in project time-lines.
- As your partnership strengthens, and your classes and schools begin to take on more challenging projects, communication between schools will need to be more frequent.
- If you need an example of a Sister Schools communication schedule and project time-line, contact Sister Cities International.

9. Introducing Sister Schools to your Students

An important aspect of the Sister Schools program is getting your students excited to participate in the program. **The following are some ways you can make the partnership visible and accessible to your students and school!**

- Have an assembly at your school, and/ or a presentation in class, about your Sister School and their culture. This will be a good way to introduce them to the partnership.
- Have an annual “Sister Schools Day” at your school to commemorate the partnership
- Ask the students if they know anything about the region their Sister School is in, or if there are specific things they would like to know. This will help teachers gauge interests and topics to cover between Sister Schools.

- Display pictures and other information about your Sister Schools and its culture in your class.
- Have a media display about your Sister School's region. Search the internet daily or weekly for articles about current events concerning your Sister School's region or country. This can start conversations between Sister Schools and inspire projects.

10. Enjoying your Sister Schools Partnership

(The most important step!)

- Although it takes effort and work to initiate a Sister Schools partnership, the rewards and benefits it brings to your schools and students will be worthwhile!
- Your students will be excited and engaged by the cultural exchange projects between Sister Schools, and the program will bring an international component to your campus.
- After you have settled into the Sister Schools program, the partnership will be effortless and natural to incorporate into your schedules. Have fun with it! Maybe even plan a teacher exchange!
- You and your fellow Sister Schools teachers and principals will develop the program to adapt to your schools: projects may vary in their frequency during different times of the school year, or teachers may decide to do the same project every year to simplify the partnership.
- No matter how you set up your partnership, the important thing is to communicate with your Sister School, and enable your students to learn from each other and gain mutual understanding.
- The Sister Schools mission is to:

Promote peace through mutual respect, cooperation, and understanding,

one student,

one school at a time.

Sister Schools Supplemental Materials

The following is a description of the supplemental material that accompanies your Sister Schools toolkit. Be sure to take advantage of these additional resources!

Sister Schools Dialogue Worksheet:

Sister Schools will use this worksheet to structure their partnership. This worksheet will help schools organize their schedules and determine how the program will be implemented between the schools.

Tips for a Successful & Sustainable Sister Schools Program:

This packet has tips on how to make sure a partnership is successful and remains active between Sister Schools. This will help schools and Sister Cities identify possible problems that may arise, how to avoid them, and how to build a sustainable program that is successful and rewarding.

Sister Schools Project Ideas Packet:

This 18-page Project Packet is filled with project ideas that are divided into three different levels: basic, intermediate, and advanced. The project levels are based on age level and time commitment required to complete them, so that teachers may choose and modify projects to their classroom needs.

Sample Sister Schools Resolution:

The Sister Schools Contract will be signed by both schools and Sister Cities, confirming the partnership and making the schools official Sister Schools' members.

Sister Schools Resources Packet:

The resources packet will be a list of resources for free online international education curriculum and other tools that could help develop your Sister Schools program further. Including the i-EARN International Education and Resource Network.

Sister Schools Best Practices

Read about existing successful sister schools programs. Find out about the kinds of projects and activities they are doing. Learn what works and what doesn't from sister city members, teachers, and principals who have already tried it.

Conclusion & Sister Schools Contacts

The Sister Schools Program is a wonderful opportunity for your students and schools to become ambassadors between your Sister Cities. Sister Cities around the world have been creating people-to-people connections between communities for over 50 years, and now your school and students can be a part of this amazing network of citizen diplomacy as well.

We are thrilled to include your school as a member of Sister Schools and look forward to helping you start your program.

Without the commitment of Sister City members and volunteers, and your school's principals and teachers this program would not be possible. We know your Sister Schools partnership will bring an exciting new element to your school.

If you are ever in need of further assistance, or have any questions about running your Sister Schools program, contact your local Sister City organization.

Or contact Sister Cities International:

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