

Statewide Connections: Bringing Harrisburg Students into our Campaigns

Written by Justin Carter

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On April 19th, we traveled to Harrisburg PA to meet with students from Harrisburg's William Penn High School and engage them in our Campaign for Nonviolent Schools and our Campaign for Equitable School Funding. We met with Harrisburg students in the William Penn HS library after school and led a participatory workshop that explored the root causes of violence in our schools and communities.



The Nonviolence workshop, which was created by PSU students, uses small group dialogue, sharing of personal experiences, 'gradient of agreement,' and facilitated discussion to help participants understand the definition of *structural* violence as well as interpersonal violence. The workshop introduces the definition of violence as a way of exerting power that hurts other people's chances of survival. It also encourages participants to understand that nonviolence is actually a very active and powerful way of life that includes standing up against injustice.

Throughout the Nonviolence workshop, all students had a chance to talk about the conditions inside their schools. People talked about the lack of qualified teachers and the high rate of teacher turnover; the lack of books and resources; the prison-like atmosphere inside of their schools; the criminalization of youth. We identified these conditions as examples of structural violence and talked about how these kinds of conditions can lead to young people acting out in violent ways. Students from both Philly and Harrisburg agreed that underfunding of schools is a root cause of these problems.

By sharing their experiences, students came to the realization the problems we see in our schools are not isolated to our own districts; that the struggle for a high quality education is a statewide struggle. We made plans to meet again and work together on our Campaign for Equitable School Funding and the Campaign for Nonviolent Schools.

This meeting was an important step for Philadelphia Student Union in building a statewide

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network of students who are actively working on addressing violence and fighting for adequate, equitable school funding.

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In this piece, we hear from some Harrisburg students about how they view violence and how the Nonviolence workshop changed their perceptions of this issue. Chelle Reed conducted the interviews, Justin Carter recorded the narration, and Greg Jordan-Detamore edited this piece for [On Blast](#).