

June 2010 | Vol. 1 Issue 1 | Email not displaying correctly? View it in your browser.

PA SCHOOL CLIMATE COALITION NEWS



Tip of the hat...

to Chester High School.

Chester High is one of Pennsylvania's most under-resourced schools. A little over half of students enrolled in 9th grade make it to their junior year, and the majority of students consistently fail to earn basic scores on PSSA assessments (City-Data.com).

Yet assembled in a small basement classroom, 20 committed Chester High students meet three times a week to tackle one of the most pressing issues plaguing the district: school discipline.

The students are members of "Youth Court," a program that empowers youth to play a critical role in judging young offenders by serving as jurors and rendering dispositions for their peers. Each year, the Youth Court hears and sentences over 70 cases involving "Level 1" or "Level 2" offenses (i.e. truancy, class disruption, profanity, and occasionally physical violence). In order to participate in Youth Court, a student must admit guilt and agree to a hearing in which he or she will be assigned a "Youth Court Advocate" and have the opportunity to testify before a judge and jury before receiving a sentence. Sentences range from written assignments and apologies, to tutoring or community service. After the disposition is entered, a Youth Court Coordinator will ensure that the student fulfills his/her sentence and that the matter is expunged from the pupil's record. Despite wavering support from administrators, reluctant to share their disciplinary authority with students, Chester High's Youth Court members could not be more proud of their accomplishments.



Upcoming Events

There is a Pennsylvania School Climate Coalition meeting / conference call at 3:30 p.m. on **June 28th** at 1315 Walnut St. Suite 400, Philadelphia, PA 19107. Call in number is 877-818-1056, and the passcode is 1975. Following updates on the work of coalition members, discussion will focus on strategy related to the recommendations of the Interbranch Commission on Juvenile Justice.

The [Alliance for Educational Justice](#), is planning a rally in Washington, D.C. on **July 19**. Please contact andi@yucyouth.org for more information.

The Community Responses to Zero Tolerance group in Philadelphia will hold a meeting on **July 30th** at 3 p.m. Contact Harold Jordan at Hjordan@aclupa.org for more information.

The [Philadelphia Student Union](#) is holding a free Leadership Institute for students entitled "Building A Youth Movement" from **August 9-13**. Email fred@phillystudentunion.org for more information, or register online at youthmovement.eventbrite.com.



On June 15th, 2010 two Youth Court members, Jamar Saunders and Brian Foster,

accompanied by Stoneleigh Fellow and Youth Court consultant, Gregg Volz, Esquire traveled to Harrisburg to testify before the Pennsylvania Senate Judiciary Committee about their youth court experiences. They described how youth court is a preferred alternative to punitive school discipline and how it improved their attitudes toward school, academic performance, and the importance of helping their peers.

The fate of Chester High's Youth Court is still uncertain in the midst of another change in the school's administration. Youth courts across the country face similar challenges as educators experiment with different programs. Yet nationwide, the number of youth courts has increased dramatically over the years (from 78 in 1994 to 1,250 in 2006) and the number of supportive social science reports is growing exponentially (*Hirschinger-Blank*, 32).

The anecdotal and empirical data is clear: The potential of Youth Courts to make a difference in both the lives of the offenders and the adjudicators is tremendous and certainly merits the attention of educators and school officials on a national level.



Wag of the finger... to a Philadelphia charter school for permanently expelling a 6-year-old boy. Christian was expelled on April 21st from his charter school for "inappropriate

Two parent-organizing groups in Philadelphia, [Juntos](#) and [SEAMAC](#), are planning a free workshop for parents on school violence in August. Please contact Zac Steele at noneuclid@hotmail.com if you or someone you know could help to plan this workshop.



School Climate in the News

[Climate Managers Fired, Deputy Superintendent Hired](#)

[Connecticut School Suspensions Drop Before New Law Takes Effect](#)

[Considering the Impact of School Discipline Practices in Massachusetts](#)

[South Philadelphia High School Six Months Later: What Still Needs Work](#)

[Teaching Discipline: A Toolkit for Educators on Positive Alternatives to Out-of-School Suspensions](#)

More information

For more information on the Pennsylvania School Climate Coalition, contact [David Lapp](#) at the Education Law Center.

touching" of his teacher.



As the teacher and students were sitting on the floor reading a book, Christian touched his teacher's legs and said, "I wish I could make you feel better," right after she complained about her legs hurting.

The school code does not define "inappropriate touching", but, during the expulsion hearing, the school's attorney said it's inappropriate "whenever a teacher is uncomfortable." The teacher admitted to hugging her students every day and that this was the first time Christian had "inappropriately touched" her, but the board still voted to permanently expel. The Education Law Center is representing Christian in an appeal to the Philadelphia County Court of Common Pleas.

Policy Updates and Action Items

STATE LEVEL

The Interbranch Commission on Juvenile Justice (*Read the full [report](#).*)

Last month the ICJJ issued recommendations addressing issues related to the Luzerne County "kids-for-cash" scandal, including zero-tolerance policies in school. As the Commission concluded, "too often, schools use the justice system as the school disciplinarian and juvenile courts are too willing to serve in this role."

The Commission found that "zero-

tolerance policies were integral to the overall scheme," leading to a "constant stream" of students into the school-to-prison pipeline and that "allowing schools to use the justice system as its school disciplinarian has no place in the educational process or in the juvenile court system." The Commission urges the education department and juvenile justice system to develop and expand alternative diversion programs instead of relying on ineffective and unjust zero tolerance policies. Please help strategize how to use the ICJJ report to advocate for improved disciplinary practices at our next PSCC meeting on June 28th at 3:30 PM.

Pennsylvania Senate Bill 56 (*Read the full [bill](#).*)

SB 56 creates mandatory police notification when students commit certain enumerated offenses, without regard to the intention, age, or understanding of the child involved. SB 56 may not be passed this session of the PA General Assembly, but the bill persists with powerful backing.

We worry about the consequences of this bill for children, especially young children and children with disabilities, and have found some allies:

"I think we've moved past the point where we need to consider such things as zero tolerance policies, mandatory reporting policies, those policies frankly don't work." – *Hon. Arthur E. Grim, Senior Judge, Court of Common Pleas of Berks County and member of the Interbranch Commission, Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing, June 8, 2010.*

Please call your state legislators to

express your concern about SB 56!

Pennsylvania House Resolution 674 (*Read the full [resolution](#).*) HR 674 is resolution sponsored by Rep. Roebuck and others to study the status and success of efforts to implement School-Wide Positive Behavior Support programs in PA schools and to make recommendations to the Legislature on how to expand high quality SWPBS programs. The Resolution unanimously passed the House Education Committee but is now stalled in the full House. Contact Sallie Lynagh at slynagh@drnpa.org to help get this back on track.

FEDERAL LEVEL

ESEA Reauthorization

A national campaign continues to push to include measurements and supports for positive school climate in the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act. To learn more and get involved in this campaign visit: www.dignityinschools.org

U.S. House Resolutions 2597 and 4247

Two federal bills with positive school climate implications, the Positive Behavior for Safe and Effective Schools Act (HR 2597) and the Keeping All Students Safe Act (ending harmful restraints) (HR 4247) can be found by entering their bill numbers here: <http://thomas.loc.gov/>

[Unsubscribe](#) <<Email Address>> from this list.

Our mailing address is:
Education Law Center
1315 Walnut St.
Philadelphia, PA 19107

[Add us to your address book](#)

Copyright (C) 2010 Education Law Center All rights reserved.

[Forward](#) this email to a friend

[Update your profile](#)